

Institutionalizing Peoplehood?

By Moty Cristal, an Israeli

Editor's Note: In following the logic of intertwined networks and ideas, Cristal's piece refers to and interacts with ideas presented in other articles in this volume

This article should have been written in Hebrew, the language of the Jewish People. However, despite the fact that Israel is rapidly becoming the largest Jewish community in the world, most of the conversations on Jewish matters are conducted in English.

But first things first.

Jewish Peoplehood is quickly becoming the organizing principle of Jewish life. Scholars and practitioners are debating its scope, content, origins, and relevance. Some compare it to Kaplan's concept of Jewish civilization and others see Jewish Peoplehood as a timely move from Herzl to Ahad Ha'am. The articles in this volume of Peoplehood Papers, their footnotes and references, as well as the "The Peoplehood Papers" series by itself, reflect more than anything the richness and the depth of this conversation.

Struggling with the attempt to define, rather than just describe, Jewish Peoplehood, scholars and practitioners are drawing the lines of this conversation. This is a dialogue which is not merely intellectual, but rather stems from a need – a need voiced by younger people throughout the Jewish world to create a different,²⁵ more appropriate Jewish paradigm which will meet the external challenges that our global society is facing,²⁶ reflect the existing trends²⁷ within North American Jewry as the second largest Jewish

²⁵ As the dissatisfaction with the existing "roles" in the global Jewish theatre described by Ted Sokolsky, President and CEO, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto in his publication: "Jewish Peoplehood. Towards a New Path of Israel Diaspora Relations": "However, in the creation of those achievements [the creation of the State of Israel] certain stereotypes were constructed, that now impede our ability to grow as a people together.. Diaspora Jewry too often saw itself as the "great provider" of Israeli society offering financial and moral support to a struggling nation...and it was a vast frontier open for mining: mining for Olim or financial support"

²⁶ For a comprehensive analysis of challenges facing the Jewish people see "Mega-Trends in the Next Five Years which will Impact on World Jewry and Israel", by Ambassador Stuart E. Eisenstaedt, submitted by the Jewish Policy Planning Institute to the 2008 "Facing Tomorrow" conference. (www.jpppi.org.il).

²⁷ See on one hand the discouraging data analysis presented in Prof. Steven Cohen's research such as "A Tale of Two Jewries: The Inconvenient Truth for American Jews" and the critique of Prof. Saxe who argues that: ..."Findings suggest

community in the world, as well as address the hunger that exists within the elites in Israel for Jewish content in their lives.²⁸ Meeting all these challenges requires a more updated defined paradigm - something which goes beyond, and not replaces, classic Zionism.

Whether it is Yossi Abramowitz's "on-going distinctive catalyst" definition, or Brook Goldstein's suggested definition for Neo-Zionism as "going away from the Israel-centric paradigm towards a progressive zionOUT where a home state spreads its influence by empowering its people abroad," or any other definition suggested, it is evident that we are facing a dramatic paradigm shift in Jewish life, which is gaining increasing support within Jewish communities worldwide²⁹. This shift, from the classic Zionist, Israeli-centered paradigm towards a more People-centric paradigm, a Peoplehood paradigm, calls to put the Jewish People in the center and to ensure that the Jewish People, the Jewish tribe, wherever its daughters and sons reside, maintains strong links to and with its nation-state, the State of Israel.

This paradigm shift and the necessity to articulate it loud and clear was presented by Prime Minister Olmert, in his address to the JAFI assembly in June 2008:

"The timing of this session affords me the opportunity to share with you thoughts and plans which I have been contemplating for a while - to change the paradigm of relations between the State of Israel and the Diaspora... With new realities, comes the need for a new paradigm...

"The old paradigm of the Diaspora as benefactor and Israel as beneficiary can no longer continue... For the past sixty years, Israel has been the project of the Jewish People. For the next sixty years, the Jewish People will need to be the joint project of Israel and Jewish communities around the world"

Now that the "Chief Executive" of the Jewish State has acknowledged the need for a paradigm shift, and indicated its general direction, scholars and practitioners must lay out the content and the operational actions associated with this shift.³⁰

that deterministic views of the impact of birthrates and intermarriage may need to be adjusted". In the working Paper series: Understanding Contemporary American Jewry" of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute, January 2007.

²⁸ As described here by Ari Engelberg and Yossi Beilin.

²⁹ It is not a coincidence that this article, as well as most others in this volume, does not use the term "Diaspora". In the Jewish context, this term carries a certain value judgment, which contradicts the new Peoplehood paradigm.

³⁰ Many are still arguing that "Peoplehood, rather than becoming a powerful, overarching umbrella concept for Jewish life, could become the "poor stepchild for those who are not religiously or nationally engaged", Alan Hoffmann at http://www.pathstopeoplehood.org/article_one.aspx.

Executing or implementing the new paradigm — beyond the further conceptual development created by articles in this volume — requires work at least in five different interconnected and interrelated arenas:

(a) Communication: We must change the modes through which global Jewish discourse is conducted – from a bilateral US-Israel conversation towards a more orchestrated round-table conversation which enriches content and tasks towards a stronger sense of Peoplehood. To that end – new structures and forums have to be established in order to facilitate such a global conversation.

(b) Language. The new paradigm ought to choose its vocabulary and its language in a way which strengthens Jewish Peoplehood. Hebrew should become the spoken language of the Jewish people on two distinct levels, even for those Jews whose mother tongue is not Hebrew. The first is a basic communication-level Hebrew, which allows every Jew to communicate with each other. The second is conversational Hebrew that will allow Jews to actually express themselves beyond basic communication. New Hebrew teaching schemes ought to be developed and pursued which will allow, among other things, a stronger connection between Jews and Israelis around the world. "Hebrew Centers," part of Israel's culture houses, should find their place near Jewish synagogues and Jewish centers throughout the world, aiming to reach the Jewish community as well as non-Jews, overcoming the risks and threats associated with an Israeli reach-out.

(c) Values. As indicated here by Yossi Abramowitz, the new paradigm requires the identification of values which are uniquely Jewish and will serve, as Abramowitz phrases it, "as the new DNA of our religion, nationalism and culture". President Peres and his dedicated team rightfully choose to focus the opening event of the 2008 "Facing Tomorrow" conference around the duty of tikkun olam, one of the most Jewish of all our values. These Jewish values will be pursued throughout the world by Jewish organizations, networks or projects such as Israeli Flying Aid, Jewish Social Action Month, American Jewish World Service, and many others.

(d) Actions: The last paradigm shift that the Jewish people underwent was from emancipation and assimilation to Herzl's practical Zionism. Zionist actions were easy to

understand if challenging to implement. Coming to Eretz Yisrael, cultivating the land, building a society and finally establishing a state – all were clear tasks that are still being implemented today. What are the actions that can be derived from the new paradigm? In this volume, many writers identified actions which ought to be developed in order to actualize Peoplehood. Unlike Zionism, which had clear actions associated with it, including the ultimate goal of making aliya, the new paradigm carries no clear and inherent priorities. Stemming from its networked structure, as discussed below, no priorities are given within the long list of directions suggested here, for example, by Deborah Housen-Curiel.

(e) Structure: The fifth dimension which has to be revised and renewed in order to support the new paradigm is the structural one. In a previous volume of Peoplehood Papers, Dr. Shlomi Ravid phrased the challenge as "the need to explore what it means to be an institutional expression of Jewish Peoplehood in the 21st century and how it should shape and impact the future mission of Jewish institutions."³¹

Answering this challenge requires understanding the logic of networks.³² First level networks are networks that people join in order to meet others - alike or not necessarily so. From LinkedIn, Facebook and even JDate, we are surrounded with virtual and less virtual first level networks. Second level networks are those that, beyond the first level characteristics, are designed around a certain organizing principle, a shared vision or sense of mission. People who might differ on other things are connected — physically or virtually – through certain links to people with whom they share a certain commonality. A Jewish congregation can serve as a good example for second level network.

Third level networks are operational networks — networks that have an organizing principle, a shared vision, and an obligation for the people in the network to act, to perform, or to execute whatever each individual considers or interprets as the purpose of the network. Al-Qaida and the network of the global Jihad is an unfortunate effective third level network.

³¹ http://www.ujc.org/local_includes/downloads/26210.pdf

³² The logic of networks refers to the newly defined science of networks in the social, rather than engineering world, and it is closely read with Chaos Theory and Complexity Science. For the evolution of the network science see: S. Wasserman and K. Faust, Social Network Analysis, A. Barabasi, Linked: the New Science of Networks.

Networks have no formal leadership, no hierarchy, and are self-regulated — everything that the organized Jewish world is not. The world, however, is moving from organizations and formal institutions to mobilizing masses and constituencies through effective networks. Hence, in order to operationalize the new Peoplehood paradigm and its intertwined communication, language, values and actions dimensions, a dramatic shift in structure is required: a shift towards a network-structured institutionalization.

Network-structured institutionalization requires three types of interventions, which can be executed simultaneously through an almost-chaotic web of local and global Jewish institutions, linked through individuals and actions: (a) a comprehensive revision of existing Jewish organizations, (b) the establishment of new Jewish institutions and networks and (c) strengthening of existing global Jewish networks.

The followings are some examples of the types of structural changes required under each one of these three interventions.

(a) Existing Jewish organizations and institutions must change or they will lose relevance in the Jewish world and will be replaced, practically and operationally, by other dynamic and more up-to-date structures.

Prime Minister Olmert referred to this point in his June 2008 JAFI address: "The Government of Israel has to assume much greater responsibility for the Jewish future worldwide. In practical terms, greater responsibility translates into greater investment... The time has now come for the Jewish Agency to assume the additional responsibility of being the agent of the State of Israel for preserving the Jewish future. In order to fulfill this new and amplified mission, the Jewish Agency will need to re-evaluate its current structure, management and governance – a process, which I know is already underway."

A necessary structural change that would affect both the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency, is to turn JAFI into an operational arm, an executive agency, of the State of Israel with the important task will be to bring the global Jewish agenda into Israeli official policies.

Other global Jewish organizations will have to revise their modes of operation including the United Jewish Community's activities and the World Jewish Congress which is in the

process of creating constitutional changes which will allow it to become, once again, an operational representative body.

(b) New institutions need to be established in order to support the new paradigm. One of these, as advocated by Professor Yehezkel Dror, is the establishment of a constitutional consultative body in Israel which will represent world Jewry in Israeli internal decision making.

This idea is highly debatable within the Jewish world, and its practicalities are still far from being agreed upon and accepted. However, such a constitutional body reflects more than anything else the new paradigm of People-centric Jewish world. This type of new institutions is still far from Daniel Elazar's vision³³ of global Jewish governance, but in answering the dynamic nature of global phenomena, it will take an appropriate step towards coordinated Jewish actions, either as a response to threats or in taking a leading role in answering global challenges such as environment or moral dilemma emerging from advance science.

During the 2008 "Facing Tomorrow" conference, the organizing committee made a courageous political attempt to move in these directions. One of the sessions brought together Jewish leaders such as Ronald Lauder, Zeev Bielski, Alan Dershowitz, Arik Carmon, Isaac Herzog, Malcolm Hoenlein and Pierre Besnainou, in an attempt to discuss decision-making processes. These leaders could not reach any agreement or accept the fact that decisions in the Jewish world would not necessarily need to be done in a power-politic setting. Their inability to engage in a constructive dialogue that went beyond their organizations' achievements or who-controls-what, was so evident that the only brave attempt made by Pierre Besnainou, neither an American nor an Israeli, to present a platform for discussion was hardly mentioned, and completely disregarded by world Jewry leaders. These men (perhaps it is relevant to note that there were no women on the panel) failed at that event, and fail since then, to see the depth of the required change in their organizations. Jewish organizations, rather than connect themselves in a web of personal and professional ties, still maintain their political rivalries in a lost quest for political power which is no longer relevant for the challenges facing the Jewish people.

³³ D. Elazar, Reinventing World Jewry: How to design the World Jewish Polity.
<http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles3/rwjintro.htm>

(c) The third required intervention towards a network-structure institutionalization is to strengthen global Jewish networks. Networks such as the Nahum Goldman Fellowship alumni, the Wexner Fellows alumni, KolDor³⁴ and even the WJC Jewish Diplomats, a networked structure within the traditional WJC organization, serve today as the breeding fields for Peoplehood ideas and actions.

While in the past Jewish leaders were identified by the organization they were leading or involved with, the leaders of tomorrow will emerge from the multiple roles they play in Jewish institutions and in their proven capability to mobilize local or global Jewish collective actions.

The Jewish world is undergoing a paradigm shift from the classic Zionist, State-centric paradigm towards a People-centric one. Its definition is still in the making, but the sense that the existing structures, conversations and leaderships fall short of addressing the local and global challenges Jewish communities are facing is only growing stronger. In order to operationalize the new paradigm, a shift is required in five different arenas: communication, language, values, actions and structure. This article indicated the three necessary interventions required to support the network-structured institutionalization process: a significant revision in the major Jewish organizations, the establishment of new institutions which will reflect the new paradigm and the strengthening of the existing networks in the Jewish people.

I do hope that the ideas presented here will generate objections. Since the days of Hillel and Shammai, it is clear that consensus has never been a Jewish value, and fierce debates were always a much needed dimension in paradigm shifts.

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³⁴ At the 2007 KolDor conference more than 100 Jewish networks and organizations were represented through the participation of 120 young Jewish leaders. It was towards that conference that KD lay leader, Sandy Antignas, who also serves as a lay leader at the UJA-Federation of New York, coined the term: *a network of networks*.