

DRAFT

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A Common Aspiration: The Promise of Peoplehood

In order to explain the difference between the people of fate and the nation of destiny, it is worth taking note of the antithesis between camp (machaneh) and congregation (edah).

The camp is created as a result of the desire for self-defense and is nurtured by a sense of fear; the congregation is created as a result of the longing for the realization of an exalted ethical idea and is nurtured by the sentiment of love. Fate reigns in unbounded fashion in the camp; destiny reigns in the congregation ...

The congregation is a group of individuals possessing a common past, a common future, common goals and desires, a common aspiration for a world which is wholly good and beautiful and a common unique and unified destiny.

From "Fate and Destiny," by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

Fundamental Questions: Who are We and Why are We Here?

And our children will ask us: What does it mean to be "Jewish" or to be part of the "Jewish People?" Why is this people different from all others? Who are we? What do we believe? What do we stand for? What do we care about? What is our faith? Where is our God? What is our country? Where is our home? What is our community and what do we owe them? What do we owe the other people of our world or the planet upon which we all depend? Who is a Jew? Are

we simply a people or are we a "people of memory", commanded to remember so that we don't forget who we are and what we are here for? What are we supposed to remember? What is our story and What is the story of our people What is the story that we tell our children as we tuck them into bed at night about who we are, where we came from and where we are going? Of course, increasingly, we must add one more deeply troubling but critically important question that seems to be emerging in the next generation: Why I should I care whether we perish as a people or survive?

The story we tell our children will need to provide some answers to these questions emotionally or intellectually if it is to be truly meaningful to a large segment of the next generation.

But what is the story that can answer these questions?

Is it the history of a people, 3500 years of collective struggle to survive as a nation, frequently as a nation without a homeland, spread throughout the world, a tiny minority, often surrounded by desperate enemies? Or is it the story of a 3500 year old culture, a civilization that brings beauty and meaning to our lives and has deeply influenced the course of the larger Western civilization that surrounds us? Or is it a faith, a set of beliefs rooted in a specific religious worldview that gives meaning to our lives and informs our actions? Is it the story of the *machane* or the story of the *edah*? The story of a people or of a faith?

The Challenge of Peoplehood

These questions have become part of a large and occasionally contentious debate among academics, demographers, and Jewish communal policy makers.

The challenge of defining and maintaining a sense of peoplehood was articulated in "*A Tale of Two Jewries: the "Inconvenient Truth" for American Jews*" by Steven M. Cohen:

...the major qualitative threat to American Jewry entails the extent and nature of "group cohesiveness." Social scientists refer to this as the "ethnic" dimension of Jewish identity. Jewish "ethnicity" here does not mean Jewish nostalgia. Rather, ethnicity connotes the collective aspect of Jewish identity and community. It is expressed in the prevalence of Jews with Jewish spouses, friends, and neighbors. It encompasses Jews

joining together to form organizations, charities, industries, and political movements. It is about attachment to local Jews, to American Jews, to Israel, and, ultimately, to the Jewish People. The social tissue that ties Jews together is ethnicity. It is what makes being Jewish and Judaism so essentially different in form from other religions. Being Jewish is not only about God, faith, rituals, worship, and spirituality. It is also about friends, neighborhoods, community, Israel, and Peoplehood. In fact, "people," "nation," and other variants of the Jewish collective appear repeatedly in the Bible; "religion" does not.

It is now clear that a sense of commitment to a particular people-- the Jewish People --is in decline.

While some of the specifics of Steve's challenge are arguable ("Religion" does not appear repeatedly in the bible? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "religion" as "the service and worship of God or the supernatural." Since the word "God" appears, thousands of times and rituals of every kind fill the Bible's pages--I wonder what Steve means by "religion"?) the question itself is valid and important. The cause for the decline in Peoplehood, from Steve Cohen's perspective, is outlined in a more recent Commentary article co-authored with Jack Wertheimer (*Whatever Happened to Jewish Peoplehood*):

*How to explain this fraying of bonds?
... The most blatant is the dramatically higher rate of intermarriage as compared with earlier generations. Of Jews now marrying, nearly half are being wed to non-Jewish partners. Whether as cause or consequence, the intermarried tend to have fewer Jewish neighbors, fewer Jewish friends, lower levels of membership in Jewish institutions, less attachment to Israel, and less allegiance to the Jewish people. As for Christians who marry Jews, they tend to understand Jewishness narrowly, as a matter of religious practice and faith rather than as an ethnic identity.*

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...To be sure, other indicators of Jewish involvement have remained stable, or have actually improved. Membership in both synagogues and Jewish community centers has held steady, and measures of ritual observance, like attendance at a Passover Seder or lighting candles on Friday evening, have also held their own or better. American Jews have also increased their participation in educational programs at all levels. But this heartening development has not noticeably contributed to augmenting their ethnic cohesion or their sense of peoplehood. Instead, it has gone hand in hand with its diminishment.

To see why, we need to consider another factor, namely, the distinctively American inclination toward congregationalism, individualism, and unfettered experimentation in religion.

...If, moreover, American religion tends to the innovative, it also tends to the private and the spiritual. Here, too, American Jews have proved adaptive, especially lately, when they have been eagerly abetted by their rabbis and educators. Contemporary American Judaism is replete with the language of spiritual quest, personal "journeys," and searches for healing. At worship services, it is common for rabbis to speak of the Sabbath, for example, not as a sign of the everlasting covenant between God and the Jewish people but as a means of private emotional release, urging congregants to treat the day as a time for reviewing their personal experiences of the week just past and for letting go of their everyday cares...

The publication of these two articles had important consequences for two debates that were emerging on the American Jewish policy agenda. The first (intended by the authors) was to intensify the debate over the proper balance for the organized Jewish community between discouraging intermarriage and welcoming the intermarried. The second result (unintended by the authors) was to sharpen the debate on the proper role of the Federation movement with regard to Jewish identity and Jewish education, and the place of congregations and synagogues in

this effort. It also raised questions about the correct balance between overseas needs and fundraising as opposed to local concerns for Jewish continuity/Jewish renaissance within the Federation/UJC agenda.

Unfortunately, the publication of *Whatever Happened to Jewish Peoplehood* became part of the argument for the UJC to begin moving away from the Jewish education/Jewish renaissance/synagogue agenda (which they had never really embraced) and back to more comfortable territory focusing on fundraising, "overseas needs", Jewish unity and of course the centrality of "peoplehood" very loosely defined as financial support for the central, unifying, institutions of Jewish life.

In June of 2007 UJC published its new strategic objectives including six strategic goals:

- Expanding continental community development and capacity building;*
- Increasing total financial resource development capacity;*
- Rebuilding our support base by halting the decline in, and then growing, the number of donors;*
- Enhancing Jewish peoplehood and identity;*
- Creating more meaningful engagement and relationships with UJC stakeholders and*
- Identifying and advancing big ideas for the federation system that address the most important issues of our time.*

In the discussions that preceded the publication of these objectives the Cohen/Wertheimer article became part of the debate. At a time when the Jewish community and contributors at every level were seeking answers to the challenge of strengthening formal and informal Jewish education and attracting the next generation of Jews, these issues were virtually erased from the agenda of the UJC and from many local Federations and "Peoplehood" stripped of all content, purpose and meaning became the new rallying cry of the Federation movement.

This of course was the very opposite of what Jack Wertheimer and Steve Cohen would have wanted (they are both strong advocates for the intensification of Jewish education at every level) but their perspective was quickly polarized in both the Jewish renaissance/Jewish

peoplehood debate and the debate over balance in the outreach agenda.

Peoplehood Fades in the Absence of Meaning and Purpose

Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer are raising a number of important issues but their analysis is potentially misleading, because their understanding of the cause and effect of our challenge may be exactly reversed. Our sense of peoplehood, of being part of the Jewish camp, our community of fate, has certainly declined, but it has done so along with and, I believe, as a result of a decline in our intellectual understanding and appreciation of our culture and a disastrous collapse of serious religious and congregational life (between the beginning of the twentieth century and roughly 1990), which is only recently and slowly being restored.

In fact I believe that the collapse of ethnicity and peoplehood were a direct result of our community's emphasis on empty slogans like "We Are One" over a serious encounter with Judaism, Jewish community building, or Jewish education. Paradoxically, the decline of ethnicity and peoplehood among American Jews occurred at exactly the same time (1967 through 1990, the time that Jonathan Woocher described as the era of "Sacred Survival") that our Jewish community seemed obsessed with ethnicity, peoplehood and fundraising (what Abraham Joshua Heschel called "the empty generosity" of Jewish life in his speech to the General Assembly of the old Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in Montreal back in 1965) to the exclusion of all other Jewish values. Our problem today is not that Federations are reaching out to these new and more diverse Jewish households with messages that are more accepting and diverse (unfortunately most aren't really reaching out with much energy) it's that we continue to reach out with messages that are empty of content and meaning, as empty in many cases as the "empty generosity" that Heschel decried in 1965:

Our young people are disturbed at parents who are spiritually insolvent.

They seek direction, affirmation; they reject complacency and empty generosity.

There is a waiting in many homes, in many hearts, for guidance, instruction, illumination, a waiting, which is often intense, pressing, nationwide.

So many are heartsick at the spiritual failure of our community.

To maintain devotion to Judaism, to succeed in the effort to convey my appreciation to my child, I need a community, as we all do.

In this emergency we call upon the Federation: Help us! Let us create an atmosphere of learning, a climate of reverence . . .

We must create a climate of elucidation, of pronouncing our people's waiting for meaning, by discovering and teaching the intellectual relevance of Judaism, by fostering reverence for learning and learning of reverence.

We need a revolution in Jewish life.

In my view, there can be no revival of Peoplehood in the 21st Century, at a time of choice and choosing, when ethnicity has lost much of its power, without content and meaning, learning, culture and civilization, community and caring, a "rumor of angels", and a particular concern for our people inextricably bound to a universal concern for humankind. A generation of Jews that may have forgotten or never experienced the peoplehood idea must be helped to rebuild it using learning, engagement in great Jewish enterprises, and experiences of purpose and meaning as our tools. "We must create a climate of elucidation, of pronouncing our people's waiting for meaning, by discovering and teaching the intellectual relevance of Judaism, by fostering reverence for learning and learning of reverence." Peoplehood as choice, learned peoplehood, *voluntary peoplehood*.

Peoplehood is an essential part of the Jewish experience, it opens doors to our unique culture, binds us to each other and might yet enable us to participate as a people in the transformation of the world as God promised Abraham and Sarah:

"...that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I have loved

him, because he will teach his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of God, to do righteousness and justice."(Genesis 18:19)

The peoplehood idea must be supported by meaning and purpose. It's too important to allow it to be used by people and organizations that would degrade its meaning, in order to use it as a fundraising slogan.

The most damaging flaw in the Cohen/Wertheimer Commentary article, however, is that it seems to diminish the importance of the resurgence of congregational life, spiritual diversity, spiritual/religious seeking (especially among the intermarried,) a Jewish approach to social justice and Jewish learning among American Jews:

"Membership in both synagogues and JCCs has held steady and measures of ritual observance . . . have held their own or better. American Jews have also increased their participation in educational programs at all levels. But this heartening development has not noticeably contributed to augmenting their ethnic cohesion or their sense of peoplehood. Instead it has gone hand in hand with its diminishment."

They also seem to lament the fact that *"Christians who marry Jews tend to . . . understand Jewishness narrowly, as a matter of religious practice and faith, rather than an ethnic identity."* Equally disturbing, they seem to be suggesting that our universalism, our commitment to social justice must of necessity be at war with our particularity and our commitment to our own people. Together this would seem to place **both** our Jewish commitment to social justice (*"I have loved him because he will teach his children and the household that will follow after him to follow the way of God by doing justice and righteousness"*) and our traditional connection to God in opposition to our pursuit of Jewish peoplehood.

Rediscovering Peoplehood: From the Outside In

While it is true that none of the positive developments in the religious life of American Jews have yet solved the challenge of Jewish peoplehood they may yet represent the beginning of the solution. The rebuilding of Jewish life must start with all of these positive trends which must be allowed and encouraged to broaden and deepen so that ultimately they can and will, I believe, help revive our sense of

peoplehood. Our best hope for a Jewish renaissance is through an emphasis on the restoration of a balanced and complete culture and civilization: spiritual at its core; in love with Judaism, Jewish learning and the Jewish people; dedicated to Israel; and committed to the betterment of all humankind. This is a more complicated but more complete picture of a dynamic and vibrant Judaism...one that can and will attract our children and grandchildren.

The growth of personal spirituality, vibrant congregational life (most notably among Reform Jews), resurgent learning and a genuine commitment to social justice based on Jewish learning and Jewish values did not cause the decline of peoplehood among American Jews. Rather, the miraculous resurgence of Jewish religious life in America is the first step in *rebuilding* a strong sense of peoplehood, if we can manage to sustain and expand these trends at the same time that we re-emphasize our commitment to peoplehood *in the context of* a revived commitment to Jewish spiritual and intellectual life. Rebuilding....from the outside in.

As Franz Rosenzweig put it during a period of massive assimilation in his own time:

Dear God. As we stand before this Ark we acknowledge with a sense of both history and wonder that it is to a book that we owe our survival -- that Book which we use in the very form in which it has existed for millennia: it is the only book of antiquity that is still in living use as a scroll. Once the learning of this book filled the bounds of Jewish life completely. Everything was really within this learning of the Book.

Then came the Modern Age. At one blow, it vastly enlarged our intellectual horizons and our very lives. The teaching of Judaism struggled to keep pace with this rapid expansion. What was new was not so much the collapse of the ghetto wall; even previously the Jew moved beyond the bounds of the ghetto. What was new was not that the Jew's feet could now take him farther than ever before. The new feature was that the wanderer no loner returned at dusk. The gates of the ghetto no longer closed behind him, allowing him to spend the night in solitary learning. And gradually, the wanderer found his spiritual and intellectual home outside the Jewish world.

Dear God, we are the children of those wanderers. We seek a new means of Jewish learning. It is learning in reverse order. A learning that no longer starts from the Torah and leads into life, but the other way round: from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, or pretends to know nothing, back to the Torah.

All of us to whom Judaism, to whom being a Jew, has again become the pivot of our lives, we all know that in being Jews we must not give up anything, not renounce anything but lead everything back to Judaism. From the periphery back to the center; from the outside in.

Starting With Communities of Memory and Meaning: Reaching for Peoplehood

If we believe that the journey to peoplehood begins where many Jews apparently are, seeking personal spirituality, community and meaning, in part as a way of escaping the existential loneliness and alienation that even ipods and instant messaging can't penetrate, then we might begin by understanding community and the role it might play as a starting point in defining Judaism and peoplehood in these times. Robert Bellah provides a useful definition of "real" community and its relationship to memory and meaning in *Habits of the Heart*:

Community is a term used very loosely by Americans today. We use it in a strong sense: a community is a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision-making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it. Such a community is not quickly formed. It almost always has a history and so it is also a community of memory.

Communities have a history, in an important sense, they are constituted by their past, and for that reason we can speak of a real community as a community of memory, one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in retelling its story, it's constructive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have

embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community. These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is so central to a community of memory.

The stories that make up the tradition contain conceptions of character, of what a good person is like, and of the virtues that define such character. But the stories are not all exemplary, not all about successes and achievements. A genuine community of memory will also tell painful stories of shared suffering that sometimes create deeper identities than success.

And if the community is completely honest, it will remember stories not only of suffering received but of suffering inflicted, dangerous memories, for they call the community to alter ancient evils. The community of memory that ties us to the past also turns us toward the future as communities of hope. They carry a context of meaning that can allow us to connect our aspirations for ourselves and those closest to us with the aspirations of a larger whole and see our own efforts as being, in part, contributions to a common good.

....While the idea of community, if limited to neighbors and friends, is an inadequate basis for meeting our current needs, we want to affirm community as a cultural theme that calls us to wider and wider circles of loyalty, ultimately embracing the universal community of all beings.

(In contrast) members of a lifestyle enclave express their identity through shared patterns of appearance consumption and leisure activities which often serve to differentiate them sharply from those of other lifestyles. They are not interdependent, do not act together politically, and do not share a history. If these things begin to appear, the enclave is on the way to becoming a community. Many of what are called communities in America are mixtures of communities in our strong sense and lifestyle enclaves.

In these times, I believe, "community" is our primary road on our journey to peoplehood but only "real" communities in their

strongest sense can bind our new interfaith families (and most "marginally affiliated" in-married households as well) to each other, to Judaism and ultimately to the Jewish people. But Cohen and Wertheimer point out quite correctly that synagogue membership is no guarantee of attachment to Jewish peoplehood and in most cases synagogue life and synagogue structures are simply inadequate to the task. In a talk to the CCAR Steve describes the challenge more fully:

"Whatever we have done, it hasn't "worked," at least not yet, at least not on the population level. The manifold efforts in Jewish education, congregational renewal, welcoming, taking Judaism public, and so forth have hardly made a dent in the relevant problem areas...

"Why are we not succeeding?"

"... efforts at outreach and welcoming have undoubtedly brought thousands of intermarried families into Jewish life and affirmed their decisions to raise their children as Jews."

But

"...far too many those raising Jewish children fail to provide what any of us would regard as an adequate level of Jewish education and socialization."

Boston's CJP has made a serious funding commitment to outreach to interfaith families as well as to an intensification of Jewish education and involvement at every level. This has included significant new funding for day school excellence; for youth outreach; social justice programs and synagogue transformation; a massive system of adult education; serious incentives for synagogues to encourage large scale participation in intensive Jewish summer camping; and new resources for Birthright and Birthright follow up.

In Boston 60% of interfaith families raise their children as Jews (about double the rate of most other cities) and the vast majority of those join synagogues, give their children some Jewish education and see them become Bnai Mitzvah in similar proportions to in-married Reform households. But this changes after Bnai Mitzvah with 80% of affiliated interfaith households dropping out along with 60% of their in-married fellow Reform congregants.

Boston is a community of great synagogues and great Rabbis and their success is clear in their ability to attract interfaith households and in congregations characterized by relatively high levels of learning and participation for in-married and interfaith Jewish households alike but in spite of their hard work and CJP's investment the dropout rate for both in-married and interfaith families is just one symptom of our weakness and our most significant challenges.

Synagogues are our most widespread form of Jewish involvement, virtually our only universal "gateway" to Jewish life for affiliated interfaith households and nearly all in-married households. But synagogues are not structured or adequately funded to carry out their critical mission: the spiritual, ethical, intellectual and cultural transformation of a very complicated and sophisticated generation of young families. They join too late, in part because we don't have enough synagogue based preschools and they drop out because, for too many families we fail to provide spiritually alive environments of *Torah*, *tzedek* and *chesed*; learning, social justice, caring and meaning. (In Bellah's terms, interdependent, caring, communities of memory, ultimately embracing the universal community of all beings.)

The first step in our journey to Peoplehood may well be a movement from lifestyle enclave (the reality for most of what passes for community in America and in the American Jewish community) to "real" community. Our synagogues and community centers must seek to become places where communities develop and are strengthened, where face to face communities are engaged in discussion and decision making and real people care for each other, study the vast library of Jewish culture and literature together (thus moving toward the development of a true community of memory,) work together for the common good and seek to expand the circle of caring beyond their own institutions to encompass the larger community of Jews, the Jewish people and the "universal community of all beings."

For synagogues to become more fully "real" communities, "in our strong sense," will require the integration of synagogue life at levels we see only very rarely in synagogue life today. The clearest blueprint for congregational effectiveness through the integration of powerful transformational experiences lies in Jack Wertheimer's accurate, important and groundbreaking essay, *Linking the Silos* published several years ago by the Avi Chai Foundation. Synagogues that integrate camping and Israel educational travel, youth groups and universal Jewish literacy, caring and social justice will assure our Jewish renaissance and our Jewish future in ways that "just say no" to intermarriage never will. Or, as Steve Cohen urged us many year's

ago, we need to reach out with "the language of resource" rather than "the language of reproach."

The Possibility Of Transcendence: A Rumor of Angels

Of course synagogues must also seek to be places that provide spiritual opportunities because religious identity and synagogue membership are exceedingly fluid and American Jews aren't quite as "secular" as some believe. According to one survey 35% of American Jews say they're secular and another 15% say they are somewhat secular but another more recent survey tells us that 83% of Jews say they believe in God! In truth, we can be secular and unaffiliated one day and deeply religious or "spiritual" on the day our child is born, on the day our parent dies or on the day we face a serious illness. This is not secularity in any classical (or Israeli!) sense. American Jews are not particularly religious and not particularly secular...They are also very religious and very secular...seeking and searching for meaning and community...most may not be "religious" but they love their synagogues and many (especially non Jewish spouses as Cohen and Saxe point out) are seeking "a rumor of angels" (Berger), the possibility of the transcendent...the idea of the spiritual!

Cohen and Wertheimer view the fact that "Christians who marry Jews ... tend to understand Jewishness narrowly, as a matter of religious practice and faith rather than as an ethnic identity" in an entirely negative light, a block to their ability to identify fully with the Jewish people. **But what if the disintegration of our religious identity was in large measure the cause of the deterioration of our sense of peoplehood and what if our sense of peoplehood will require taking our spiritual yearnings seriously along with our need to reconstitute our culture, civilization and sense of community?** In that case Christian spouses seeking to identify with the Jewish faith and ultimately the Jewish people may actually have something to teach us as we relearn the meaning of spirituality and the importance of faith in our tradition and our sense of peoplehood.

Mare Winningham is a former actress turned country singer and a former Christian who became Jewish.

She writes of her new faith in "My Fixed Point":

" My fixed point has justice and truth in its gates it has peace on its sleeve and its heart on its face.I will search out the meaning and find sacred space, My fixed point has justice and truth in its gates."

and in "Refuge Rock Sublime":

*"At dawn I seek You Refuge Rock sublime,
the morning prayers I lift and those at evening time,
I tremble in your awesome presence and contrite,
for my deepest secrets lie before Your holy sight.
You, Refuge, Rock, Redeemer, You Refuge Rock sublime..."*

In other songs she is no less in love with the Jewish people or Israel.

In the proper context, the restoration of the possibility of awe and wonder will support and not conflict with our search for peoplehood. Our new Jews and even those non-Jews who choose to live their lives among us may have something to teach as well as something to learn.

The Faith/Peoplehood Paradox of Interfaith Marriage

There is a paradoxical quality to interfaith families who decide to raise their children as Jews. It is a paradox that is rooted in the difference between the Jewish people and Jewish faith, between Jews and Judaism, between *machane* and *edah*. In an interfaith family the choice to raise one's child as a Jew is most often a decision to raise a child within the Jewish **faith**. Hence, the commitment to join synagogues and to learn more about ritual and faith. But involvement in a synagogue that begins to look more like a "real" community than a "lifestyle enclave" inevitably draws the family into the interpersonal world of Jewish community and the Jewish people.

Perhaps more interestingly the decision to raise one's child in the Jewish **faith** inevitably links the non Jewish spouse to the *machane*, to the Jewish **people**. Raising your child as a Jew means that he is now inevitably part of the Jewish people. Antisemitism endangers her. Members of his family are living in Israel and under threat when the missiles fall. She feels pride when a Jew wins a Nobel prize. He is embarrassed when a Jew commits a crime or when Israel doesn't live up to proper standard of human ethics and morality. A non Jewish spouse raising children in the Jewish faith is, like it or not, through the children (s)he loves tied to the fate of the Jewish people and begins, slowly and over time, to become part of the *machane*-- the Jewish people. This reality is another profoundly unexpected road to peoplehood for non-Jewish spouses. Paradoxically, the non-Jewish

spouse who, as Jack and Steve correctly indicate, may find it difficult to experience peoplehood through childhood family and friends, food and humor, neighborhoods and culture is bound to the Jewish people with unseverable bonds through his love for his children.

However liberal rabbis choose to address the question of officiation at interfaith marriages this understanding may also provide a new way of thinking about the importance of welcoming interfaith couples choosing to raise their children as Jews. We may need a new approach that welcomes the interfaith family into our community of fate, the Jewish people, because of the unseverable connection between raising a child in the Jewish faith and participating in the fate of the Jewish people.

Soil and Seed, Community and Content, Peoplehood and Purpose

One central goal of Jewish life, as I've described it, may be the establishment of "real" communities of, learning, and caring in a world of justice (interdependent communities of memory, sharing common practices and ultimately embracing the universal community of all beings--Bellaah) but the Jewish conception of , learning, caring and justice can only be fully realized in the context of strong, interdependent "face-to-face" communities. Learning, justice and caring; *Torah*, *tzedek* and *chesed* represent the purpose and meaning at the core of Jewish existence. They are the seeds of Jewish community. At the same time, Jewish communities are the ground within which these seeds must grow.

As children, our first lesson in ecology (even during the "pre-green" fifties!) was about the destruction of farming on the great plains and the creation of the dust bowl in America during the 1930s. It was obvious, even to small children that the trees and crops required soil to grow in but our teachers made it clear that the soil needed the trees as much as the trees needed the soil! We were told that when the land was cleared of trees and other vegetation the soil turned to dust and blew away because the land required the plants to hold it together and protect it from the wind. No trees or plants... no soil....no soil ...no plants or trees!

Too often in the past, strategies for Jewish education, the content of Jewish life, have ignored the need for community, while strategies for community-building have failed to understand that communities require culture, meaning and purpose to flourish. And so I believe it is with Jewish peoplehood. Jewish peoplehood (the machane) is the soil within which we can seek to become an edah, a people, "*possessing a*

common past, a common future, common goals and desires, a common aspiration for a world which is wholly good and beautiful and a common unique and unified destiny."

Adapting Bellah's definition of community by analogy to Jewish peoplehood is, of course, flawed and incomplete but it can, I believe provide some useful insight into our peoplehood challenge:

Peoplehood is a term used very loosely by **American Jews** today. We use it in a strong sense: The **Jewish People are** socially interdependent, **they** participate **directly or indirectly** in discussion and decision-making, and **they** share certain practices that both define the **Jewish People** and are nurtured by it. **The Jewish People has developed over millenia.** We have a history and so we are also a **people of memory.**

The Jewish people has a meaningful, influential, and complex history, in an important sense, it is constituted by **its** past, and for that reason we can speak of the **Jewish people as a people of memory,** one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, **the Jewish people** is involved in retelling its story, it's constructive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of **Jewish Peoplehood.** These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is so central to a **people of memory.**

The stories that make up the tradition contain conceptions of character, of what a good person is like, and of the virtues that define such character. But the stories are not all exemplary, not all about successes and achievements. A **people of memory, the Jewish People** also tells painful stories of shared suffering that sometimes create deeper identities than success.

And if **our people are** completely honest, **we** will remember stories not only of suffering received but of suffering inflicted, dangerous memories, for they call upon the **people** to alter ancient evils. The **people of memory** that ties us to the past also turns us toward the future as **a people of hope.** **We** carry a context of meaning that can allow us to connect our aspirations for ourselves and those closest to us with the aspirations of a

larger whole and see our own efforts as being, in part, contributions to a common good.

*....While the idea of **Jewish peoplehood**, if limited to neighbors and friends, is an inadequate basis for meeting our current needs, we want to affirm **our sense of peoplehood** as a cultural theme that calls us to wider and wider circles of loyalty, ultimately embracing the universal community of all beings.*

*(In contrast) members of an **ethnic** lifestyle enclave express their identity through shared patterns of appearance consumption and leisure activities which often serve to differentiate them sharply from those of other lifestyles. They are not interdependent, do not act together politically, and do not share a history. If these things begin to appear, the **ethnic** enclave is on the way to becoming **a people worthy of our Jewish history, tradition and purpose. Most frequently when we speak of the Jewish people in America we are referring to a mixture of Jewish peoplehood in a strong sense and ethnic lifestyle enclaves.***

Birthright: The Peoplehood Experience that Touches the Soul and Changes the Future

Throughout this essay the re-creation of Peoplehood, from the outside-in is described as an intense process of learning and seeking, building community and moving from meaning and faith, caring and engaging to a profound connection to the Jewish people. Birthright Israel, in contrast, suggests that an encounter with Israel continues to be a significant peoplehood building, transformational opportunity independent of all other experiences.

There is something magical about Israel. Something transformational. There is something about a first Israel visit that has the power to touch our souls and shatter and then rebuild identity as nothing else can. And while the time (from 1967 to 1990) that American Jews found their entire Jewish identity through a vicarious identification with Israeli heroism has passed, Birthright's power to build Jewish solidarity and inspire Jewish feelings among Jews of every kind and from every part of

the world has emerged with surprising power. Birthright uses this "Israel magic," along with "soul searing" informal education, a mifgash with young Israeli soldiers and just plain fun, all in the context of an intense sense of community that emerges for many in the context of the "cultural island" consciously created by the program. All combine in ways that seem poised to change the identity of half a generation with impact far beyond the network of those who have already gone, into an expanded network of friends and family who tell and retell the "Birthright story."

Even beyond Israel's raw spiritual power there is something about sharing a new experience with your entire generation that enables you to transcend past experience and see yourself and your generation in a new and "special" way (as was the case with the "transformational" sixties generation.) The power of Birthright is therefore not just in individual stories of lives changed and Jewish connections made. It is in the power of an experience that's had a serious impact on 200,000 young Jews and that touches 40,000 more every year. Because it touches so many lives and transforms so many personal stories it has the power to reshape the story of a generation and change the very zeitgeist within which Jewish life exists and changes. It is a "tipping point" experience for an entire generation, a moment of revolutionary change, though this new reality may not yet be clear to most observers.

The Tipping Point, by Malcolm Gladwell, has been one of my favorite books because it carries a message of change and opportunity.

"The possibility of sudden change is at the center of the idea of The Tipping Point and might well be the hardest of all to accept.

The tipping point is the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point.

All epidemics have tipping points.

We are all, at heart, gradualists, our expectations set by the steady passage of time. But the world of the Tipping Point is a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility. It is, contrary to all our expectations, a certainty.

What must underlie successful social change in the end is a bedrock belief that change is possible, that people can radically transform their behavior or beliefs in the face of the right kind of impetus."

Taglit Birthright Israel is "the right kind of impetus" and stands at the heart of our opportunity to transform and engage the next generation. It is the "game changer", it represents an amazing opportunity and it allows us to bring a message of hope to our community...a reason to be optimistic about engaging the next generation.

Over 150,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 26 from all over the United States have already gone on a free Birthright trip to Israel and we are currently sending 40,000 more each year. This may well represent close to HALF of the entire generation over time!

Many of these young adults have little previous connection to Judaism or to Israel. Maybe they were Bar or Bat Mitzvahed, many not. Maybe both their parents were Jewish, but often not.

But in the course of 10 days, something magical happens. Most of the young people who go on Birthright come back to some degree changed and ready for more. Suddenly young people who were immune to a Jewish message due to sad afternoon school experiences are open and eager to learn more and to become engaged, if we are there to offer them attractive opportunities.

We all know the story that many analysts tell about the next generation and the story that it seems to be telling about itself:

Individualistic and independent, materialistic, more connected through the Internet than through face to face community, heavily influenced by the Internet culture in which they live, alienated from Judaism and Israel and resistant to the very idea of peoplehood which many seem to consider both "ethnocentric and racist."

While "retail" outreach can work in individual cases it's difficult to imagine touching a substantial part of this interesting, smart, deeply interconnected and complex generation (half of whom will soon have been raised in interfaith families!) without somehow creating a "tipping point" of attitudinal change. Birthright is our best chance. Leonard Saxe and Barry Chazen explain why in their new book, Ten Days of Birthright Israel. Birthright is counter-cultural and potentially widespread enough to create a *new* cultural reality for a great many young Jews:

To some extent, Birthright Israel is counter-cultural. It is a group-oriented experience in a Western cultural context that seems increasingly individualistic. Nevertheless, the program may resonate with the needs of contemporary North American young adults and a growing interest in communal activities. As much as contemporary life emphasizes individualism, there has been a revival of interest in spirituality and communal life. Involvement in ethnic and religious communities by contemporary young adults is not, however, what their parents and grandparents experienced. Young adults are finding their own highly individualistic way in a newly complex world.

*To oversimplify, there seems to be a change in how young adults view the individualism that characterized the 1980s and 1990s in America. Consider, for example, the case of Sheila, a young woman described by sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues in their 1985 classic on American perspectives, *Habits of the Heart*. Sheila is not Jewish, and thus not a prospect for Birthright Israel, but she is an archetype of a large group of young Americans. As part of the study, Sheila is asked what her religion is. Her narcissistic reply is "Sheilism": she regards herself as a person of faith and she listens to "just my own little voice." Although Sheila is representative of many contemporary young adults, our sense is that this type of individualism is seen by many others as insufficient. In this sense, Birthright Israel is the counter reaction of contemporary young adults to the individualism and the lack of genuine connection with others that characterizes their iPod—instant message lives.*

*Another contextual answer is suggested by political scientist Robert Putnam in his sociopolitical treatise, *Bowling Alone*. In the language of social capital adapted by Putnam to describe the value of our relationships with others, Birthright Israel is designed to create "bonding" social capital, a sense of connection to others who share a common background. Bonding social capital is potentially essential to creating "bridging" social capital; in effect, it is the glue that allows members of disparate subgroups to come together as a society.*

Or a generation to begin to feel part of a people.

So, is Birthright an experience of Peoplehood or an experience of faith? Perhaps a Birthright returnee can answer the question for us. Jesse was born to a Jewish father and an Italian Catholic mother. Part of two

wonderful families Jesse was raised much closer to his Italian Catholic grandparents with Easter and Christmas filled with all the warmth of family celebrations. Jesse is now 27 years old and has studied cultural traditions living in communities in Africa and taught English as a second language in a remote village in Japan.

This is a young man we would be proud to welcome to the community of Israel as a member of our people or as a member of our faith.

Because Jesse was raised to make conscious choices exploring questions of faith, he very much wanted to participate in Birthright and he wrote the following letter on his return from Israel:

The ten days I spent in Israel were intense, emotional, and exhausting, but amazing nevertheless... I have been back for almost a week and I am only now beginning to synthesize the experiences I had. I know this process will continue for a long time to come. I don't know yet just how to incorporate these thoughts and feelings in my life after Israel, but based on my other experiences living and traveling outside of the U. S. , I have come to realize that the places visited, the people met, and the reflections made resonate in the little passing moments of everyday.

When I travel to places far beyond my previous experience and far from home, I find myself most affected by the personal faces placed upon places and situations only heard about beforehand. I hope we have an opportunity to talk at greater length in the future, but for the moment, let me just recount one anecdote involving one of those new faces made personal for me.

We visited Tzfat on an afternoon in the middle of our trip...Walking through a town as old as Tzfat and with such an illustrious history, you feel as if you are walking in the footsteps of holy men and women. We visited the Ashekenazi Ari Synagogue, learned a little about the history of Kabbalat Shabbat rituals developed right there where we sat... With only a short time before we needed to return to the bus, I wished we could delve a little deeper and reflected on what life must be like for Jewish scholars studying there, living a life of holy devotion. I was astounded by the beauty of the art displayed there in the tiny galleries lining the narrow streets of Tzfat. At the designated time, I met with the rest of our group and we followed our guide to a little shop carved in the rock face, literally a hole in the wall, but large enough to accommodate most of our group of 44 people. The shop belonged to a man named Gonen Halevi who works as a sofer, writing Holy Scripture. I

stayed and talked on my own with Gonen, after almost everyone had left. I asked him about a few of the art pieces in his shop and he told me a little about each. He asked for my Hebrew name, which I had recently learned is Yishai, father of David, and he wrote it for me on a piece of parchment, which he gave me to keep.

.. I bought two pieces from Gonen that day...

Towards the end of my trip, I sat down with our tour guide, an Israeli man named Shachar, who I had developed great affection and respect for over the past week and a half, and we worked to translate the Hebrew in the art work. A process that turned into a deep three-hour discussion of language, culture, and social change, extending late into the night. You may not need the translations, but I included them anyway. The language and art are both beautiful:

*God will bless his People with Peace
Make us higher and purify us
Please grant those who worship you with strong protection
Bless them, purify them
Your mercy and correctness always rewarded them
Your untouchable holiness, manage your people with your goodness
Proud one, turn to your people, those who remember your holiness.
Please with the power of your right hand save from trouble
Accept the singing of your people*

My Taglit-Birthright trip to Israel was a profoundly life-changing experience. In what ways? We'll have to wait and see. However, I truly believe in the importance of making this kind of journey for young Jewish adults. My self-identity as a Jew is something I am continuing to explore and I want to thank you for your hand in this, as well as for your help in allowing me to experience Israel with two of my closest Jewish friends.

Look forward to seeing you.

*Shalom,
Jesse*

Faith or fate, peoplehood or religious experience? For Jesse and many others the answer is both and the two are inextricably tied together!

Choice, Intensification and a Judaism of Meaning

Of course Birthright is just the beginning of creating a new story for the next generation of American Jews, a way of opening doors on a massive scale, for more young Jews than we ever thought in our wildest dreams could be engaged in the great task of re-defining Judaism for the 21st century. It is our task as an American Jewish community to construct follow up experiences that encourage the development of communities that are filled with meaning and purpose, caring and learning, memory and commitment. We have started to do this in Boston through Federation funded full time follow up staff on each of our most populous campuses and a new grants program for innovative programs aimed at the broader young adult community but we still have a long way to go and the broader American Jewish community has barely begun to address the challenge of converting the Birthright experience into something deeper and more durable.

Birthright's success doesn't depend on ethnocentrism and at least twenty percent of Birthright participants are from interfaith families, but that still leaves us with the challenge of helping this generation construct its own unique Jewish identity following the Birthright experience.

The answer, it seems to me, is deeply connected to the concept of peoplehood that develops from the "outside-in" rooted in "strong" communities from which a sense of voluntary peoplehood can develop. A new understanding of peoplehood will not be a peoplehood of ethnicity but rather peoplehood freely chosen in the same way that our Judaism has become a Judaism freely chosen by those who participate in the creation of a faith, a tradition and a culture that is rooted in our past but open to the future and that must also be "tov v'yafeh," good and beautiful.

I believe a peoplehood of choice, open and welcoming to interfaith families and their children, rooted in a serious encounter with Torah and Tzedek and Chesed, listening closely for a "rumor of angels," reaching out to a generation that has been deeply touched by the hundreds of thousands through a life changing Israel experience, is "capacious enough" to unify our community and begin the process of redefining peoplehood and, perhaps, beginning the slow work of solving the peoplehood paradox for 21st century Jews.

Birthright provides an opening for a generation in which many experienced Judaism and peoplehood as empty and meaningless or

ethnocentric and racist or for most as nothing at all. They have been forced to endure schools that in many cases barely believe in the value of the subjects they're teaching. And they're doing so at the insistence of parents who themselves have rarely experienced Jewish learning and literature, culture or civilization, at the same level that they've experienced the beauty of the other parts of western civilization that were part of their university experience and their lives as educated Americans.

The challenge of extending and deepening the Birthright experience brings us back to the need for leadership and institutions that can build "strong" communities that can provide caring and memory, intensive experiences of meaning and purpose, serious engagement in work that matters, learning that is truly transformational, and a connection to the "network of humankind" so that we can dare to dream about the role we may be called upon to play in fulfilling the promise of redemption.

Saxe, Phillips and Chertok describe The need for intensification and true engagement to complement the Birthright experience and more generally as a strategy for the renaissance of American Jewry in "It's Not Just Who Stands Under the *Chuppah*: Intermarriage and Engagement" published by the Steinhardt Foundation:

The impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel demonstrates that even in the years of young adulthood there are opportunities to positively influence the Jewish trajectories of young Reform Jews. Gaps in Jewish knowledge and a limited storehouse of Jewish memories are not insurmountable barriers to choosing to be engaged in meaningful Jewish life. Our research on Taglit-Birthright Israel as well as on other efforts to engage young adults in Jewish life, such as Jewish service programs (Chertok, Samuel & Saxe, 2006), make clear that successful strategies "weave together multiple strands of emotional, intellectual, and hands-on experience that entice young Jews to cast their life stories in Jewish terms" (Saxe & Chertok, 2007). The proliferation of minyanim and other alternative settings for Jewish worship among Jewish young adults suggest that young Jewish adults "are looking for 'redemptive, transformative experiences that give rhythm to their days and weeks and give meaning to their lives" (Banerjee, 2007).

Having in-married parents does not guarantee active engagement among Reform Jews, nor is having intermarried parents a definitive predictor of non-engagement. Our

conclusion is that it is the absence of Jewish engagement across the lifespan that constitutes the "malaise" of modern Jewish life referred to by Rabbi Schulweis. Although efforts specifically aimed at inviting and welcoming the intermarried into Jewish life continue to be important, it is engagement and not intermarriage that presents both the greatest challenge and the most promising arena for intervention for Reform Jews and Reform Judaism...

In a similar vein, a qualitative study of the experiences of intermarried families in Reform congregations found it difficult to distinguish between a synagogue's ability to engage all congregants from its ability to reach those who were intermarried (Chertok, Rosen, Sales & Saxe, 2001). The most effective congregations observed were those that developed ways to invite and encourage all congregant families to integrate the Jewish life symbolized by the marriage canopy into their homes, their lives, and the lives of their children...

The call for Reform Jews to engage meaningfully in Jewish life is the essence of our understanding of the dilemma of contemporary Jewry. The active engagement of homes containing one adult convert may contain an important message for the engagement of all Reform Jews. Adults in these households place more importance on celebrating Shabbat and studying text; as well, the young adult children of these families are more likely to have experienced Jewish ritual and tradition in their homes.

The behavior and attitudes of those who have become Jewish through conversion and of their children suggest that the critical factor is not denomination or in-married versus intermarried status. Instead it may be the act of "choosing" that brings Judaism to life for these individuals and their families and encourages them to bring the rhythms and traditions of Jewish life into their family life.

Social scientific evidence makes clear that Jewish identity is in flux among American Jews. Accepted wisdom has been that the root of the problem for American Jewry is intermarriage and the dissolution of traditional, endogamous Jewish families. Our conclusion is different. Whether or not the identity of the next generation is strengthened depends on our ability to educate and transmit Judaism. It depends less on whom young Jews marry than their capacity to find

meaning in Judaism and the ability of parents to be role models in this endeavor. As Rabbi David Ellenson, President of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, reminds us the Reform movement "must have the courage and conviction to acknowledge that an emphasis upon a 'Judaism of meaning,' as opposed to a 'Judaism of boundaries and borders,' is what is needed in our day" (Ellenson, 2007).

In Boston we have committed ourselves to developing this "Judaism of meaning" and our outreach is rooted in substance rather than "lowest common denominator" Judaism. We are committed to building a community with no barriers to entry but with a vision of Jewish life as high as Sinai...filled with the beauty and meaning of Jewish life. Not outreach **or** learning...not outreach **or** social justice but outreach **and** learning, outreach **and** community, outreach **and** a connection to the Jewish people **as well as** the network of all humankind. A Jewish communal life rooted in our tradition but also reaching out to the future.

We are not powerless to save our Jewish future. In Boston, we have worked to strengthen congregations and day schools along with universal adult Jewish learning, intensive Jewish summer camping, expanded youth programming and a commitment to social justice. At the same time we have developed new ways of building bridges between Boston, Israel and other diaspora communities through people to people and community to community connections.

Because we chose to go our own way we have been criticized for shattering the international unity upon which our sense of peoplehood was built but that unity was already long gone and our Boston-Haifa and Boston- Dnepropetrovsk initiatives were designed to rebuild a sense of peoplehood beginning with personal connections and then extending to a broader sense of Jewish peoplehood.

In fact, following the inevitable collapse of ethnicity after three generations of freedom in America, the rebuilding of peoplehood must begin with the personal. Even Israel, the essential peoplehood commitment, must be encountered personally through programs like Birthright (arguably our very best hope for

a large scale peoplehood experience) and more intense and personal people to people bridges to community philanthropic efforts in Israel and other Diaspora communities.

The collapse of our sense of Peoplehood developed during a time when Federations dominated the Jewish communal agenda in America. It was not that our support for Israel or Federation giving or rescue were misplaced. They were not. It is rather that we ignored the other foundations upon which our sense of peoplehood must inevitably be built. In my experience, those who are returning to spirituality and personal meaning through serious Jewish learning and engagement are also returning to their congregation and a sense of community within congregational life. They are also searching for ties to the Jewish people and increasingly traveling to Israel. They are also, of course, increasingly committed to a Jewish path to social justice. Many of the trends that Jack and Steve report in the two papers that are quoted at the beginning of this essay are true, but do not tell the whole story of Jewish renewal and renaissance. For Federations to become relevant we must reconnect to our people's yearning for meaning and purpose, spirituality and community, learning and caring.

Viktor Frankl, Paradoxical Intention, and the Pursuit of Peoplehood in the Absence of Meaning and Purpose

A renewal of Peoplehood cannot be pursued directly and we cannot rebuild our sense of Peoplehood without deciding what we will be as a people, what we stand for, and what we will dream.

The late Dr. Viktor Frankl was a psychiatrist in Vienna and a student of Sigmund Freud. The therapy he invented, logotherapy focused on man's search for meaning as the core human psychological drive. When Freud escaped the Nazi takeover of Austria he moved to London to test his theories and treat his patients. Frankl was not so lucky. He renewed his "practice" in the concentration camps to which he was sent, working with fellow prisoners to restore hope to the hopeless and the possibility of meaning in the valley of the shadow of death.

"Frankl's mother, father, brother and pregnant wife were all killed in the camps. He lost everything that could be taken from a prisoner, except one thing: 'the last of the human freedoms, to

choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.'

He used his experiences as a prisoner in German concentration camps in World War II to write 'Man's Search for Meaning, an enduring work of survival literature, and to open new avenues for modern psychotherapy.' In it he wrote:

"This was the lesson I had to learn in three years spent in Auschwitz and Dachau: other things being equal, those apt to survive the camps were those oriented toward the future - toward a task, or a person, waiting for them in the future, toward a meaning to be fulfilled by them in the future" .

In Man's Search for Meaning, Dr. Frankl related that even at Auschwitz some prisoners were able to discover meaning in their lives -- if only in helping one another through the day -- and that those discoveries were what gave them the will and strength to endure.

And so it is with our pursuit of Peoplehood. There are some goals that cannot be directly pursued. In fact, the harder you pursue them directly the more they elude you. You cannot find love by seeking love or make friends by seeking friends or pursue "self-actualization" in the abstract. Or develop our sense of Peoplehood by making the pursuit of Peoplehood a priority in and of itself.

These basic human needs can only be satisfied while pursuing other objectives. Frankl puts it this way:

By declaring that man is responsible and must actualize the potential meaning of his life, I wish to stress that the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system... being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love, the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it.

In other words our existence as a people, a peculiar people, a "people of destiny" depends on our ability to identify and pursue a Jewish life of meaning and beauty and purpose, of *Torah* and *Tzedek* and *Chesed*, a Jewish life worth living.

In the end our commitment to Peoplehood needs to be rooted in something more than "Jewish continuity," Jewish survival for its own sake. Of course we are concerned with the number of Jews and with Jewish demographic decline but ultimately we must have faith in the value of Jewish life, faith in the power of Judaism and, and an abiding belief that Jewish community and Jewish learning are a great gift that we are preserving for all our children and grandchildren. We must be optimistic about the power of Judaism, presented with passion and quality, to attract the next generation of Jews and the generation after.

Faith and optimism are in short supply these days but if we are to succeed, we must believe deeply in our work and provide answers when our children ask us why they should choose Judaism. And we have good reason to believe in our work, in our people, in our culture, in our values and in ourselves.

"And your children may then ask you: What is this service to you? You must answer:"

- In a time that lacks vision and prophecy and that yearns for meaning, we are carrying an ancient faith in an ancient God so that our children and grandchildren will have spiritual options to fill their lives with light and joy.
- In a time of greed and selfishness, we're part of an old—a very old—tradition of caring for strangers—love of the poor and oppressed—and responsibility for widows and orphans, the elderly and handicapped.
- In a time of forgetfulness, we're part of the oldest living chain of learning and literature in the world, inheritors of an ancient and hauntingly beautiful culture.
- In a time of anomie and loneliness, we carry the secret of community making and caring to provide our children and grandchildren a sense of community and belonging.
- In a time of rootlessness and alienation we're connecting to a 3500-year-old history and an infinite future.
- In a time of religious intolerance, murder and terror we represent a faith that recognizes (in Rabbi Jonathan Sacks words) the "dignity of difference" and has the potential to

foster religious communities that are serious and learned and particular in their spiritual core but also universal in their concern for the oppressed and connected to the network of all humankind

We are the representatives of a deep and significant 3500-year-old religious civilization that can provide personal spiritual meaning and purpose for our lives. We are part of intimate, face-to-face Jewish communities through which that religious civilization is transmitted. They are the community structures of caring and warmth and justice that make Jewish life worth living and that just might help us create a new vision of Peoplehood for the 21st century.