

# The Peoplehood Papers 21

May 2018 | Iyar 5778

**Social Justice  
and Peoplehood**



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## **Social Justice and Peoplehood**

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# From the Editor

## Shlomi Ravid

In recent decades, particularly in North America, pursuing social justice and Tikun Olam has become central to the Jewish conversation. This quiet revolution reflects a transformation of the Jewish collective ethos shifting focus from the wellbeing of the Jewish People to its contribution to society and humanity at large – from particularism to universalism. This collection of essays examines the development of Jewish social justice through the collective prism. When does it go beyond the values held by individuals, and become an expression of a Jewish collective ethos? Is that defined by the constitutive values of Judaism and Jewishness? How can we explain in historical terms the recent growth of the field? How does it connect to today's Jewish ethos? How much is it a byproduct of a changing ethos, the force behind that change, or both?

While the growing emphasis on social justice in North America is very clear and can be explained as part of a search for a "covenant of destiny", the story in Israel is different. As a society still driven by a more particularistic "covenant of fate", and facing existential challenges, the State's approach to social justice is at times compromised. This creates both internal challenges among Israelis torn between their commitment to social justice and to the State, but also to the global sense of Peoplehood. The tension between particularism and universalism in the Jewish collective ethos threatens Jewish unity and the sense of a shared destiny. Some of the articles in this collection focus on this challenge that is crucial to the future of Jewish Peoplehood.

In trying to better understand the nature of the current Jewish drive for social justice, its meaning, purpose and challenges we divided the articles into three main groups:

1. Articles that wrestle with the broader question of Peoplehood and social justice.
2. Articles that focus on specific dimensions or issues of the Jewish social justice field.
3. Articles that address Israel's challenges on the social justice front.

## Peoplehood and Social Justice

**Jill Jacobs** proposes an approach to Peoplehood that integrates Jewish commitment to social justice with a responsibility to the survival of the Jewish people. In her words "The reintegration of Jewish identity and practice—a peoplehood that is political-religious-

cultural-economic-familial—depends on reclaiming our traditional self-understanding as articulated in the Torah and *halakha*, and refusing to abandon a single aspect of this multi-faceted identity”.

**Abby Levine** writes from the perspective of the Director of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable – a network of 57 Jewish organizations engaged in social justice work. Their work in her words, is based on “... a Jewish tradition that says: Remember the stranger. Care for the widow and the orphan. Treat employees fairly. Heal the world. Pursue Justice. A tradition that teaches us not only how people ought to treat each other one-on-one, but also demands that we collectively imagine and work towards a vision of a truly just and fair society for all. We, the field of Jewish social justice, believe in and work for the systematic transformation of our communities, our cities, our states, our country, and the world”.

**Mordechai Liebling** calls for creating a Jewish Theology of Liberation. “Liberation theology aims to transform the historical conditions of poverty, marginalization, injustice and violence present in the world by creating a space for the creative articulation of peace, dignity, inclusion, justice and solidarity”. Liebling calls for its collective creation: “A collectively developed Jewish theology of liberation will nourish our bodies, hearts, minds and spirit, strengthening and guiding us in creating a socially just, environmentally sustainable and spiritually fulfilling human presence on the Earth”.

**Ruth Messinger** lays down the foundations for global Jewish responsibility. She concludes: “We must pursue justice at home, in our own communities, in our own country, in Israel, and throughout the world. Before millions starve in East Africa, land is stolen in Guatemala or new violence erupts in Myanmar, we, as Jews, motivated by text, by tradition, and by history, must heed the call to accept responsibility, to act, and to protest these transgressions. This is how we take up our role, fulfill our obligations and help to heal the world. This is what we do to create a world of greater equity and justice and to encourage others to join with us each day to work for the good of the entire globe”.

**Jonathan Schorsch** offers a compelling explanation of the role social justice plays in current day Peoplehood. “Jewish Peoplehood ... at its most basic it refers to the idea that Jews hold or should hold feelings of shared identity with one another. Without substantive values that make up this shared togetherness, however, it does not have compelling meaning. Social justice, a powerful modern ethical-political concept, offers the idea of Jewish peoplehood just such a compelling set of positive values, often rooted in Torah and rabbinic Judaism, which can bind individuals and communities around something, meaningful and productive”. He then addresses some of its challenges and

recommends a holistic approach that integrates Peoplehood with other dimensions of life.

### Issues and Challenges

**Cherie Brown** notes that “there have been many historic moments of cooperation in the U.S. between Jews and groups targeted by racism, particularly people of Black African heritage. Over time, Black Gentiles and Jews have come to recognize that they have many experiences of oppression that link our peoples in a common struggle for social justice... But there have also been too many moments of mistrust and division between Jewish people and Black African heritage people on both personal and political levels”. She shares insight from vast experience of working with young people on the **intersection of racism and anti-Semitism**, and how to avoid them.

**Darren Kleinberg** wrestles with the challenge of going beyond the intellectual understanding of the value of social justice to the development of a proactive approach. He finds the answer in spiritual engagement which he proposes to nurture. Or in his own concluding words: “if the Jewish community is going play an increasingly meaningful role in bringing justice to the world, it is time to develop programs and methodologies that will help those who participate in Jewish life to cultivate transformative spiritual experiences that will leave them with no choice but to act. Otherwise, we will continue to *understand* the need for justice, but fail to *feel* it and thus act upon it.”

**Nigel Savage** writes about Jewish tradition and the crises of environmental sustainability as both a unique challenge and opportunity. His conclusion is: “I hope and pray that, as each year goes by, we learn our tradition more deeply; we deepen our sense of being part of the Jewish people, with unique gifts to share in the world; we address environmental challenges more directly; we see the actual and potential significance of Israel through fresh eyes; and so we thus, in aggregate, add a new chapter to the history of the Jewish people. This is what it is to take Torah from Zion out into the world -- making a better world for everyone, and in so doing also strengthening Jewish life and the Jewish people. *Kein yehi ratzon.*”

**Sid Schwarz** offers a micro perspective on social activism. The moving story of his congregation *Adat Shalom's* involvement with the NICL school in Haiti, exemplifies a true commitment to social justice and the core belief that even against enormous odds there is always something you can do to improve the world. Schwarz concludes with a warm recommendation to Jewish institutions to build these kinds of hands-on service

missions into their year-round programming both as true expressions of Jewish values but also as a means to building a meaningful, empowered and cohesive community.

### **The Israel Challenges**

**Yair Assulin** opens his article dramatically with the assertion that “in the end, you understand that, more than anything, so much of what happens now in Israel – how we think, speak, love, hate – is a result of the occupation”. And yet towards the end the article takes a twist: “And thus, you suddenly understand that the occupation is not a political issue after all. It is in fact a question of whether you support Israel, that is to say, whether you support a society that asks hard questions, wants to understand, and is committed to moral values. Do you support an ethical Israel that believes that all persons have value, by virtue of their simple humanity? Do you support a society in which the Jewish discourse is not reduced to spiritualist kitsch but is translated into action?” To Assulin it is all about morality which “cannot be contained by fences or walls. Like the wind, it is boundless. And everything is connected”.

**Aryeh Cohen** defines himself as a Peoplehood “skeptic”. In his view Israel’s seventy-year occupation, treatment of its Palestinian minority and asylum seekers lead to the conclusion that: “the State that claims to be the Jewish State is not interested in a vigorous pursuit of Social Justice”. Adding to that 30% of American Jews that supported trump and the lack of criticism of the occupation among North America Jews he concludes: “there is no special affinity for Jewish people towards social justice. The Jewish people is like everybody else”.

To **Ed Rettig**, Aryeh Cohen’s article suffers from unintelligibility. Its “soft moral relativism” that cannot accept the legitimacy of alternative interpretations of social justice, is what makes it unintelligible. For Rettig “the argument that Social Justice is a central pillar of Judaism and Jewish peoplehood stands on a firm basis of intelligibility. In this, it is like talk of God, of the prohibition of theft or sermonizing against adultery. We may disagree on how to develop these pillars of our civilizational thought and how to realize them in practical terms. But how can we avoid these - and other foundational components like them, monotheism, or *brit*, for example - if we are to speak of contemporary Judaism as anything meaningful?”

**Micha Odenheimer** shares what he calls “a crisis of faith in Jewish nationalism” he is experiencing, triggered by Israel’s treatment of the African asylum seekers. His conclusion is that “the era of Zionist piety, in which the state itself is seen as not just necessary, but as righteous and good, is over. Instead the state must be seen as an arena—the main



arena— in which the struggle for Jewish ethics, for the soul of the Jewish people, is taking place. And in this struggle, the hard to define, easy to malign concept of Jewish Peoplehood will play a decisive role”. At the end of the day Micha still believes that “the People of Israel, who, if not prophets, are the sons and daughters of prophets” will prevail.

**Dana Talmi** and **Max Klau** challenge the assumption that young Jews “... must choose between being progressive and loving Israel”. They propose that “... a service experience in Israel provides a path that transcends this kind of binary, either/ or choice”. Their observation of the the Yahel service program emphasizes that point: “Again, and again, we see our participants emerge from this experience having discovered a way to integrate a foundational commitment to progressive values with an intense, informed, and sophisticated love of Israel and Judaism”.

The articles in this collection are intended to shed some light and inspire conversations on how pursuing social justice figures in the broader context of the current and future Jewish ethos. On one hand it offers the Jewish people a meaningful, significant and inspiring collective mission. On the other it exposes deep internal disagreements on the essence of the Jewish enterprise. This is a crucial conversation to the future of Jewish peoplehood, which we hope this collection of essays will advance.

We would like to thank our friends at the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable for their assistance in putting this collection of essays together.

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## PEOPLEHOOD AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



### Reintegrating Judaism

**Jill Jacobs**

In a 1970 manifesto, Jews for Urban Justice declared, “The Jewish people is not political, or religious, or cultural, or economic, or familial. It is political-religious-cultural-economic-familial. What characterized its peoplehood best, at its best moments, was the principle of *halakhah*: the Way, the Path; a wholeness and fusion of body, mind, and spirit; of action and ideology; of person and community.” The group went on to lament that the American Jewish community, over the past fifty years, has experienced an “oppression so subtle and so debilitating that it has felt to many Jews like victory,” namely, the splitting of these essential components of Jewish peoplehood from one another.<sup>1</sup>

The growth of the Jewish social justice sector over the past two decades represents an attempt to remedy this unnatural split, which remains present in much of Jewish communal life.

Jews have long defied categorization. Famously, the conditions of emancipation under Napoleon required the Jewish community to revoke any claim to national identity. Yet, in the late nineteenth century, even European Jews who converted to Christianity discovered that the rise in racialized anti-Semitism precluded their best efforts to blend in. And despite rhetoric about America’s “Judeo-Christian tradition,” neither Judaism as a whole, nor Judaism in the United States, has ever primarily been defined in terms of faith, as Christianity is. Rather, the tongue-in-cheek term “Member of the Tribe” may be most apt, as a description of a people with religious traditions, sacred books, shared history and language, ethnic and cultural traditions.

Yet, too often, the multiple parts of Jewish identity have existed in different realms: religion happens in synagogue on Saturday, and social justice takes place on Sunday at protests or at the food bank. A widespread perception holds that being a “religious”

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1 “The Oppression and Liberation of the Jewish People in America” (1970) in Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier, ed., *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology* (New York: Grove Press, 1973)

Jew means keeping kosher and observing Shabbat, but not necessarily paying workers a living wage or supporting health care for all people.

As a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary in the late nineties and early 2000s, I started researching and writing about *halakha* on issues such as labor, housing, and criminal justice. I quickly found myself deep in the writings of Jewish thinkers and legal experts, ranging from the ancient rabbis of the Talmud through the authors of modern *teshuvot* (response), who saw civil law as an integral part of *halakha*, and the obligation to create a better world as essential to being a Jew. And yet, when I spoke about my commitment to being a Conservative rabbi who worked on social justice, I too often heard, “That’s a Reform thing,” or “Why don’t you go to law school instead.” Secular Jews involved in justice work sometimes expressed surprise or suspicion that a religious Jew would engage in progressive politics.

Thankfully, I rarely hear these reactions today. The move toward what I have termed “integrated Judaism,”<sup>2</sup> includes a significantly greater involvement of traditionally observant Jews in justice work, increased interest in *halakha* on issues of civil law, the use of Jewish ritual within social justice organizations and activities, and concerted efforts to bring engagement with the world into synagogue life.

At the same time, there is a backlash that threatens this integration, and that also threatens to split the Jewish community as a whole. From the right and center right, this backlash most often takes two forms: 1) The assertion that “politics” do not belong in the synagogue, and 2) the defining of “Jewish interests” narrowly as the physical self-preservation of Jews. From the far left, the backlash most often involves the invalidation within certain progressive spaces of Jews who consider themselves Zionist/pro-Israel, and a lack of expressed concern for the physical well-being of Jews in Israel. Each of these positions leads to the fissure in Jewish identity of which Jews for Urban Justice warned.

### **Torah and politics**

As the head of an organization that mobilizes rabbis and cantors, I hear often from clergy whose congregants complain that “politics has no place on the bima.” This position restricts the role of a rabbi to talking about ritual matters. But neither the Torah nor the millennia of commentary that followed restrict themselves to ritual. Rather, the

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<sup>2</sup> Jacobs, Jill, *There Shall Be No Needy: Pursuing Social Justice Through Jewish Law and Tradition* (Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2009) 1-8

Torah—and the whole of Jewish law—attempt to create a sacred community that insists on the dignity and equality of every single person. Insofar as “political” relates to the *polis*—how people live together—the Torah is inherently political. The moment Noah and his family step off the ark to reestablish human society, God commands them not to murder, and gives further instruction that the rabbis of the Talmud understand as mandating the establishment of a legal system. Immediately following the revelation at Mount Sinai, God specifies a series of laws that primarily relate to ethical and just relations between people—including torts, the treatment of vulnerable populations (widows, orphans and *gerim*--non-Jewish members of the community), loans, and the care of the poor.

Political does not mean partisan, of course. That is, Jewish law does not mandate whom to support or oppose in an election, but does have a voice in teaching us how to build a more just society. And despite claims that one could cherry pick from Jewish sources to defend any position, the overwhelming force of *halakha* pushes toward a system that attempts to reduce inequality, ensure that the basic needs of all people are met, and create the most justice for the largest number of people.

### **The self-preservation of Jews—and its absence**

The second danger—both on the left and the right—stems from the assumption that one must choose between the preservation of Jewish bodies and a commitment to Jewish moral behavior. On the right, this most often entails defending Israeli governmental policy, even when this policy violates the human rights of Palestinians, and even extends to physically threatening or inciting against progressive Jews. On the left, this assumption most often involves disregarding the physical safety of Israeli Jews, sometimes to the point of rationalizing or excusing violence against them.

Both of these positions presume a false distinction between the physical and the moral well-being of the Jewish community. That illusory bifurcation threatens the possibility of a reintegrated approach to Jewish life. If we give up our moral conscience and abstain from engaging real life in the *polis*, then we allow the ethnic or “familial” part of Jewish identity to crowd out the others. While the physical survival of the Jewish people is obviously necessary, it is insufficient if we abandon our moral core. Yet if we devalue the physical well-being of Jewish bodies, then we trivialize the suffering of individuals and hide from the dangers of violent anti-Semitism (at our peril). Either approach endangers both Jews and Judaism.

The reintegration of Jewish identity and practice—a peoplehood that is "political-religious-cultural-economic-familial—depends on reclaiming our traditional self-understanding as articulated in the Torah and *halakha*, and refusing to abandon a single aspect of this multi-faceted identity.

**Rabbi Jill Jacobs** is the Executive Director of T'ruah, which mobilizes 2000 North American rabbis and cantors, together with their communities, to protect and advance human rights in North America, Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territories.



## Social Justice and Jews – An Open Letter to Jonathan Weisman

**Abby Levine**

You're right. Not enough American Jews are engaged in activism and social justice at this critical point in our nation's history. I agree with you – 2018 is desperately calling out for more people grounded in Jewish values consistently, passionately standing up for the America and the world we believe in and speaking out about anti-Semitism, hatred and bigotry.

Many of us are already doing this work – and we are a lot more like you than you may think. You would fit right in.

Jane Eisner, editor of the Forward, mentions a few incredible Jewish women leading this work every day. They, and other inspiring leaders, are backed up by hundreds of thousands of rank-and-file community members, activists, teachers, thinkers, and doers.

I'm the Director of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable – a network of 57 Jewish organizations engaged in social justice work. These 57 organizations have a combined budget of \$275 million dollars, have staff in 39 cities across the US, and are grounded in a long and deeply Jewish tradition of justice.

This is a Jewish tradition that says: Remember the stranger. Care for the widow and the orphan. Treat employees fairly. Heal the world. Pursue Justice. A tradition that teaches us not only how people ought to treat each other one-on-one, but also demands that we collectively imagine and work towards a vision of a truly just and fair society for all. We, the field of Jewish social justice, believe in and work for the systematic transformation of our communities, our cities, our states, our country, and the world.

That vision, for the world as it should be, combines with the responsibilities that are so integral to Judaism. It's not only that the Exodus story of freedom and liberation is foundational to the Jewish people, but also that we are commanded to retell the story each year at the Pesach seder. The combination of vision and responsibility brings thousands of us American Jews to feel a calling to Jewish social justice. This is not a new phenomenon – we stand on the shoulders of generations of American Jews working for



justice – taking one step forward and two steps back but seeing change happen across the arc of history.

So, why would you fit right in? How am I so sure? Because I've seen how meaningful this work is for the tens of thousands of activists involved in it.

Based on an extensive survey of Jewish social justice leaders, we found beautiful and inspiring illustrations of how a Jewish context for justice work makes an impact: Jewish tradition brings meaning and sustenance to individuals; it strengthens the field's institutions as a whole; and American Jews' understanding of what it means to be outsiders motivates support for marginalized communities.

### **Jewish Tradition Creates Meaning**

Changing the world is hard – finding inspiration in Jewish tradition and history deepens and brings meaning to the work.

Sometimes, social change work feels like a slow grind—one tiny step at a time, making phone calls to recruit people to attend an event, stuffing envelopes, attending a committee meeting to plan another meeting. And even when there are exciting, peak experiences like participating in a service project, or learning through a group text study, or attending an advocacy day or rally, these moments are frankly fleeting against the backdrop of a thousand emails.

Knowing that our work toward social change and justice – fighting hate and bigotry, working across lines of difference, advocating for a systemic transformation of society – is part of the Jewish tradition, creates a layer of meaning onto those experiences that energizes us.

In the words of a few of our movement's leaders:

I think a Jewish framework for social justice helps me stay inspired and motivated to do the work and to do it Jewishly. It can feel cold and empty when the meaning and inspiration is not there. And then it's too easy for me to spend my time or focus on other things.

We've seen that college students are interested in going deep on specific topics and gaining wisdom from traditional and non-traditional Jewish sources. These students are flocking to the work because it's – in their own words –

“meaningful”. Integrating Jewish meaning and context allows them to connect to the work and the community in a deeper way.

### **Jewish Wisdom Strengthens Organizations**

Secondly, Jewish tradition serves as a well of abundance to strengthen the field as a whole. Drawing upon Jewish values and history increases the quality of our organizations and our practices. It teaches us to create a culture of learning, which is necessary for strong organizations.

Jewish history reminds us that we have endless examples of prophets, organizers, teachers, healers and helpers – all of whom have roles to play in building a community of action. Jewish social justice organizations need a diversity of skilled people, working in community with each other, to accomplish shared goals. Not only do 57 organizations strive toward that diversity within their ranks, but also our field achieves that when we collaborate with each other on programs, events and collective fundraising.

As a few of our survey respondents said:

Jewish thought is a multi-thousand-year-old tradition that has survived and will likely outlive any of our institutions. So, to give our institutions the best lasting power to continue fighting for a better world year after year it would be best to build them on the enduring foundation of Jewish wisdom.

It feels important to build on the wisdom and work that’s already been done before us, to see ourselves in a line of ancestors stretching far back, and to add to their work instead of thinking that we can/should create it all from scratch.

### **Jewish Experiences of Being Outsiders**

Lastly, and at a most instinctive level, in all our diversity as Jews, we share overlapping memories from our own lives and that of our parents, grandparents, and ancestors, of being outsiders or the “Other.” This helps us relate to and support marginalized communities – sometimes but certainly not always. It’s baked into our lived collective experiences, as well as the commandment repeated 36 times in the Torah: you shall neither wrong the stranger, nor oppress them, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. We as a field don’t always operate from this understanding, but it serves as a fundamental pillar of the Jewish social justice field.

This is why 70% of American Jews oppose a ban on visas to Muslims wanting to enter the US, as measured by the recently released poll from Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. Or, in the words of one of our respondents:

I'm motivated to do justice work because I identify as a Jew, and within that identity, as an (often) marginalized minority. This is a large part of what motivates me, the same way any other identity group with its own unique challenges and strengths may feel a similar call to action.

These three themes are just the tip of the iceberg. If these themes resonate with you, come find us – there are at least 57 starting points. If you have questions about how and why we do this work, ask us. I assure you, we contain multitudes of opinions about our work, the work of broader Jewish communities and its institutions, and the world at large. We are filled with organizations and people that bake challah to end hunger, advocate for reproductive justice and everything in between. Come on in, it's a fun and important place to be.

**Abby Levine** is the Director of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, a network that makes social justice a core expression of Jewish life, while advancing social justice issues in the broader society.



# A Call for Creating a Jewish Theology of Liberation

**Mordechai Liebling**

A Jewish theology of liberation will tell a new story of how the world is fully interconnected, where the primary energy of evolution is cooperation and not survival of the fittest, and how the entire world is imbued with dignity and purpose. This story will be in harmony with the scientific explanation of the 13.7 billion years since the Big Bang, the Torah's wisdom that justice is caring for the Earth and each other, and, our own need to live a life of meaning and purpose. The stories we tell, the narratives we create, govern our lives and can create societies of wholeness, of liberation.

The great lie of western civilization is separation and the myth of the individual. There has never been a society of one; we are social animals. Modernity created the myth of the individual to break away from the claustrophobia of closed hierarchical oppressive societies. It succeeded and we are now paying a great price for it having gone to the extreme. Rampant individualism leads to alienation, unhappiness and a sense of meaninglessness that gives rise to societies where masses of people are addicted to materialism and to numbing out through various modalities. It can lead to a desperate desire for belonging that manifests in extreme nationalism and a susceptibility to authoritarian leaders. Our separation from the Earth, our treatment of it as a mere storehouse of resources, has led to the escalating disruption and destruction of global warming. We must create a new balance of the individual and the communal, of humans and the ecological system of which we are an element. We need a story of connection.

What follows are some ideas about theology that are intended to begin conversations. One step out of the age of the individual is to recognize that a theology needs to be collectively produced. The ideas that follow are the product of interactions I have had with teachers, colleagues and students; and of course, are a product of my own life experience. I hope that the remarks below spark discussions and encourage groups of activists to gather and discover how their beliefs and actions inform each other. The goal is for activists to see how developing a theology can inform their activism and better integrate their hearts and minds.

Jewish thinkers have long observed that in the Torah there is the God of Creation-*Elohim*, or “God as Being,” working through the laws of nature; and the God of History-*YHVH*, “God as Becoming” manifested as the power of being able to transform society from what is to what ought to be, the possibility of justice. We have learned since that nature functions through constant evolution and that for the struggle for justice to succeed it needs to be worldwide and in many forms. The spiritual understanding that bridges the two names of God is that Being and Becoming are inter-dependent, not dichotomies. We are part of an evolving System of Life. God is the name we give to the energy that makes it a cohesive system, God is the connective tissue of the universe. The awareness that recognizes the complete interdependence and connectivity of all that is, can be called God consciousness. This is a non-theistic understanding of God. This is not God the Creator nor the God who intervenes in history, this is God understood as the name for the Oneness of existence. Love and, hence meaning, arises from the awareness of the complete interconnection of a living, evolving system. Our desire to bring about justice is rooted in this consciousness of our connection to others-love.

Liberation theology aims to transform the historical conditions of poverty, marginalization, injustice and violence present in the world by creating a space for the creative articulation of peace, dignity, inclusion, justice and solidarity. It has a powerful legacy of teaching that oppressed people need to act on their own behalf, that having agency is an essential part of the move out of oppression.

A key tenet of Latin American Liberation Theology is praxis. Praxis is a process that can be understood as the commitment to end oppression, which is translated into action and then reflected upon through the lens of Spirit on the action taken, finally the understanding of Spirit is reflected on through the lens of commitment and action. A theology develops over time; theology understood as how an awareness of Spirit informs our strategy and actions. It is calling for action to precede understanding, an idea embedded in Jewish myth. In Exodus 24:7 the Jews standing at Mount Sinai signal their acceptance of the Torah with the words “na’aseh v’nishma” – “We will do and we will hear/understand.” Action precedes understanding, the collective does what is right and then through reflection on the action develops an understanding of God.

A brief illustration of praxis: A group decides to have a demonstration in front of City Hall to protest police violence, after the action the group might reflect on the following:

- Were the people most affected by police violence in the forefront of the action
- Did we accomplish our goals

- As a group did we treat each other with love
- In our speech and actions did we dehumanize police or city officials
- Did what we say reflect a systemic analysis of the issues that recognizes interdependence
- What are Jewish texts that may help us reflect on this
- How did each of us experience our relationship to Spirit during the action.
- How does this affect our theology?

A Jewish theology of liberation will, also, need to reflect on the various roles that Jews play in social structures; both how Jews collude and benefit from oppression and how Jews are targeted and oppressed. It must include acting to end the Jewish role in oppressing the Palestinian people and working for the ongoing safety of the Jewish people. For Jews living in North America and Europe it means understanding the effects of living in cultures of Christian hegemony.

A collectively developed Jewish theology of liberation will nourish our bodies, hearts, minds and spirit, strengthening and guiding us in creating a socially just, environmentally sustainable and spiritually fulfilling human presence on the Earth.

**Rabbi Mordechai Liebling** is the Director of the Social Justice Organizing Program at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. In recognition that social identity affects one's views: He is a white cis gendered heterosexual, married male, whose parents were Holocaust survivors who became refugees in the United States where he was born.



## On Global Jewish Responsibility

by Ruth Messinger\*

The commandment most repeated in the Torah is to care for the other and the stranger. What exactly does this mean today when we know so much about the state of the world and how many are in need? It can feel overwhelming.

It is understandable when people say their obligation is to care for themselves and their families, and, perhaps, to respond to one additional problem in their own community. They opt to leave other problems, especially those at a distance, to “someone else”. It is understandable, but not in accord with the teachings of our faith, the words of our sages, the roles our Biblical ancestors played, or with history.

We are reminded that we were once strangers, that at various points in our history we were the other, that we needed people to come to our aid, so it is our obligation to do this now, for others. We think, most dramatically, of the people who stepped forward during the Holocaust and saved Jews ...and of the many who might have, but did not, and what the consequences were. And then it seems reasonable to recognize that we must act.

We are told in text that every person is equally made in the image of God and equally deserving of help. We are taught: “We sustain the non-Jewish poor with the Jewish poor, visit the non-Jewish sick with the Jewish sick, and bury the non-Jewish dead with the Jewish dead, for the sake of peace.” (Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 61a)

And our modern writers have recognized that we live in an ever more connected world, making our choices harder. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks recognizes that television and the internet have “effectively abolished distance”, but argues that we still have a responsibility to act for the other. Rabbi Joachim Prins observed, powerfully, that “(N)ighbor is not a geographic concept. It is a moral concept. It means our collective responsibility for the preservation of man’s [sic] dignity and integrity” wherever he or she may be.

It is not only from text that we derive this global perspective, but also from Jewish history. Abraham challenges God to protect the non-Jewish innocents of Sodom and Gomorrah, Joseph uses his wisdom and insight to prevent famine from devastating all of

Egypt, and Esther risks her life to lobby the king on behalf of her people who are seen as the “other”. In each instance a Jewish leader takes responsibility for people under threat, whether of oppression, famine or ethnic cleansing, testifying by example to our obligation to act similarly today for people who are starving, who are victims of hate, who face incipient genocidal activity.

We are instructed to partner with God in shaping a world of justice and compassion, to reach beyond ourselves to those for whom we might make a difference, to be an *or l'goyim* – a light unto the nations.

Consider this additional text teaching:

Anyone who is able to protest against the transgressions of one’s household and does not is punished for the actions of the members of the household; anyone who is able to protest against the transgressions of the entire world and does not is punished for the transgressions of the entire world. (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 54b)

This ancient text makes it clear that *any* time we fail to act, for *any* persons, whatever their relationships to us, wherever they live, when we know that they are in need, we are to be held accountable for whatever goes wrong.

And, whether we are responding locally or globally, there is the question of what response we are asked to make. The rabbis debated whether study or action was called for and concluded:

“Study is greater because it leads to action.” (BT *Kiddushin* 40b)

So, it is not enough to learn that people are starving in East Africa or that climate change literally will drown some island nations. Once we know the facts, we need to act. Even though we alone cannot feed a nation or stop climate change, we need to act because there is always something we can do.

The impact of this insight is in some way reassuring, encouraging us not to get overwhelmed when we focus in on what is wrong in the world. Yes, the problem in its totality is daunting, and yes, it is true that no one of us can solve it alone. But we can make a difference, and our obligation is to do what we can, to intervene for one person, but also to speak out against what is wrong – in the hope that enough people will do this to save even more lives, to make a greater difference.

As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel observed, there is “no time for neutrality.” It is incumbent on us to tackle problems head-on. When he stepped forward to advance



civil rights and to oppose the Vietnam war he explained his decision: "(I)n a free society, where terrible wrongs exist, some are guilty, but all are responsible ("The Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement," 1972).

These arguments make the case for the work that Jews have done in the world in the last century in many places, at many times, and by various organizations: responding to the genocide in Darfur, the earthquake in Nepal, a ban on Muslim travelers, and, now, incipient famine in East Africa, a global immigrant and refugee crisis and, a looming genocide in Myanmar.

These crises continue. We who have faced famine, experienced genocide and been the quintessential refugee community must do what we can to help those in trouble today. We who know what happens when not enough others intervene cannot live in a world in which the deaths of others from famine or violence will be because people just did not care enough. We must transcend boundaries of difference and national borders, recognize the divine in each person and act.

So, we are called upon to act, to do what we can, both at home and abroad, to be that light unto the nations even – or perhaps, particularly – in hard times. We must pursue justice at home, in our own communities, in our own country, in Israel, and throughout the world.

Before millions starve in East Africa, land is stolen in Guatemala or new violence erupts in Myanmar, we, as Jews, motivated by text, by tradition, and by history, must heed the call to accept responsibility, to act, and to protest these transgressions. This is how we take up our role, fulfill our obligations and help to heal the world. This is what we do to create a world of greater equity and justice and to encourage others to join with us each day to work for the good of the entire globe.

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*\* This essay is written with special thanks to Rabbi Rick Jacobs, CEO of the Union of Reform Judaism, with whom I previously co-authored a longer essay on the same topic*



## The Threefold Cord is Stronger than the Single Strand

**Jonathan Schorsch**

Rebbe Simha Bunim of Przyscha said to his hasidim: "He among you who is concerned with nothing but love is a philanderer; he who is nothing but devout is a thief; he who is nothing but clever is an unbeliever. Only he who has all these gifts together can serve God as he should" (quoted in Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, 2:250; a slightly different version appears in Michael Rosen, *The Quest for Authenticity: The Thought of Reb Simhah Bunim*, 184-85).

Jewish peoplehood, a secular version of a notion with ancient and theological roots, means various things to various people. At its most basic it refers to the idea that Jews hold or should hold feelings of shared identity with one another. Without substantive values that make up this shared togetherness, however, it does not have compelling meaning. Social justice, a powerful modern ethical-political concept, offers the idea of Jewish peoplehood just such a compelling set of positive values, often rooted in Torah and rabbinic Judaism, which can bind individuals and communities around something, meaningful and productive.

Calls to social justice are not as straightforward as they may seem, however. A tension seems to characterize social justice language among Jews today. It often invokes biblical or rabbinic concepts as sources or inspirations, while simultaneously seeking to transcend what is perceived to be their obsolete or repugnant setting. For instance, the biblical call to defend the powerless is extracted from the system that believes this is commanded by God, the notion of cyclical debt cancellation and rest for the land is extracted from a system that sees this as a practice for Israelites/Jews and their particular country. Some understandings of social justice even seem to stand at odds with particularistic, collective identity itself. Nonetheless, social justice offers a vital, essential complement to the non-political components of personal and collective life that have traditionally bound Jews, such as community, spirituality, ritual, customs and something beyond anthropocentrism.

Social justice as an organizing principle has proven to be particularly attractive to Jewish leaders, foundations and administrators who seek to provide coherence and inspiration

to Jewish communities and individual Jews buffeted by the changes brought on by modernity. For many Jews, religion and ethnic customs have lost much of their power. In the face of assimilation, acculturation and disaffection, it is not clear that Jewish culture, secular Judaism or “Jewishness” connect Jews with one another and with their Jewishness or Judaism effectively or long-term. At the same time, Zionism has become for many a narrow Israel-first creed and a bastion of nationalism, if not supremacism. One of the responses to Emancipation as a religious-ethnic minority was the adoption of universalist causes. Thus, Jews were often heavily represented in the wider, secular, often universalist campaigns that came to be understood as comprising what is now called social justice (bundism, feminism, anti-racism, etc.).

Social justice in the Jewish world mirrors the way it has developed historically in the larger world. It has channeled people’s dissatisfaction with the often-narrow worldview of Judaism, served as a secular substitute for religious drives toward righteousness, yet also provided avenues for living out the idealist, radical and even utopian (messianic) vision of Torah in its widest sense. In many ways social justice has made Judaism relevant and inspiring again. Its ability to galvanize individuals and groups toward caring and engagement cannot be overstated.

Two troubling aspects of social justice can interfere with a healthy sense of peoplehood, however. Social justice is usually understood to be universalist, egalitarian, secular and rationalist. This sometimes means that social justice advocates ignore, dismiss or attack Jews who value God, tradition, specific forms of communal structure, concentric identity that moves from Jewishness outward, for example. This seems self-defeating.

Another disturbing and disappointing aspect of the current decline of the Left -- in general, but no less true among Jews or in Israel -- is its inability to connect to the population at large, perhaps even a disinterest in doing so, the result of a persistent Avant Garde mentality, i.e., we elite few know what’s best for everyone. For social justice to work effectively, alliances must be forged that include those who aren’t atheist, queer or anti-capitalist.

Still another limitation of social justice as a collective glue needs to be mentioned. In its modern, political, mostly secular form, social justice shares in the rationalist, materialist, instrumentalist worldview of Western modernity. This is the worldview (especially if we include Communism) that has produced the worst genocides the world has ever known, dehumanizes people in routine and daily ways, their work and lives, and is the primary culprit behind the destruction of the planetary environment. At its most extreme, social justice language whittles down the human being to a one-dimensionality that seems to leave no room for spirit, ritual, transcendence, traditional customs, the more-than-

human. Judaism without humanitarian politics may be often ungodly, but politics alone, even humanitarian politics, seems differently disabling.

If peoplehood is empty, if not dangerous, without the moderating values of self-critique, openness and compassion, social justice as a substitute for Judaism excises much that is not only valuable, but perhaps essential. Neither social justice, traditional religion nor peoplehood alone forges a whole person who thinks holistically, who can bring into dialogue the multiple strands of ourselves, community heritages and political and scientific advances, who understands humanity to be a part of the more-than-human world, who understands that collective evolution/revolution and inner, personal evolution/revolution only lead us somewhere better when accompanying one another. The dire crises we face today include rising authoritarianism, the intentional erosion of human rights (which we might name the forgetting of the concept of *tzelem elohim*), terrible and unjust economic inequality and global environmental collapse (a case of ignoring the widest interpretation of *tzelem elohim*). Only collectives that nurture people who do not compartmentalize the different sides of their world and their own selves will be producing the kinds of individuals who will more likely produce healthy, beneficent and sustainable societies. In accord with the surprising and radical teaching of Reb Simha Bunim with which I began, we need individuals and peoples who have a mature identity, who understand their own internal plurality as the most potent source of understanding, strength and energy.

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## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES



# The Intersection of Racism and anti-Semitism: The "Hook"

**Cherie R. Brown**

As a result of a long history of oppression, Jews have sometimes faced an uncomfortable dilemma: to live among other Jews, often in a vibrant Jewish community, but at the cost of becoming isolated from the rest of the world's peoples or to become universalists, fighting everyone else's struggles but ignoring Jewish liberation and the legitimacy of the fight to end anti-Semitism.

Many Jewish young-adult activists are rejecting this false choice. They want to claim being proudly Jewish while having a commitment to broader social justice issues. They refuse to accept that there is any contradiction between living a visible, proud, Jewish life and fighting for both Jewish issues and the liberation of all peoples.

From 2001 to 2014, I was invited to lead sessions on racism for Jewish young-adult social justice groups. In these workshops, I appreciated their commitment to using Jewish texts and symbols to strengthen social justice activism. I observed how passionate many were to root out racism in their personal and work lives.

But I also noted a challenge. Many of the Jewish-young-adult activists I was working with did not always recognize how they were experiencing anti-Semitism or how the intersection of anti-Semitism and racism could derail hard-sought relationships with People of Color.

Jews have a right to show up as Jews as we work alongside others in liberation movements. This includes expecting our allies will learn about to combat anti-Semitism, just as we (specifically White Ashkenazi Jews) learn how to combat racism. In fact, it may be an insult to our allies, to not have high expectations of them, and it is ultimately racist not to expect that they will also want to come through for us and take on anti-Semitism.

Ideally, one would expect that White Jews and peoples targeted by racism would be natural allies. There have been many historic moments of cooperation in the U.S. between Jews and groups targeted by racism, particularly people of Black African

heritage. Over time, Black Gentiles and Jews have come to recognize that they have many experiences of oppression that link our peoples in a common struggle for social justice.

But there have also been too many moments of mistrust and division between Jewish people and Black African heritage people on both personal and political levels. One way to look at the difficulties over the years between Black Gentiles and Jews is to examine the intersection of racism and anti-Semitism. I sometimes talk about this as a "hook."

Jews are sometimes scared and panicked, the result of a long history of betrayal and abandonment. This panic leaves us, in certain circumstances, wanting to take charge of a situation, exerting strong leadership, even interrupting or taking over if it looks as though something could go wrong. I have sometimes called the Jewish need to take charge of situations and the urgent need to "get things right" as being "scared active." When White Gentiles are scared, they might hide out in their bedrooms; when Jews are scared, we might build ten new organizations. In other words, fear may propel a Jewish person towards urgent activity.

These Jewish behaviors are understandable. They are attributable to the horrific history of anti-Semitism, when things going wrong could mean imminent death. We need to model compassion towards ourselves and other Jews who show these "scared active" behaviors.

At the same time, when these behaviors are acted out in relationships with Black African-heritage people, it is also racism. And Black people have learned over a long history of oppression that when White people get scared, Black people's lives can be in danger. In the U.S., for example, many states have "stand your ground" laws. Under these laws, if a White person is afraid of a Black person, the fear may be a justifiable defense for shooting the Black person. As a result, Black people may understandably want to run far away from any White person who is acting out of fear. And yet, abandoning White Ashkenazi Jews because they show fear may be anti-Semitism.

This is the "hook." Jewish panic and "scared active" behaviors lead to racism, and the response of People of Color to the racist behavior leads to abandoning Jews, which is anti-Semitism.

Here are some examples of the "hook," where people are caught in the interplay of racism and anti-Semitism:

- A Jewish activist and a Vietnamese director of an advocacy organization are working together to improve the lives of domestic workers. The Vietnamese director fails to

meet agreed upon deadlines. The Jewish activist panics about the possible impact of the delays and becomes impatient with her colleague, exhibiting racism. The director testily pushes back at the Jewish activist, blaming her for her panic, exhibiting anti-Semitism.

- Several Jewish students at a Midwestern University were distraught when they learned that the organizers of a rally in support of Palestinian rights scheduled the event on the Jewish religious holiday of Rosh Hashanah. The Jewish students shared their upset with the rally organizers, but they were oblivious to the racism coming across in their strident, urgent, and demanding tones. The organizers of the rally pushed back at the Jewish students, saying, "This isn't about you! Don't tell us when we can or cannot hold a rally!" This response was unaware anti-Semitism. The organizers failed to recognize the legitimate concerns of the Jewish students. By scheduling the rally on Rosh Hashanah, the organizers were excluding Jewish students who would otherwise want to participate in the event.
- A Jewish leader in a national organization became troubled by the unaware anti-Semitism expressed by Black colleagues in a panel discussion. It took the Jewish leader three months to summon the courage to approach one of her Black colleagues to discuss her concerns. When she did so, her Black colleague became upset with her, noting that waiting so long to raise these concerns was racist. The Black colleague felt that the Jewish leader had left her "high and dry" with her anti-Semitism "showing." The Black leader however focused solely on condemning her Jewish colleague for waiting so long, without recognizing how scared her Jewish colleague was to even raise the issue of anti-Semitism.

By understanding the intersection of racism and anti-Semitism, White Ashkenazi Jews and People of Color can avoid getting caught by the "hook." Aware of this dynamic, Jewish social justice work can grow without succumbing to either unaware racism or anti-Semitism.

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## A Phenomenology of Social Justice

**Darren Kleinberg**

Since the cradle of civilization, human history has demonstrated that ideas alone will not bring justice to our planet. After all, everything we need to know about how we should treat ourselves, relate to others, and steward the earth, has already been said and recorded, and yet today we count 65 million refugees among our brothers and sisters, to cite but one terrible example of our failure to pursue universal justice.

More than *understanding*, we need to find ways to *feel* the urgent necessity for justice. To illustrate this point, I will attempt to outline just such an approach and make the case that it should be adopted throughout the Jewish community.

My teacher, Rabbi Dr. Irving “Yitz” Greenberg, teaches that all human beings are created *b’tzelem Elohim* – in the Image of God. Drawing on classical Jewish sources, Greenberg claims that to be created in the image of God is to be endowed with three fundamental dignities: Uniqueness, Infinite Value, and Equality.

I have understood and affirmed this teaching since my very first exposure to it, many years ago. And yet, my own understanding of this idea has not led me to enact any great contributions on behalf of social justice. While I have been deeply saddened and angered by the injustices in the world, I have also been mostly passive in my (non-)response.

Then something changed. My relationship to Greenberg’s three fundamental dignities was transformed from a merely intellectual understanding into an embodied experience that brought with it new insight. What follows is my attempt to describe that experience and to outline what I am calling a phenomenology of social justice.

By phenomenology, I am referring to the effort to translate something of the inner experience to those on the outside. In truth, no words can *fully* capture the felt sense of insight, but such is the challenge of this approach.

And so...

Recently, while sitting meditatively on a bench in the Baylands Nature Reserve, I was taken by the uniqueness of each blade of Pampas grass, each American Avocet and Great Blue Heron, each cloud formation, and, of course, each human being along the trail.



More than just an *understanding* that they were each unique, I *felt* their uniqueness. I experienced a *present awareness* of this defining quality of the natural world of which we are all part.

I recall thinking that, when Ralph Waldo Emerson asked the question, “Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe...?” (Emerson, *Nature*) it must have been in the wake of just such an awareness of the uniqueness of the natural world.

At that moment, a broader meaning of Rabbi Greenberg’s three fundamental dignities and their relationship to one another was revealed. I intuited that the three fundamental dignities applied not only to human beings, but to *all* of nature, both as a whole, and with respect to each of its constituent parts (macro, micro, atomic, sub-atomic, etc.).

This pervasive sense of the uniqueness of nature led me to two considerations: The first being that, while we *can* compare one element of the natural world with another – for example, one could ask whether one animal moves more quickly or slowly than another – such comparisons only serve to feed the human fascination with taxonomies. More importantly, they do not impute value; rather, it comes from the individual making the comparison, informed by their own conditioned sense of what is ‘better’ and what is ‘worse.’ Put simply, there is no hierarchy of value between unique things.

Secondly, because each unique aspect of the natural universe is, by definition, the only instantiation of its kind, it can never be replaced. This quality of uniqueness assigns infinite value to all of nature. Once we realize that all of nature is infinitely valuable, it then follows that each aspect is also therefore *equally* as valuable as the other.

Put simply, the three fundamental dignities should be formulated thus: Because of uniqueness, therefore infinite value, thus equality.

In this realization one is confronted with a defining question: How should we behave in relation to the natural universe, the constituent parts of which are all infinitely valuable? Any answer must begin with a commitment to living our lives in a manner that honors the uniqueness of all of nature which, of course, *includes our fellow human beings*. Herein lies the beginnings of a phenomenology of social justice.

There was something about the way I learned this truth on that day at the Baylands that was different. It changed my understanding, and it also changed me. Pursuing justice is no longer just an abstract idea, it is now an experience that demands action.

It is my belief that, if each human being were to have a similar experience, they too would be transformed and together we could establish a redeemed world defined by justice.

So, how do we get there?

The good news is that there have been a number of developments in the American Jewish community over the course of the past half century that suggest an increasing interest in, and exposure to, approaches that emphasize spiritual transformation alongside intellectual edification. The Havurah and Renewal movements placed spiritually transformative experiences at the center of their work many decades ago. In addition, Jewish meditation has begun to make its way into schools, synagogues, and JCCs, and there are leadership development programs for Jewish professionals that do the same. There are also many, many books to read and lectures to attend or stream to help the seeker along the path. But there is much more yet to do.

For example, during my eight wonderful years studying in yeshivot in Israel and the United States, I recall very few opportunities to learn about the inner life and methods for cultivating spiritual practice. Institutions such as these need to introduce more opportunities for their *talmidim* and *talmidot* to deepen their spiritual lives. As mentioned above, there *has* been movement in Jewish day schools, but this work needs to become a much higher priority as they prepare the most engaged participants and future leaders in Jewish life. Foundations and Federations should allocate significant resources to supporting this work; including prioritizing spiritual development for their own board members, employees, and donors. And the list goes on.

To conclude: if the Jewish community is going play an increasingly meaningful role in bringing justice to the world, it is time to develop programs and methodologies that will help those who participate in Jewish life to cultivate transformative spiritual experiences that will leave them with no choice but to act. Otherwise, we will continue to *understand* the need for justice, but fail to *feel* it and thus act upon it. May it be our will...

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# **Jewish Tradition and the Crises of Environmental Sustainability: a Unique Challenge and a Unique Opportunity.**

**Nigel Savage**

## **A. Introduction:**

***Challenges, insignificance, clichés and Jewish intuition.***

The challenges are clear and overarching.

Rising oceans. Pollution, and concomitant rising asthma rates. Loss of biodiversity. Deforestation. Urban sprawl. Depleted fish stocks. Drought. Soil erosion. “Small-scale” wars that take large numbers of lives, turn millions into refugees; and then in turn partially destabilize western democracies.

The challenges are overwhelming. So much so that these different slow-motion tragedies become background noise, which we mostly (try to) tune out. But then something punctuates our consciousness again, whether we want it or not – news, a headline, a documentary, a story, a picture.

To be clear: the tragedy of human insignificance is that these challenges are beyond the ability of any one of us to impact for good. Hitler and Stalin, in their individual and unique determination and evil, did indeed cause tens of millions of people to lose their lives. Churchill by himself played a key role in saving the West. Nelson Mandela, by the force of his personality, played a unique role in enabling South Africa to transition peacefully from apartheid to democracy. But these individuals who by themselves had an enormous impact – they are the exceptions.

For those of us reading this, on the big global issues... they are intertwined, they are supranational, and they hinge upon the collective daily choices of 7.3 billion people every day. It is hard enough to allow ourselves even to be fully aware of the big global challenges the world faces. But it is even harder to fully acknowledge our own seeming impotence in the face of them.

And so for you, reading this, and for me writing it: *what are we to do?*

First: I want in this little essay to go beyond clichés, but I will begin by noting that clichés are often a kind of truth that we take so for granted that we forget their essence and their value. In 2009 I found myself at Windsor Castle, representing the Jewish people in addressing a worldwide group of religious leaders, ahead of COP 15, the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. What was I to say? In addressing a non-Jewish audience, I was provoked afresh to think about what, if at all, might be a unique Jewish contribution to the issues the world faced. And in thinking about this question, I ended up not talking about, for instance, “bal tashchit” (an injunction not to waste which, in certain respects, is not uniquely Jewish, and which is reflected, directly or indirectly, in many world religions). Instead I talked about the centrality of *hope* in Jewish tradition. And I quoted (freshly) the to-Jewish-ears-often-cliched phrase, “*we are not required to complete the task, but we cannot desist from it.*” Not every tradition teaches this, or lives it.

On hope as a Jewish value: it is not just that, on Tisha b’av, we face each year, squarely in the face, death and destruction – and yet come back to life at mincha, and have a midrash that mashiach will be born on the afternoon of Tisha b’av. Much more prosaically: in 1945 a third of the Jews of Europe had been murdered, and we continue to learn (from Fr Desbois and Tim Snyder and others) the scale and ubiquity and determination of the violence meted out upon the Jewish people caught in central and eastern Europe in those years. No escape. No safe place. Murder and tyranny and brutality. And somehow, we bounced back: not just the state of Israel, and its creation and all that it has accomplished. But the Jewish contributions since then in the US, in France and England, in Australia; in the sciences and the arts and business. This is so central to the Jewish story that we don’t even fully notice it – but we should.

So hope is real and it is one of our gifts for the world, at this time of hopelessness. Our hope (*ha-tikvah*) is not a blind hope, not a rose-tinted hope, not a heads-in-the-sand hope. It is, rather, a cultural/historical/theological instinct that *to have hope is possible, is rooted in our historical experience, and will help to summon up our best selves*. Without hope we give in to anomie and apathy and we don’t get out of bed. We avert our gaze, and by our inaction we allow bad things to get worse. With hope and determination we get things done, and we contribute and we start to fix things.

So, hope and pitching in and striving to make a difference, *even if we can’t complete the task*: these are not bad places to start, and it is important to register them not as clichés, not as things we take for granted, not as words whose content we no longer hear, but rather as real injunctions; a daily kavannah to lean it towards the bad news, to acknowledge our sense of insignificance, and then to do all that we can.

And so then, after that: what?

I want to make two fundamental points.

First: as I have begun to sketch out thus far, **that there really is a unique Jewish contribution that we can, could and should make to the challenges that face the world right now.**

And secondly: **that doing that should and will, in the process, strengthen Jewish life.**

(And – spoiler alert - one of the things that is slightly weird is that, thus far, we haven't yet as a people made a hugely significant impact on the global challenges themselves; but the work that we have done to address those challenges has already had, and daily has, a significantly positive impact in strengthening Jewish life. This is a paradox to which I'll return at the end.)

### **B. A distinctive Jewish contribution**

For most people reading this essay I'm going to assume not merely a familiarity with Jewish thought and Jewish life but, arguably, an *overfamiliarity*. Part of the gift of the environmental challenges is that they can prompt us, and I would argue strongly that they should prompt us, to view Jewish tradition freshly. Not through the eyes of an educator, a rabbi, a "Jewish leader", and thus not through the prisms of – for instance – "the Israel/diaspora relationship" or "the challenges of day schools" or "how do we engage our young people" – but rather through the prisms of our identities as human beings, as citizens of the world. And, perhaps, as parents or grandparents – those prisms are especially salient, because even if you or I may not be alive in 2100, the kids being born today should be. And what world will we bequeath to them?

When we break through our overfamiliarity, key elements of Jewish tradition appear to us in a new way. Here are just two more, in addition to what I've sketched out in relationship to hope and being willing to engage, even if we can't complete the task.

### **C. Land and relationship to place**

You would be hard-pressed to name any great "environmentalist" who was not or is not very firmly grounded in relationship to place. For John Muir (the founder of the Sierra Club, and one of the great 19th century naturalists) it was California and the Sierra Nevada. For Alfred Wainwright, 70 years later, it was the English Lake District. For

Wendell Berry (arguably the greatest living environmental writer) it is Henry County, Kentucky, where he lives, on land that his family has farmed for five generations.

We have learned the hard way – not least from the French and Russian revolutions – that we should be wary of those who love “people” in abstract, but are not grounded in love and respect for the uniqueness of individual people in practice. Far too many people have been murdered in the name of a nominally idealistic or altruistic ideology.

And so too with relationship to land. For we may love “the world,” but the world is slightly too large a place fully to connect with. In some sense there is no “world” as there is no “humankind.” We learn love by loving someone, somewhere, sometime, and caring about them, and giving to them. We must love some patch of the earth, and be in relationship with it, in a not too dissimilar way.

And as soon as one thinks in these terms – as soon as one realizes how fundamentally true this is, and how important for the well-being of the world – we realize how remarkable is the Jewish commitment to the land of Israel. We understand rather sharply that we have more in common with the indigenous peoples of the world than we do with most citizens of Britain or France or the United States. And unlike any of the world’s other indigenous peoples – almost all of whom have been almost irreparably damaged by their confrontation with modernity and colonialism – we have traveled through all these countries, all these centuries, and yet 80 *generations* after the destruction of the second Temple we still love this land, face it, travel to it, care for it, visit Israel, live in Israel. That *the state of Israel is the only country in the world to end the twentieth century with more trees than it began* – this is not an obscure factoid. It is not “hasbara.” It is a deep and truthful and fascinating and significant reflection of what a deep connection to a particular place, allied to all that we teach in our tradition about trees, and reverence for land, and Choni haMagel, and the Torah as “etz chayim” --- all these things weaved us into a people who really planted trees – by the millions. In an ironic postscript I learned from Dr Alon Tal that some of the earlier chalutzim planted *the wrong trees* – monoculture pine stands that were not well-suited to the land of Israel. But for the last twenty or thirty years Israeli tree-experts have been slowly fixing this. This is honest work and good ecology – na’aseh v’nishmah in a real way.

There’s a straight line from the JNF and KKL and the blue box and planting trees to the work of Yosef Abramowitz and Energiya Global. Israel is one of the densest countries in the world in population. It has not much land, even less growable land, and very little water. *The environmental challenges that Israel has faced in the last thirty years will become chronic in a third of the world in the next thirty.* And so, lo and behold, the work that Yosef did a dozen years ago, in founding Arava Power – to try to help fix

*Israel's environmental challenges – is now being applied in Africa and elsewhere. This is precisely what it means to begin with love for a particular place –our people's ancient homeland –and then apply it to make the whole world a better place.* This is just one of the gifts of Jewish tradition, a profound and real one.

#### **D. Shabbat, shmita, and cycles of rest in Jewish tradition.**

I will not labor this point. I hope it will have become gradually obvious to readers of this essay these last ten or fifteen years. But the intra-Jewish conversation on Shabbat (“I keep it”; “I don’t”; “I do this”, “I do that”) is far too small, and it misses the larger and more significant point. And shmita as an idea isn’t for most people even part of an intra-Jewish conversation; for most people it has been ignored in any serious way until the last shmita year in 2014-’15.

But it is now clear that “24/7” is overconsuming the world and burning us out and damaging families and communities. So, again, when we think about the potential Jewish contribution to the world, and we think about the twenty centuries’ experience we have of living and engaging with these ideas; only then, only through those ideas, do we even begin to have a glimpse of the gifts we might offer the world, the teaching we might do, the models we might suggest, in the coming decades.

#### **E. The paradox of Jewish impact.**

Hope is a potential gift to the whole world. The teachings of Hillel are a potential gift. Our relationship to Israel and trees and Shabbat and shmita – these are all potential gifts for the world. I hope and believe –and intend, by my work and Hazon’s work and that of a growing number of our friends and partners in the world of Jewish, Outdoor, Food, Farming and Environmental Education (ie “JOFEE” for short) – that in the coming years and decades we will really contribute to the world in material ways. This is slowly happening, and Yosef and some of the Israeli water- and clean-tech entrepreneurs are part of it.

But the greatest impact of this work, these last two decades is not, paradoxically on the world; it’s on the Jewish community. Not everyone cares about the world or the environment or sustainable food systems. But of those who do – including many of the best and the brightest of our teens and 20-somethings – these passions are leading them through the doorways of new institutions. In North America Hazon (including Adamah and Teva and our Hazon Seal of Sustainability and our work catalyzing the

Jewish Food Movement) but also Eden Village and Milk and Honey Farm and Pearlstone and Shorashim and Urban Adamah and a wonderful proliferation of projects all over the place. And in Israel the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, and Chava v'Adam farm, and Harduf and Heschel and Teva Ivri and a bunch of other projects and people and initiatives.

The paradox was evoked by Hamlet, when he said that he must “by indirections find directions out.” The positive impact of these initiative on the Jewish people is dependent on the seriousness of their sincere and serious environmental commitment. If they are instrumental – merely a step towards strengthening

“Jewish identity” they will not succeed. If they are not truly grounded (as, happily, they are) in a serious commitment to effecting change in the world then they will not also have the Jewish impact that in fact they do have.

And the final paradox, is that it may yet be that the greatest contribution of the Jewish people is not in clean tech or planting trees, but rather in sharing core Jewish teachings much more deeply and widely across the world. Because now we *all* need hope, and we all need Shabbat, and we all need halacha as a form of voluntary self-restraint, and we all need to learn that it is not our responsibility to complete the task – but nor can we ignore it.

#### **F. And so, in conclusion...**

I don't know when you will be reading this. But I'm writing this during sefirat ha'omer. This is the annual journey in which we start with an ancient (indigenous) agrarian cycle, the growth of the barley harvest. But then we overlay a rather different psychological journey from Pesach to Shavuot – from “freedom from...” (want, oppression, hunger), to “freedom to....” (receive the Torah; self-limit ourselves; keep kosher; keep Shabbat.)

I want to end by noting that this core challenge – that not everything we *can* do, *should* we *do* – lies at the absolute center of the environmental crises, and of our potential responses to them. We cannot legislate by government fiat all the restraints that we actually need, and nor should we. So “religion,” widely construed, will have a vital role to play in trying to help the world's people build a better future in the coming decades. We are all too familiar with the negative role that religion has played and can play in recent years. But we too easily forget – or didn't notice in the first place – the gifts of religion in general and of Jewish tradition in particular.



I hope and pray that, as each year goes by, we learn our tradition more deeply; we deepen our sense of being part of the Jewish people, with unique gifts to share in the world; we address environmental challenges more directly; we see the actual and potential significance of Israel through fresh eyes; and so we thus, in aggregate, add a new chapter to the history of the Jewish people. This is what it is to take Torah from Zion out into the world -- making a better world for everyone, and in so doing also strengthening Jewish life and the Jewish people. *Kein yehi ratzon.*

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## Faith and Service in Haiti

**Rabbi Sid Schwarz**

When I accepted an invitation from the Israeli organization, Tevel B'Tzedek, to travel to Haiti about a year after the devastating earthquake in 2010 to do some teaching for their disaster relief team on the ground, little did I know that it would lead to one of the most fulfilling projects of my rabbinic career. The Israelis were doing amazing work under the most difficult circumstances, as Israelis have done all around the globe in similar situations. My contribution was to bring some Judaic context to the work taking place in one of the poorest countries in the world.

As it turned out, the interest in my teaching was not just from the Israelis; the Haitians that were being trained by the Israelis were eager to learn from a rabbi as well. At a time when Jews are at risk in many parts of the globe because of rising anti-Semitism, Haitians treat Jews as if they had just walked out of the pages of the Bible. Haitian Christians identify powerfully with the story of the Israelites coming out of Egyptian enslavement and being led by God to the Promised Land. It reflects their deepest aspirations for themselves since Haitians have not only been victimized by natural disasters, but by 100 years of political tyranny and a dysfunctional civil society.

In several of my presentations to Haitians, my translator was a young Christian minister named Johnny Felix. In his early 30's and with a smile that can light up a room, Pastor Johnny founded a church and a school in Leogane, literally, out of nothing. I spent some time in his community and with the students in his school and felt that with a little help, Pastor Johnny could actually make a big difference in the lives of these children. Less than 50% of Haitian children go to any elementary school at all and the most successful schools are mostly church-sponsored.

Upon return home, I spoke about my experience from the *bima* of the congregation where I am the founding rabbi—Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation in Bethesda, MD. I proposed that we undertake a Haiti Project with the primary mission of supporting Pastor Johnny's NICL School which now serves 200 children from K-6th grades. So as not to repeat the mistakes of so much post-disaster aid, the requirement was that families commit to five years of funding at a relatively modest level of \$100/year.

Adat Shalom's Haiti Project is now going into its sixth year. Over 100 Adat Shalom households contribute \$100/year for five years which allows us to support Pastor Johnny's NICL (New Christian Institute of Leogane) School. As a result of this generosity we are able to fund scholarships for student tuition, equipment for the school and underwrite the school's core budget. We have worked closely with Pastor Johnny on issues of budgeting, management and the importance of sustainability. Since we have started the relationship, we are pleased that tuition revenue has increased by over 50% as a percentage of the overall school budget. On more than one occasion Pastor Johnny has said that Adat Shalom was sent to him by God. As much as that might hit our ears a bit strangely, there is no way to do the work that Pastor Johnny does day in and day out against overwhelming odds without such a "leap of faith".

In December 2016 I led the fourth Adat Shalom service mission to Haiti in six years. We now fill the 20 available slots easily, with half the delegation made up of young people, ages 15-25. It is hard to capture the power of the experience in words.

Our work over the years has been varied. We have prepared meals for a massive soup kitchen operation. We laid concrete foundations and built houses. At Pastor Johnny's NICL compound we created a vegetable garden that we dedicated and named *Gan HaMazon*, the "garden of plenty". Many of the students in the school are food insecure so we focused our attention on that aspect of community development. On our last two missions, we raised the funds for and provided much of the labor to build a third structure on the school's campus. Part of that facility will house a computer lab with 15 work stations while the other part will become a dining room for the students. In each venue we worked side by side with Haitians and we used that opportunity to gain insight into the challenges they face in their lives. In so many cases we walked away inspired by the dignity of the Haitians living in circumstances that are close to what would be our worst nightmare.

The experience was also a deeply spiritual one for us. Every evening after dinner we gathered in the dorm at Notre Dame where we lived. We used the time to share highs and lows of our very intense days and then to enrich our experience by studying Judaic texts and values from a sourcebook that I developed specifically for our mission. The conversations were wide ranging. How can Americans be most helpful in a country where poverty, illiteracy and illness is so widespread? How can we help Pastor Johnny and the NICL school become self-sustaining? What are the ethical ramifications of our lives of privilege when compared to the deprivation that is the lot of most Haitians? More than a few of the mission participants talked about the experience as "transformative" and "life changing".

Taking on the project at Adat Shalom did require some conversation. Some wanted to be sure that our service missions would not be “missionary” in the way some church ministries use missions to proselytize. Others, reading of the how ineffective the \$13.5 billion in aid has been in Haiti, shared their own reservations of our commitment of time and money to the country. But the testimonials from mission participants over the years has made almost everyone into a believer. Our micro-philanthropy, focused on one institution, has been most gratifying as people see the progress we have made at NICL. One congregant wrote me a note saying that she herself was not capable of going on a mission but she was so proud to be a member of a synagogue whose commitment to justice extended to a place like Haiti.

As a rabbi our service missions represent the very best of what we can and should be doing as a Jewish community. The participants became a tightly bonded team during our challenging days on the work site and we became a family during our “down time” at the dorm. With each passing day we became more inspired to give of ourselves to help those who have so little but who live their lives with great dignity and with deep faith. Finally, we took great pride in “walking the talk” of Torah. We weren’t just **talking** about Jewish values; we were **living** those values every day.

There is one arena in which I have become something of a proselytizer. I believe that service missions need to be a bigger part of how the Jewish community, and synagogues in particular, engage in *tzedek* work. Such work can be done in one’s own community, of course. But it becomes a whole other kind of experience when done by a group for a week to ten days, be it in Israel, in Rwanda (where some of our synagogue members spend time at the [Agahozo Shalom Youth Village](#)), or in Haiti. Not only does it build strong social bonds among participants but it provides for the kind of cross-cultural learning that could never be conveyed in a classroom. Hundreds of churches understand the importance of service missions as a way to transmit the values that they cherish, both to their members and to the people that the missions serve. The same could be true for synagogues.

In the sermon I delivered at Pastor Johnny’s church on Sunday morning I said that despite the differences in nationality, race, religion and socio-economic status that separate us and the Haitians who were our hosts, three things tie us together. Both communities are faith communities committed to *chesed*, acts of lovingkindness; both are committed to *tzedek*, acts of justice; and both are committed to *shalom*, acts that advance spiritual wholeness and peace.

Many Jews would jump at the chance to live out these values under the auspices of a Jewish organization. To the extent that we know how many Jews, especially of the

younger generation, are motivated by social justice, Jewish institutions should find ways to build these kinds of hands-on service missions into their year-round programming.

**Rabbi Sid Schwarz** is a senior fellow at Hazon. As the Founder/CEO of PANIM: The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values, he did some of the early work developing the field of Jewish service-learning in the 1990's. Rabbi Sid currently directs the Clergy Leadership Incubator ([www.cliforum.org](http://www.cliforum.org)), a two-year fellowship on visionary leadership for rabbis, and *Kenissa: Communities of Meaning Network* ([www.kenissa.org](http://www.kenissa.org)). He is the author of *Judaism and Justice: The Jewish Passion to Repair the World*.

## THE ISRAEL CHALLENGES



### The Price of Immorality\*

**Yair Assulin**

In the end, you understand that so much of what happens now in Israel – how we think, speak, love, hate – is, more than anything, a result of the occupation. A result of more than half a century of repressing, shutting our eyes, pursuing power, and kitsch. A result of not listening or giving account, of acting as though there's no tomorrow, so why worry about the future. A result of stubbornly refusing to “do not unto others what is hateful to you.” A result of fear. And when, again and again, you hear that members of Knesset have passed yet another law doubtless designed to save the Prime Minister from his investigations, intended, no doubt, to impede the pursuit of truth, to prevent the public from following events and taking part in determining norms, you understand how deeply public integrity has been eroded. When you hear members of Knesset declare in empty, flowery phrases that these are “laws for the benefit of the People of Israel,” you realize how much all of this truly, deeply springs from the occupation, from the consciousness that it creates, from the corrosion that is inherent to occupation.

And you understand that the goal of fifty years of discourse is to blur reality, to misrepresent it, to tell a story that doesn't really exist the way it is depicted. You realize that its sole purpose has been – and still is – to lump millions of ordinary human beings who live there into “the ultimate evil,” the “eternal enemy,” regardless of what each of them does, irrespective of the fact that each person is “a whole world.” And when you think about it, about the mechanism of this discourse, this instrument to shape consciousness, you understand just how ideas diffuse throughout a society, how the absence of morality is never limited to the goal that it ostensibly aims to serve. You realize that the impact of the mind set it creates goes far beyond what one can even imagine.

And when you consider this regime, this discourse, this country that makes things “holy,” that uses these religious concepts, you can't avoid the thought, the knowledge, that it's connected. That this, too, is part of the erosion. That this, too, is part of the price that Israeli society pays for what happens, we would like to believe, “over there,” beyond the mountains of darkness, in that place that a majority of Israelis support but have never

visited, have never personally experienced, don't really know. Who have never truly seen the face of the "other."

In exactly the same way, when you think about smear campaigns about traitors that have simmered here for years, when you think about the attenuation and simplification of the term "patriotism," about the pervasive cynicism, about the very possibility to brand – with a gesture, a sentence – an entire group of people, to ridicule them, to establish a clear hierarchy between you and them, when you think about all of this, you cannot avoid the thought that this too has seeped in here from the occupation. You realize that the cynicism of "there" is the cynicism of those who can legislate laws which, by their very essence, damage Israeli society, that by their very essence corrode the place of the Israeli, the ability to know, to understand. And when I write "the ability", I mean the ability of all of us, of everyone who inhabits this space. Including that of the legislator.

Indeed, when you see it, you can no longer avoid the thought that, at the end of the day, everything springs from fifty years of control over other human beings, from a sense of unlimited power over the weak, over those who are dependent upon you. From Israeli society's ability to shut its eyes, to repress, from the schizophrenia by which you are ostensibly a moral person in your own home, a person who considers herself moral and continues to support – or at least not to really oppose – our control over other human beings. Israeli society has come to believe in the illusion of separation, partly because of our sense of fear, partly because we have learned to hold our nose and move on, because we choose to believe what is convenient, and to attack and to ostracize anyone who seeks to clarify, to ask, to examine, to expose. Because of laziness. Because, like Jeshurun, we have waxed fat and kicked. And this illusion is perhaps the most dangerous thing for a person and for a society.

Whoever relinquishes the right and the obligation to know about the occupation and its ramifications, whoever refrains over the years from encounter with the other, whoever does not demand it and, with a terrible passivity and an uncritical eye, accepts the pre-digested content of the official Israel discourse again and again, without reflecting on the most basic issues, should not be surprised when the Israeli Parliament works to make sure he knows nothing at all about anything, ever. Premise: a regime, any regime, by its nature, aims for the public to know as little as possible while believing that it knows as much as possible. The responsibility of the public is to demand the truth.

The price of blindness that immoral behaviour demands is so high that it causes the individual to sin against himself, his family, and the people whom he truly loves and is committed to. And this is an important point. The means become the end. You forget what you were aiming for...and how can you get there with your eyes closed? The

recognition that these things seep so deeply is the first step toward a conversation about morality. Judaism has always understood this. It has never viewed morality as some sort of action unconnected to a context, unconnected to life. The fundamental principle of morality is that it is an expression of life, of human consciousness, of the human soul.

And thus, you suddenly understand that the occupation is not a political issue after all. It is in fact a question of whether you support Israel, that is to say, whether you support a society that asks hard questions, wants to understand, and is committed to moral values. Do you support an ethical Israel that believes that all persons have value, by virtue of their simple humanity? Do you support a society in which the Jewish discourse is not reduced to spiritualist kitsch but is translated into action; a society that can admit its mistakes? Or are you, perhaps, in favour of a society that careens daily from manipulation to manipulation, using its power to distort reality. Do you want a society driven by a lust for power, concerned only for itself? Is the soundtrack of the society you want the voice of a salesman who debases significant issues into kitsch, destroying the ability of this country, of this society, to develop and survive? That is the choice.

Most of the Israeli public, in its heart, is disgusted by such laws, or at least offended by any attempt to undermine its self-image as a western democracy. You hear it everywhere. Nonetheless, we must face the fact that such laws, indeed the arrogance that allows our legislators to think in these terms, to formulate and advocate for these and other laws, grow out of the miasma of occupation: the belief that we can control another people and deprive them of rights forever. When we try to evade morality, when we sneer at the very question of morality, we are left with contempt for anyone who seeks to clarify, who insists on knowing, who is not willing to "go with the flow."

The power of morality is that it is neither an idea nor a rarefied intellectual position. Morality is first and foremost a sensibility, the lively existential experience of a person who faces the world and recognizes the limits of power, indeed the limits of his existence. Morality is meaning in the world. Whoever thinks it is possible to behave immorally in one place and smile blithely in another, will ultimately discover that one cannot escape morality. Morality cannot be contained by fences or walls. Like the wind, it is boundless. And everything is connected.

**Yair Assulin** is a philosopher, poet, author, and scriptwriter. He has published two award-winning novels, "The Voyage" and "The Things Themselves," and numerous short stories. His column, "Endpiece," appears weekly in *Haaretz*.

\* An abridged version of this essay first appeared in "Endpiece," Assulin's weekly column in the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*.





# Peoplehood and Social Justice

**Aryeh Cohen**

It is the best of times, it is the worst of times. Actually, it is neither.

I am a “peoplehood” sceptic. That is, as I wrote in my last contribution to the Peoplehood Papers, I am unconvinced that the term “peoplehood” contributes anything of value to the discourse, and I fear that it may serve “as a way of talking about Zionism without talking about territorial nationalism, and therefore without talking about the occupation of Palestine and the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel.” Therefore, for the purpose of the current conversation, I will assume, as an unexamined working definition of peoplehood, “the worldwide collectivity of Jewish people.”

If I use this definition of Jewish Peoplehood as an analytical tool, I am forced to the following conclusions. One of the two largest gatherings of Jews, the State that claims to be the Jewish State is not interested in a vigorous pursuit of Social Justice. This is especially true when the social justice issue concerns citizens or residents who are not Jewish. The seventy-year occupation of Palestine and its accompanying daily human rights abuses belies the claim to social justice which is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence: “[the State of Israel] will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex.” The situation of Palestinian citizens of Israel is better, however, they are still subject to systemic discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, education, and general social welfare.

According to a recent Jerusalem Post article,<sup>1</sup> twenty five international legal experts claimed the Interior Ministry’s expulsion plan for thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum-seekers in Israel is a violation of international law. Israel has demonstrated, then, in regard to the African asylum seekers, that they do not see themselves bound by international human rights and refugee laws despite the fact that the Declaration says: “[Israel] will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”

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1. February 6, 2018. <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Top-legal-experts-Migrant-deportation-in-violation-of-international-law-540794>

Recent laws that have been introduced into the Knesset, especially the “Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People” have put into doubt the Israeli state’s commitment to democracy. The Nation-State law includes a clause which allows for segregated settlements based on religion. Other laws threaten the funding of NGOs which are critical of the government, and members of some of those NGOs have been threatened with imprisonment.

At the same time, there is a vigorous minority which stands in opposition to this trend. Tens of thousands demonstrated against the expulsion of the African asylum seekers, for example. There are still many NGOs, those which the Knesset has targeted, such as the New Israel Fund, Breaking the Silence, ACRI and others which oppose the injustices of Israeli law and practice—oftentimes in the name of Judaism.<sup>2</sup>

In North America, though especially in the United States there is a similar split. Following upon the election of Donald Trump to the presidency, the American Jewish community has experienced a surge in political activism. Organizations such as Bend the Arc<sup>3</sup> which had an extensive history of campaigning for criminal and economic justice issues, in addition to campaigning against Trump in 2016, expanded in unexpected and numerically significant issues. Whereas the political state of the Jewish community in Israel was arrayed against the asylum seekers and migrant community, the American Jewish community on the whole was wildly supportive. When the Muslim Ban was first enacted, Jews turned up with thousands of their fellow citizens to the airports in New York and Los Angeles to protest and demand that the Muslim immigrants and asylees be let in.

Jewish social justice organizations have been united against Trump and for criminal justice reforms, and sanctuary city policies, and they represent a growing percentage of the Jewish community. However, this desire for justice does not extend across all issues. Bend the Arc, and most Jewish social justice organizations who work on domestic issues, don’t take a position on Israel/Palestine, the occupation, the refugees. Only T’ruah takes a strong position opposing Trump’s domestic agenda, working for human rights for tomato growers and prisoners in solitary confinement, and at the same time is openly and avidly anti-occupation.<sup>4</sup> It is also true that approximately thirty percent of Jews

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2. Because of space considerations I have not touched upon income inequality, gender inequality, criminal justice, etc.

3. Full disclosure: I am Rabbi in Residence of Bend the Arc in Southern California.

4. More recently HIAS and some Rabbinical organizations have come out against Israel’s treatment of the African refugees, but they don’t take a position on the occupation.

(mostly in the Orthodox community) voted for Trump, see support of Israel as a partisan issue, and support the Trump agenda in toto.

So, if one is asking the question analytically—is social justice somehow essentially tied to Jewish Peoplehood? The answer is that there is no special affinity for Jewish people towards social justice. The Jewish people is like everybody else.

However, one can articulate an ethic of justice out of the sources of Judaism.<sup>5</sup> The interesting thing that is happening is that there are a growing number of people who are open to hearing that. About twenty years ago a friend of mine, who at the time was the executive director of a Jewish social justice organization, gave a presentation about social justice from a Jewish perspective, and he cited a passage from Talmud. After he had finished, a member of the audience stood up and screamed at him for quoting a traditional Jewish text to this group of enlightened, modern Jews. The likelihood of that scenario repeating itself today is slim. The progressive Jewish community (progressive religiously and politically) seems to be on board with the notion that there is support in the tradition for an ethos of social justice. On the other hand, the conservative (religiously and politically) Jewish community is still regularly proclaiming that “social justice Judaism” is an abomination and “social justice rabbis” are not real rabbis.<sup>6</sup>

And so, to finish on a traditional note, “the day is short and the work is great.” Those of us who understand the goal of Judaism as, in the words of Maimonides, to create *hesed, mishpat, utzedakah*/love, justice, and righteousness in the world must dig in and do that, using all the tools at our disposal. Is this a “peoplehood lens”? That question couldn’t be less important.

**Aryeh Cohen** is Professor of Rabbinic Literature at the Ziegler School for Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University. He is also the Rabbi-in-Residence for Bend the Arc: Jewish Action. His latest book is *Justice in the City: An Argument from the Sources of Rabbinic Judaism* (Academic Studies Press).

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5. There is a growing library of serious books which do this. See under Jill Jacobs, Elliot Dorf, Lenn Goodman, Naomi Graetz, Aryeh Cohen.

6. Just this week another book was published promising to tear the roof off the fraud which is Jewish social justice. Jonathan Neumann, *To Heal the World? How the Jewish Left Corrupts Judaism and Endangers Israel*.



## Talking About Peoplehood and Social Justice – A reply to Aryeh Cohen

**Ed Rettig**

The old story goes: A rabbi arrives new to a congregation and consults with the president over that crucial first sermon. "I am going to use the First Commandment: 'I am the Lord thy God.'" The president nervously responds: "Not a good idea rabbi. Several of our big donors are confused religiously. They are atheists or agnostics. That might make them uncomfortable." "OK," said the rabbi, "How about if I speak about 'Thou shalt not steal?'" "Well," said the president, "you wouldn't know this, but last year our treasurer spent some time in prison ... tax issues. Why make him uncomfortable?" "How about 'Thou shalt not commit adultery?'" The president merely raised an eyebrow, and the rabbi understood: "So what can I speak about in my sermon that won't offend anyone?" "Oh, you know," said the president. "Talk about Judaism."

Professor Aryeh Cohen, rabbi and scholar and teacher of rabbinical students, opened a courageous and potentially productive discussion. In that spirit of "*vikuah lishem shamayim*" - "debate for the sake of heaven," I would like to offer a critique of his article.

He describes himself as a "peoplehood' skeptic." He fears that speaking of peoplehood will provide a device for speaking of Zionism while escaping the discussion of the problems of territorial nationalism, the occupation and the rights of non-Jews in Israel. He then goes on to tear into current policies of the Government of Israel, making the breathtaking broad generalization that "One of the two largest gatherings of Jews, the State that claims to be the Jewish State, is not interested in a vigorous pursuit of Social Justice." He spices up his argument with a claim that Israel within the Green Line is a "seventy year occupation of Palestine." The entire period of the existence of the State of Israel is an occupation in his view, thus denying the fundamental political legitimacy of about six and a half million living, breathing Jews.

Having consigned six and a half million Israeli Jews to the ranks of the politically illegitimate and socially unconcerned, he turns his attention to US Jewry. From certain facts (several Jewish organizations support internal social justice issues in the USA but do not take a position on Israel/Palestine issues; about 30% of Jews voted for Trump) he

draws another breathtakingly broad conclusion: "...there is no special affinity for Jewish people towards social justice."

Prof. Cohen's article suffers from several severe weaknesses that we must address if we are to defend the concept that social justice is a core value of Judaism.

- The main problem is the soft moral relativism that guides Prof. Cohen's approach. In his view, these people - Jews living in the US or Israel - do not value social justice itself, because whatever vision of social justice guides them it is not his vision. Here is where his article strays into unintelligibility. In other words, their vision of social justice - Likudniks, Jews who vote Republican - make him "uncomfortable." It is one thing to seek intelligibility by suggesting that the social justice visions of communism, or neo-liberalism, are misguided. It is quite another to claim that a vision is not present. Yet this is his claim. An example might be the Jewish discussion of gay rights. It is one thing to say that Orthodox Judaism with its more restricted view or Reform Judaism with its broader view of gay rights is right or wrong. It is quite another to suggest that because discussion of gay rights makes me suspicious that it is really about something else - say, about the relevance and legitimacy of Halakha - makes me uncomfortable, gay rights are unimportant to either Reform or Orthodox Jews. Cohen tripped over a major "third wire" in our contemporary thought identified by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor who wrote: "Your feeling a certain way can never be sufficient ground for respecting your position because your feeling can't determine what is significant. Soft relativism self-destructs. Things take on importance against a background of intelligibility. Let us call this a horizon. It follows that one of the things we can't do if we are to define ourselves significantly, is to suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us. This is the kind of self-defeating move frequently being carried out in our subjectivist civilization. In stressing the legitimacy of choice between certain options, we very often find ourselves depriving the options of their significance." In other words, the problem with Cohen's article is that like the apocryphal ex-con synagogue treasurer in the story; Cohen might become uncomfortable discussing how specific ideational pillars of Jewish thought are applied in contemporary Jewish life. In his case, this is "peoplehood" while for others it may be "theft," or "belief in God," or "adultery." But that discomfort is not a coherent reason to refrain from the discussion or to deny the significance of the pillar.
- Cohen illustrates the loss of intelligibility when he tries to launch a discussion of what he evidently sees as alternatives to speaking of "peoplehood." Having downplayed "social justice," he finds himself echoing Maimonides: "to create *hesed, mishpat, utzedakah*/love, justice, and righteousness in the world..." And what are *hesed,*

*mishpat, utzedakakah* if not building blocks of the various Jewish treatments of social justice?

- Another key to his misrepresentation of the state of “social justice” as a Jewish concept lies in his failure to recognize that debate involves more than one opinion about an idea. There are, for example, Jewish Trump voters who believe in small government, low taxes, low levels of immigration, as matters of social justice. Their point of view may seem absurd to Prof. Cohen (full disclosure – he and I probably agree on this point), but for many of them, it is a strong motivation drawn from a Jewish civilizational commitment to social justice. We cannot intelligibly discuss that commitment and what it might require of us, without recognizing its first-level importance to the people who act on it.
- Moreover, Cohen never explains why or how discussion of peoplehood can constrain discussion of territorial nationalism, occupation, human rights of non-Jews in the State of the Jews, etc. Indeed, far from being a way to discuss these things without considering Zionism, the simple fact is that they only acquire intelligibility, making them addressable for critique, against a horizon of peoplehood and the impact of Zionism on Jewish Identity. I can testify that in our work in *Shomrei Mishpat* Rabbis for Human Rights, this is what we discuss and at great length. We also engage with the potential costs of the absence of a territorial nation, the dangers of indefensible borders and the moral significance of those dangers, not instead of, but in intimate ethical relationship to the positive commandments to treat the stranger with integrity.

The argument that Social Justice is a central pillar of Judaism and Jewish peoplehood stands on a firm basis of intelligibility. In this, it is like talk of God, of the prohibition of theft or sermonizing against adultery. We may disagree on how to develop these pillars of our civilizational thought and how to realize them in practical terms. But how can we avoid these -and other foundational components like them, monotheism, or *brit*, for example - if we are to speak of contemporary Judaism as anything meaningful? Without them, how to upset the complaisant, engender rethinking of stale moral contemplation, or be anything more than the kind of anodyne “Judaism” advocated by the apocryphal synagogue president in the old joke.

Rabbi, Dr. **Ed Rettig** is the current Chair of Shomrei Mishpat, Rabbis for Human Rights. He also chairs CJPE, publishers of the Peoplehood Papers, and serves on the board of IsraAID, the Israeli third sector organization for international disaster relief and development. Ed served for many years in American Jewish Committee's office in Israel, directing it from 2009-2013. He holds a law degree from Hebrew University and was ordained at HUC-JIR from where he also holds a doctorate in Jewish History.



## The Zionist Dream Awaits a Peoplehood Vision

**Micha Odenheimer**

Eleven years ago, I created Tevel b'Tzedek, an Israeli organization devoted to connecting Jews to the most acute challenges of global poverty in the Two Thirds World. In the tradition of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, the Baal Shem Tov, Midrashim such as Tanna D'vai Eliyahu—and of course the Torah and Prophets as well, Tevel was founded out of a belief that universal social justice is at the heart of Judaism's mission. The Enlightenment, which dismantled ghetto walls for Jews who wished to assimilate into Western civil society, created a polarizing split. Some Jews shed their Jewish particularity in an effort to fit in, raising the flag of ethical monotheism and social justice as the only essential part of the Jewish tradition. Others fought to keep virtual ghetto walls high, by emphasizing those laws that keep us separate from others, in order to preserve Jewish particularity. One guiding idea of Tevel b'Tzedek was that the time for such a split was over. In the post-modern world, Jewish particularity of the most robust kind, and aspirations towards universal social justice can be reintegrated. The State of Israel, especially, could provide a psychological platform for this reintegration. In fact, since starting Tevel, 12 years ago, the field of Israeli involvement in the challenges of global poverty has burgeoned, and young Israelis, both religious and non-religious, have shown great enthusiasm, initiative and capability in this field.

But the past few months, and the Israeli government plan to deport 38,000 asylum seekers back to Africa have been a shock to my system. My disappointment in the lack of empathy or concern for non-Jews among political and religious leaders and many on the Israeli street was so acute that I experienced it as a crisis of faith in Jewish nationalism.

Israel was an initiator of an international treaty on refugees in the wake of the Holocaust, that required countries to give asylum to people for whom return to their home country meant mortal danger. And yet our country of refugees and holocaust survivors was ignoring this treaty. Worse yet, government ministers incited fear and hatred of asylum seekers, attempting to pit the population of South Tel Aviv—a ravaged area long before the asylum seekers came—against the African refugees. And people—not all, but many—were lapping it up. Supporters of the deportation were spreading the idea that its opponents were doing so as part of a broader agenda—to create “a state of all its citizens” that would replace the Jewish state. The more you cared about the

Jewish people, the right-wing narrative went, the more you understood that compassion was a luxury. The Jewish heart for the downtrodden must be sacrificed on the altar of patriotism.

The fusion of statehood with Jewish identity had coagulated into a tendency to dehumanize those outside one's group. The passion for justice which I had thought was an indelible part of collective Jewish nature seemed to have been flattened out of existence by the nation-state. What ultra-Orthodox critics of Zionism had predicted—that the state would erase Jewish uniqueness and make us “a people like other peoples,” was happening, but not in the same way as they had feared. It was not that secular Zionism had destroyed Jewish particularity, or ritual observances. Judaism in this sense was alive and well in Israel. Instead it was the ethical and universal core of Jewish identity, forged through both our spiritual tradition and our history, that was being ameliorated—in great part by religious Zionists. It was that precious trait that allowed us to care more, not less, about other human beings *because* we were Jewish that was being degraded and G-d forbid destroyed.

But then Jewish voices against the deportation began to register loud and clear, and to break the neat left/right division on the deportation issue. First came the Israelis students: thousands of them, organizing quickly and effectively over social media as “Stop the Deportation”. Then came people such as Alan Dershowitz, Irwin Cotler, Abe Foxman, longtime diaspora defenders of Israel, who warned against the consequences of the deportation—and its immorality. Israeli intellectuals and Orthodox leaders began to cross ideological lines to speak out. Yossi Klein Halevi called the deportation “a crime against Jewish history.” Elyakim Rubenstein, the religious and widely respected deputy head of the Supreme Court called the fact that Israel had granted refugee status to only 12 asylum seekers out of thousands “astonishing.” I helped create a group called “Religious Zionists against the Deportation--Lo Tasgir” that quickly gained adherents. Rabbi Avi Giser, the rabbi of Ofra, a religious settlement in the West Bank, spoke out strongly against the deportation, risking the wrath of his constituency. So did others, such as Rabbi Aviya HaKohen of Tekoah and Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, founder of Efrat. Although at the time of this writing it is not clear what will be the final outcome, at the very least, we have managed to put some cracks in the cynical attempt to fashion a wedge issue out of the refugee question.

What the struggle over the deportation taught me is the vital importance of Jewish Peoplehood as a counter-force against the power of Jewish statehood. Professor Isaiah Leibowitz, the acerbic and iconoclastic religious philosopher, often recounted a conversation he had with David Ben Gurion. Leibowitz who was Orthodox and a Zionist in his belief in Jewish self-determination, deeply believed in the need to separate religion



from the State; Ben Gurion, who was secular, said that he would never let that happen. “You want Judaism to rise up as an independent ethical force that can criticize the state. I will never let that happen.”

But it *is* happening. For those of us who cherished the dream of a utopian Jewish state, guided by the inspiring rhetoric of its Declaration of Independence, waking up is hard to do, but absolutely necessary. The story of Israel, from the in-gathering of the exiles and making the desert bloom through the destruction of the Syrian nuclear reactor and Start Up Nation, is amazing. And yet, the era of Zionist piety, in which the state itself is seen as not just necessary, but as righteous and good, is over. Instead the state must be seen as an arena—the main arena-- in which the struggle for Jewish ethics, for the soul of the Jewish people, is taking place. And in this struggle, the hard to define, easy to malign concept of Jewish Peoplehood will play a decisive role.

By Jewish Peoplehood I mean the Jews of the diaspora along with the Jews of the Holy Land. I mean Jewish memory along with Jewish longing for messianic transformation. I mean the process through which Jewish tradition is filtered through new understanding of both reality and possibility in order to create a Torah she’baal peh, an inspired oral Torah for today. I mean the inclusion and conscious promotion and dissemination of long ignored teachings within the religious world, such as that of Rabbi Chaim Vital, the great disciple of the Ari, that “Love your Fellow” includes all human beings, or Rav Ashlag’s prescient manifesto declaring that globalization has made the acceptance of mutual responsibility for the welfare of all of humanity at the core of Judaism.

The issues are manifold. Will the gap between rich and poor in Israel continue to grow, as wealth and power are concentrated in an oligarchical class of politicians and business tycoons? Will the headlong leap into the privatization of health care, education and welfare be reversed? Will we be able to battle the “developers” who would divvy up our coastlines and raze our forests, so as to preserve the natural beauty of the country for the next generation. Will a country that has fragmented into “tribes” --Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox, Mizrachi Orthodox, Mizrachi traditional, national-religious, Russian and so on - be able to reclaim a language of the common good? Can we regain enough confidence in our own goodness and destiny to trust in the possibility of peace and to fully include non-Jewish citizens of Israel in our dialogue about the future?

On the surface, right now, it seems as if those in power in the State of Israel—following a worldwide trend that includes Trump’s United States, Putin’s Russia and Turkey’s Erdogan—have succeeded in creating a perception in which national interest and global social justice are oppositional values. But bubbling below the shiny surface is the People

of Israel, who, if not prophets, are the sons and daughters of prophets. A renewed explosion of these energies is, I believe and hope, soon to come.

**Micha Odenheimer** grew up in Los Angeles, graduated cum laude from Yale University, was ordained by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and was a close student and friend of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. A writer, journalist, and social entrepreneur, Micha's essays about poverty, conflict and globalization from countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Nepal, and Iraq have been published in the Washington Post, Haaretz, the London Times, Foreign Policy magazine and other journals. Micha was involved in the founding of Elul, was the founding director of the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews, and founded Tevel b'Tzedek in 2007. In 1999 he was awarded the Boris Smolar Prize for Journalism and in 2009 the Flegg Prize from the Hebrew University.



## Lech L'Cha: Exploring the Power of Israel to Develop Social Justice Activists

**Dana Talmi and Max Klau**

*And the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.*

*Genesis 12: 1-2.*

According to our tradition, so began the very first Jewish journey. Avram, our forefather, was living a comfortable, prosperous, unremarkable life in Haran when we heard this command to *go forth*; he was to leave behind all that was familiar and embark upon a journey to the land of Israel. Through this journey, Avram would be transformed into Avraham, and he and the great nation he is destined to beget would be both blessed, and become a blessing to others.

In Hebrew, the command that Abram hears is "lech l'cha"; as many sages have noted, there is an important lesson buried deep in this phrase. "Lech" is the command form of the verb "go!"; that word alone would have been grammatically sufficient in this context. It is followed, however, by a second command, "l'cha", a term that can be translated as "to yourself". The full term, "lech l'cha", therefore translates as "Go to yourself", and it suggests that this very first Jewish journey was, in fact, a *dual journey*: It was both a journey through the *outer world*, to the geographic land of Israel, as well as an *inner journey*, an encounter with one's deepest truths, values, and identity. The phrase "lech l'cha" suggests that these two dimensions of that first Jewish journey would unfold simultaneously, and were too interconnected to separate.

We begin this chapter with this brief exploration of sacred text for two reasons. First, because it so powerfully highlights the centrality of Israel to Jewish history, religion and identity. And second, because it illuminates the truth that the outer journey to the land of Israel and the inner journey to our own deepest values and truths are interdependent and interconnected.

In the work we do at the Yahel, these two insights inform our work in important ways. At Yahel, we bring young Jews from around the world to Israel for an intense, demanding year of service focused on working alongside marginalized communities. Like Avram, these young adults leave behind familiar, comfortable, prosperous lives to travel to Israel; once there, they spend their days on the front lines of many of Israel's most intractable social challenges.

Yahel's flagship program is the Yahel Social Change Fellowship. This is nine-month service based fellowship puts young adults at the forefront of social issues in Israel. One group of fellows is based in the Ramat Eliyahu neighborhood in Rishon LeZion, where they work with Ethiopian-Israelis primarily, and with other populations in the neighborhood as well. These fellows work on 21 different projects, ranging from working with youth at risk in afterschool programs to teaching English in schools and learning centers to supporting the work of different local nonprofit organizations. In the city of Lod, our fellows have the opportunity to work with a diverse set of populations including Arab Israelis. Here, too, Yahel fellows volunteer on 20 different projects at local community centers, schools and nonprofits.

Many of the participants on Yahel are young adults drawn from bastions of progressive activism in North American universities, and they choose this service experience because of their deep commitment to social justice. Working with this population provides us with a remarkable window into the complexities of our current moment in Israel-Diaspora relations, and what we see is both worrisome and alarming.

In the early weeks of the program every year, we encounter participants who have been frightened and confused by the discourse related to Israel in their progressive communities in the diaspora. Their commitment to human rights, racial and economic justice, and social change is foundational to their identity, and their desire to connect with their own Jewish roots, history and culture is real and sincere. And it is clear that the discourse in many communities in the diaspora is intensely hostile to any effort to hold the complexity of our current moment. Those who express sympathy for the Palestinians suffering from the occupation are shouted down by some fellow Jews as self-hating anti-Zionist enemies of Israel; those who express support for Israel's ability to remain a liberal democracy while confronting relentless terrorist attacks from deeply illiberal neighbors are shouted down by progressive peers as racist, white-supremacist colonizers who support apartheid for brown and black people who are treated as less than fully human.

It's a brutal, intense, and emotional discourse, in which progressive young Jews feel forced to pick a side in a "you're either with us or against us" debate. Many are choosing

progressive politics, embracing a nuance-free narrative that demonizes Israel in a way that should alarm anyone who cares about the future of Jewish peoplehood. Others—the ones who end up signing up for Yahel—feel silenced and shut down, and are struggling mightily to find a way to simultaneously hold on to their progressive values while strengthening a deep, meaningful, and informed connection to Israel and their Jewish roots.

Yahel provides a pathway to engage in that complex and important inner work. Here in Israel, progressive Jews find a space where they are able to engage with the full complexity of this moment. The fellows engage in service alongside local populations who are most vulnerable today in Israeli society and who are looking for ways to strengthen their own communities from within. At the same time, they encounter the remarkable community of Israeli activists fighting courageously for co-existence, for racial and economic justice, for immigrants' rights, and so many other progressive values. And they discover that these activists are animated by a deep connection to Jewish values, history, and ethics, and have embraced a sophisticated Zionism that can hold a fierce critique of current injustices along with an immense love of Judaism, Israel, and Jewish peoplehood.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of providing this kind of social justice rite of passage for progressive young Jews at this moment in time. At a time when the brutal, intense Israel discourse in the diaspora leaves progressive young Jews feeling like they must choose between being progressive and loving Israel, a service experience in Israel provides a path that transcends this kind of binary, either/ or choice. Again, and again, we see our participants emerge from this experience having discovered a way to integrate a foundational commitment to progressive values with an intense, informed, and sophisticated love of Israel and Judaism.

At this point, we can confidently claim the Israel service experience is a proven and effective strategy to ensure that this rising generation of Jewish social justice activists maintains the connection to Judaism and Israel that has endured through the millennia. It is a modern iteration of the original Jewish Journey, in which Avram left his familiar, comfortable home to travel to Israel, where he encountered tests and challenges that forged not only his own Jewish identity, but the identity of future generations.

The argument can be made that no other educational experience has the potential to influence the trajectory of young Jews as individuals, and the Jewish people overall, at this challenging and critical moment in history.

**Dana Talmi** has over 15 years of experience working in the fields of experiential education and service learning. She worked for American Jewish World Service (AJWS) and in 2007 founded Yahel – Israel Service Learning – an Israeli nonprofit that runs service learning and social action programs in Israel. Dana holds a B.A. in Israel studies from Bar-Ilan University and an M.S.W. from the University of North Carolina.

Dr. **Max Klau** is a leadership development scholar and practitioner who currently serves as the Chief Program Officer at the New Politics Leadership Academy, a U.S.-based nonprofit that is dedicated to recruiting and developing alumni of national service programs to seek political office. Before stepping into this role, he was the Vice President of Leadership Development at City Year, Inc and received his doctorate of education (Ed.D.) from the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 2005.



**The Peoplehood Papers** provide a platform for Jews to discuss their common agenda and key issues related to their collective identity. The journal appears three times a year, with each issue addressing a specific theme. The editors invite you to share your thoughts on the ideas and discussions in the Papers, as well as all matters pertinent to Jewish Peoplehood: [publications@jpeoplehood.org](mailto:publications@jpeoplehood.org).

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