

Ready, Steady, Go!

Midrashic Applications of Jewish Peoplehood Education

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How do Israeli Jews understand, maintain and act upon the connection between themselves and Jews who live elsewhere?

Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities*¹ focused on the concept of “nation,” asking how is it that people can identify with millions of others in a nation-state such as France or England without ever meeting face to face. Why would someone regard a total stranger as a fellow compatriot – a Frenchman or Englishman? By the same token, we ask: how is it that an Israeli Jew might come to regard individuals living in other areas of the world, whom he or she may never meet in a face to face interaction, as members of a common community?²

Since its inception 1998, Lokey Academy, within the Leo Baeck Education Center in Haifa, is spearheading a process of transformation from a s/State of individualism³ to different levels of ‘peoplehood’. Through intensive, relevant and creative educational processes, the Lokey Academy reaches a growing number of students and educators throughout Israel and the Jewish world each year, who engage with Jewish Peoplehood education. The following is a brief description of the key concepts and methods of created and applied by the Lokey Academy in this field.

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

² Also see Ezra Kopelowitz, "Ethno-Religious Vs. Religious Ritual: A Look at a Learning Ritual That Brings Together American and Israeli, Orthodox and Non-Orthodox Jews," *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 13 (2002). Ezra Kopelowitz, "The Concept of "Ethno-Religion" and Its Consequences for Differentiation Theory in the Sociology of Religion: A Case Study of Attitudes Towards Food Handling Rituals among Israeli Jews," (submitted for publication).

³ Jonathan Boyd. *The Sovereign and Situated Self*. UJIA, 2003.

Two by Three

One of the key texts of Jewish Peoplehood is: "You are all *nitzavim* today"(Deuteronomy 29:9). The *midrash* in *Koheleth Rabbah* I, 12:1 reveals the following assumption: "You are *nitzavim* on this day all of you – this should have been at the beginning of the book, only the Torah does not follow a chronological order". Thinking along these *midrashic* lines, we use the concept of *nitzavim* as the beginning and the 'end'¹ of Jewish Peoplehood education. Hebrew grammar supports our *midrash*, as *Nitzavim* is defined as a present action; entailing the process of ascertaining a position as well as reaching the final outcome, namely: taking a stand. Thus, our idea of Jewish Peoplehood education is: *Nitzavim* as the vision and on-going search, as well as the living realization, of Jewish Peoplehood in our time.

Benjamin Bloom identified three domains of educational activities: Cognitive: mental skills (*Knowledge*); Affective: growth in feelings or emotional areas (*Attitude*); Psychomotor: manual or physical skills (*Skills*)². Similarly, we have further "drashed" the *nitzavim* concept, and created a tripartite model of achieving it. We believe, that all three parts of this *midrash* model are crucial for achieving the idea of *nitzavim*, and that each side of it derives from an essential question:

- "Ready": What is the vital knowledge for being part of the Jewish People?
- "Steady": What are the emotional frameworks for maintaining a relationship with the Jewish People?
- "Go": What are the necessary actions of a meaningful relationship with the Jewish People?

The process by which this model was created was in itself very meaningful and generated a new educational conversation. Thus, this "two by three" model, serves us as a language and a frame for creating a wide array of educational programs for both students and educators. Our challenge is to ensure that each program engages all three model aspects, while appreciating and reflecting upon the *Nitzavim* dichotomy. We believe that this model is a "hands-on" tool, which may serve educators in their striving for an educational framework for Jewish Peoplehood education.

¹ This end of course means – a goal, a target.

² Bloom B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain*. New York: David McKay Co Inc.

Sample Curricula and Programs

Yachdav School-to-School program: an original modular curriculum in which elementary school students in Israel and abroad, study a parallel Jewish studies curriculum, exploring their own Jewish identity while learning about their partners' families, communities, beliefs and connections to the Jewish world. The program engages students from the 1st grade onwards and includes themes like: the Jewish calendar, identity circles and journey through the Jewish world.

Tzmatim (Junctures) introduces students to a unique and dynamic way of looking at Jewish history through a series of watershed events. Middle school students study about key turning point in our shared history and create their vision and reality of the Jewish People's present and future.

Young Ambassadors: Every year, 10-12 Leo Baeck High School students travel to the USA to represent Leo Baeck and Israel within Jewish communities, living with host families, attending school with their adopted siblings, and becoming active in their congregations for a period of four months, from September through December. The program has had an enormous impact on both sides' views of the Jewish people.

Youth Exchange Programs: Leo Baeck 10th, 11th and 12th graders take part in youth exchange *mifgash* program, in partnership with the Liberal and Reform communities of Great Britain. The face to face encounter takes place in London as well as Haifa, and friendships are maintained for many years.

Training for Jewish Educators: The Leo Baeck Education Center has initiated a unique training program to create a cadre of educators who are able to impart the commitment to Jewish Peoplehood Education. Fifteen educators participate in the program each year, learning from traditional and modern Jewish thought, experiencing and experimenting with Jewish ritual and devoting time to forming their "stand". In addition, intensive professional development seminars are created and implemented by the Lokey Academy staff, in Israel and abroad. Each program includes educational peers *mifgash* devoted to sharing best practices and challenges.

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