Origins and Global Perspectives of *K'lal Yisrael*

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Introduction

In 1962, in speaking about the idea of *k'lal yisrael,* Dr. Simon Greenberg, then the vice-chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary and the President of the University of Judaism, addressed an educational conference sponsored by the Philadelphia Board of Education of the United Synagogues. In his address to the conference, he said:

> It has been used somewhere by someone before modern times, its use was so rare and so unimportant that no dictionary of the Hebrew language, no anthology of Jewish thought or literature, deems it sufficiently significant to be listed as a separate item or even to include it under the rubric of *k'lal* or *yisrael.*[1]

In his remarks, he expounds upon the role and concept of *k'lal yisrael* in Jewish education and explains that the term was used frequently in the 1960s, "as if its meaning were clear and universally accepted."[2] Fifty years later, the term *k'lal yisrael* is used just as, if not more frequently, in the common vernacular of Jewish institutions, organizations, and religious leaders. While it is used frequently, it seems that the term's meaning continues to be as unclear as it was in 1962.

If one does an Internet search of webpages of synagogues (across all denominations), Jewish day schools, non-profit institutions, or Israel related organizations, the term *k'lal yisrael* will show up on most of them. Organizations want to "foster *k'lal yisrael* by strengthening our link to the broader Jewish community and the State of Israel"[3] or see *k'lal yisrael* as a pillar to congregational life. One congregation's webpage even remarks, "All synagogues share a love of Torah, a devotion to God and a

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[1] Greenberg, S. "The Role of the Concept of *K'lal Yisrael* in Jewish Education," 137,
[2] Ibid., 138.
[3] http://www.pjcc.org/about/about-mission.html#.UpzUtlWzKpg 3/11/2014.

commitment to *k'lal yisrael*."[4] What do synagogues and organizations mean when they write that they have a commitment to *k'lal yisrael*? How does one foster *k'lal yisrael*? How do we define this term that has become one of the most commonplace words in our 21st Century Jewish lingo, one that seems to be used almost as widely used as *tikkun olam?*

In 1986 the Jewish textbook Basic Judaism for Young People, Naomi Pasckoff defines *k'lal yisrael* as, "All Jews everywhere. The Jewish community has many names… but when we say *k'lal yisrael* we want to let people know that whatever differences we have, we share many things in common."[5] *K'lal yisrael* has been defined as Jewish peoplehood, the unity of Israel, the oneness of the Jewish people, all the people of Israel, a fellowship and mutual responsibility for the Jewish people. However, it appears that the most frequent translation of *k'lal yisrael* is Jewish peoplehood. Rabbi Joseph Telushkin writes, "For three thousand years, peoplehood has meant that the Jewish people recognize that the God of other Jews is our God as well, that the community of other Jews is our community. Recognition of this fact means that we cry and cry out for each other when necessary…"[6] The ultimate goal of this thesis is to investigate the meaning of *k'lal yisrael* over time. With this understanding as a foundation, one can then discuss how to develop, strengthen, and foster this idea of *k'lal yisrael.*

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first section will look at the development of the term *k'lal yisrael* throughout the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic

[4] http://www.tiflorida.org/learning/overview/ 3/11/2014.
[5] Pasckoff, N. *Basic Judaism for Young People*, 67.
[6] Brown, E., Galperin, M. *The Case for Jewish Peoplehood*, xi.

literature. There will be a close investigation on how the term is used, when the term is used, and in what context the author uses the term. While not a comprehensive investigation of when *k'lal yisrael* is used in rabbinic literature, expansive research has been completed to give readers an understanding on how the idea has developed and transformed over the years.

The second section will look at modern and contemporary scholarship on the term *k'lal yisrael*. This section will focus primarily on theologians and thinkers of the 20th Century and how the term became popular and frequently used during this Century. The chapter will highlight four scholars and summarize and analyze their usage of the term.

The final section of thesis will look at five different educational programs whose mission surrounds the idea of building *k'lal yisrael*. Each of these programs has unique approaches to *k'lal yisrael* and through conversations, program evaluations, and additional research. This section will develop a working definition of *k'lal yisrael*. Moreover, once a practical definition of *k'lal yisrael* is formulized, a summary of best practices in teaching and experiences will be proposed.

Chapter 1*: K'lal Yisrael* in the Bible and in Rabbinic Literature

K'lal Yisrael in the Tanakh

> And Adonai said to Abram, Get out from your country, and from your family, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you; And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great and you shall be a blessing.[7]

From the very first book of the Torah, the idea of Jewish peoplehood was born. Through Genesis 12, one learns that the Jewish people are greater than an individual, a couple, a family, a group, or even a small community. God creates a covenant with Abraham and promises that his legacy will not only be with a few people but also with an entire nation. This is the genesis of peoplehood, and perhaps even the idea of *k'lal yisrael.*

While the term *k'lal yisrael* is not used in the Tanakh, the concept of a distinctive Jewish people or a larger community is developed and ever present throughout the Hebrew Bible. Throughout the Tanakh, Jews are variously referred to as a congregation, a nation, children of Israel, and a kingdom, all implying a connection among people.[8] This connection is introduced in the book of Genesis in *Parashat Lech L'cha* when it reads, "And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you, and to your seed after you".[9] A covenant between God is the first understanding of what it means to be a Jewish community. God will not only watch over Abraham and his kin but also over all of

[7] Genesis 12:1-2. *All biblical translations if not noted are taken from the JPS-Tankah, 2000.
[8] Corbin, K., Plotkin A., Levine A., Most, G. "The Peoplehood Papers 1," 38.
[9] Genesis 17:7-8.

Abraham's future descendants. The first concept of Jewish peoplehood is based on a contract with God.

Adele Berlin further develops this point when she explains that "In Genesis, the patriarchs had personal relationships with God: in Exodus, the Israelites will enter into a communal relationship with Divine."[10] The beginning of the Book of Exodus describes the birth of a nation. The narrative is no longer about the patriarchs and matriarchs and their kin but about a group of people. The narrative of Exodus turns to the trials and tribulations of a community, a community that is composed of leaders and followers. In Exodus 12:37-38 readers learn that the Israelite people numbered more than six hundred thousand and that *erev rav*, a mixed multitude, went with this group too.[11] The Israelites in the book of Exodus go beyond an individual covenant with God and also create communal covenant with God and with each other. In exodus, the Israelites are group that is enslaved, is then redeemed and liberated by God, and then grows and struggles together as a People.

Membership in this group revolves not only around the same blood line and/or common history but also around the concept of revelation. The group comes together at Mt. Sinai and is now oriented around the rules and regulations that one needs to follow to be part of the Jewish people.[12] This is a new frame through which to consider the idea of peoplehood. The laws revealed at Sinai, establish the Israelites' responsibility for fulfilling their duties both to God and the larger community. In Deuteronomy 27:9, this idea is further elucidated as Moses and the Priests speak to the community saying that on

[10] Berlin, A. in Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, eds, "Torah: A Women's Commentary," 305.
[11] Exodus 12:37-38.
[12] Crane, J. "Am Yisrael," 2011.

the day they received the laws and teaching from God, "They became the People of Adonai our God."[13] The receiving of rules, delineates who is in the group and who is out. Those who do not follow these laws are no longer considered part of the group. As there are common rules and deeds to follow, groupness develops as a pillar of what it means to be a people.

Beyond a community following certain laws to be part of a group, another factor develops in the Torah that also constitutes a group. A shared vision unites individuals. Throughout the Torah, the Israelites have many shared visions that bring them together as a people. From escaping from the Egyptian tyranny, to building a golden calf, to the desire to reach the Promised Land, these elements of shared goals unite the people. One major example of this shared vision that embodies *k'lal yisrael* is the building of the Mishkan at the end of the book of Exodus.

> The whole community of the Israelites left Moses' presence. And everyone whose spirit moved him came, bringing to Adonai his offering for the work of the Tent of Meeting and for all its service and for the sacral vestments... Thus the Israelites, all the men and women whose hearts moved them to bring anything for the work that Adonai, through Moses, had commanded to be done, brought it as a freewill offering to Adonai.[14]

In this section of the Torah, one recognizes that all the Israelites participated in building of the Mishkan leading to this shared process that unified the Israelites as one particular group.

In addition to building covenant with God and receiving laws at Sinai and having a shared vision, two other frameworks for what it means to be a Jewish people are found in the wandering of the desert and the desire to reach the Promised Land. Geography

[13] Deuteronomy 27:9.
[14] Exodus 35:20, 35:29.

plays an integral role in what it means to be a Jewish people. In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses instructs the people of their responsibilities in entering the Promised Land.

> Keep, therefore all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you today, so that you may have the strength to enter and take possession of the land that you are about to cross into and possess, and that you may long endure upon the soil and that Adonai swore to your fathers to assign to them and to their heirs, a land flowing with milk and honey.[15]

When the Israelites enter the land, they will continue to be defined as a group; they will not only be defined by their tradition but also by the land in which they will dwell. No longer will they be a nomadic people but a people connected to a land. In Moses' instructions, he articulates that if they look after the land, God will protect them. To be a part of the Jewish people was to be in certain proximity to the rest of the group.

There was a logistical element of being part of a people as well. One sees this in Exodus 30:11-16. In this section of the Torah, there is a census taken. However, it seems to be less about counting the Israelites, and more about collecting a half-shekel to help the building of the Tabernacle. To be part of the people meant to be together in tribes, to traverse the desert together, and to give taxes to support the larger goals and desires of the people.

Beyond the Five Books of Moses, the idea of what it means to be a Jewish people takes on new dimensions throughout the Tanakh. For example, in the book of Esther, one sees the uniqueness and the particularism of the Jewish people. In chapter three it reads, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the

[15] Deuteronomy 11:8-9.

provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from those of every people".[16] This is a new hallmark of the Jewish people. Unlike the idea of the Jewish community that was developed in the Torah, of a wandering people, a people concentrated in one location, or a people tied together by their patriarchs and matriarchs, this is a new understanding that the Jewish people can be a dispersed people yet remain part of a larger Jewish community.

The idea that peoplehood does not have to be geographically contained or transmitted through a certain blood line is further supported in the first chapter of the book of Nehemiah when it written:

> In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the fortress of Shushan, Hanani, one of my brothers, together with some men of Judah, arrived, and I asked them about the Jews, the remnant who had had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They replied, "The survivors who have survived the captivity there in the province are in dire trouble and disgrace; Jerusalem's wall is full of breaches, and its gates have been destroyed by fire." When I heard that, I sat and wept, and was in mourning for days, fasting and praying to the God of Heaven.[17]

This Biblical passage introduces a Jew living in the Diaspora and his reaction when he hears the trials of other Jews living not in his own geographical area, but in Israel. Not only does Nehemiah feel connected to the Jews living in Judah but he also feels emotionally distraught when he hears about their difficulties and the great number killed in Jerusalem. Moreover, this news changes Nehemiah's future actions. Later in the book, after Nehemiah receives this news about his fellow Jews, one learns that Nehemiah

[16] Esther 3:8.
[17] Nehemiah 1:1-5.

decides to leave office in Persia and journey to work with his own people and reorganize the communities of Jerusalem and Judah.[18]

There is a striking relationship between the concepts of a Jewish people that one finds in the Book of Ruth and the Books of Esther and Nehemiah. Ruth is considered the earliest convert to Judaism and when she speaks to her mother-in-law, Naomi, about her choosing Judaism she gives multiple oaths of what it will mean to be a Jew.

> And she [Naomi] said, Behold, your sister-in-law is gone back to her people, and to her gods; go back you after your sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Do not entreat me to leave you, or to keep from following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.[19]

Not only does Ruth commit herself to the Jewish God, but she identifies with a people too. Rabbi Joseph Telushken remarks,

> How striking that the earliest of converts to Judaism so deeply understood the significance of peoplehood in Jewish identity. We might have assumed that the earliest converts would have simply and exclusively focused on monotheism, Judaism's singular and universal God, which indeed is what most clearly distinguished the Jews from their neighbors at the time of Ruth… Yet the peoplehood factor is no less distinctive in explaining Jewish continuity as well.[20]

While the term *k'lal yisrael* is not found in the Tanakh, the foundation to understanding what it means to be a people, what it means to be responsible for one's community, and what it means to be included in a group takes shape. To be part of a people is to have a covenant with God. To be part of a people is to share a bloodline or a common history. To be part of a people is to feel a connection with a group, even if you geographically close to them. To be part of a people is to share common goals and

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[18] http://jpeoplehood.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/programs-texts-israel-israel-calls-me.pdf, 3/10/2014.
[19] Ruth 1:15-16.
[20] Brown, E., Galperin, M. *The Case for Jewish Peoplehood*, ix.

desires. These different elements of peoplehood first articulated in the Torah are important concepts to highlight as we trace the origins of the term *k'lal yisrael*. The characteristics that peoplehood is formed through a bloodline, a covenant with God, for logistical and geographical motivations, for a shared vision, or for the undercurrents of a feeling of responsibility are all dimensions that the term *k'lal yisrael* will take on throughout the Talmud, Rabbinic literature, and modern day scholarship.

***K'lal Yisrael* in the Talmud**

The oldest reference to the term *k'lal yisrael* in both Jewish literature and history is found in the Babylonian Talmud. The first, and only, time that the term appears in the Talmud is in *masechet* Sanhedrin 58b. In this section of the Gemara, a debate about Cutheans arises. A Cuthean is an individual who converted to Judaism. In second Kings 17:24-41 one learns that the Cutheans are displaced by the Assyrians from Babylonia to Israel and converted to Judaism out of fear of natural disaster. [21] Throughout the Talmud, there is debate whether Cutheans are really converts to Judaism. In Ketubot 29a, Cutheans are considered full converts. However, in later Talmudic texts (e.g., Chullin 6a) Cutheans are considered a community of idolaters and are no longer treated as part of the Jewish community. In general, the Talmud uses the term Cuthean to refer to any idolaters, whether Jewish or gentile.[22]

Noting the differing opinions in the Talmud regarding Cutheans, a debate between Rav Huna and Rav Chisda is found in Sanhedrin 58b that expounds upon the legal status of a Cuthean and their ability to marry a Hebrew. Rav Huna has a more liberal view, allowing a Cuthean to marry a Hebrew. He argues, "If you ask, why did Adam not marry

[21] 2 Kings 17:33.
[22] Susskind-Goldberg, M. Schechter Institute, April 2009.

his daughter? In order that Cain could marry his sister. The world will be built with kindness."[23] Rav Huna's approach is that a Cuthean is a true convert and to keep peace and build kindness between communities, one should allow a Cuthean to marry a Hebrew, as it would not affect the community. Rav Huna's lenient opinion, is the minority opinion, as he uses examples of prohibited marriage relationships to exhibit is leniency. Noting that Cain could marry his sister, a forbidden relationship, Rav Huna argues that this had to be done for for the sake of the world. In turn, giving permission for a Hebrew to marry a Cuthean is similar to Cain's relationship with his sister as it is a lenient perspective and is for the sake of the community.

On the other hand, Rav Chisda shares the majority opinion quoting that a Cuthean is not part of *k'lal yisrael*. He believes that a Cuthean may have left his previous rite but has not left praying to idolaters and for that reason is not considered part of the Hebrew people. This makes a Cuthean unfit to marry a Hebrew. Rav Chisda argues, "A slave is allowed [to marry] his mother and he is allowed [to marry] his daughter; [Because] He has left [being] a Cuthean, but has not come to *k'lal yisrael*."[24] While Rav Chisda is not directly saying that a Hebrew may not marry a Cuthean, by acknowledging that a Cuthean may marry a slave, a forbidden relationship for Hebrews, it implies that a Cuthean could not marry a Hebrew. If a Cuthean was unable to marry a slave, his status would be more revered and the situation would be different. Rashi interprets this selection of gemara by saying, "Since a Cuthean does not have the status of a full-fledged

[23] BT Sanhedrin 58b, translation E. Prosnit.
[24] Ibid.

Israelite convert, there is no concern that he will belittle the Israelite religion" if he marries a his mother or his daughter.[25]

The only use of *k'lal yisrael* in the Talmud is used to make this distinction. Rav Chisda's argument is proposing what an authentic and legitimate Jew is and what it means to be part of *k'lal yisrael.* While a Cuthean may have converted, he still practices another rite and is not considered to be part of the community of Israel. In this masechet, *k'lal yisrael* is used in practical terms for it delineates who is in and who is out of the group. There is no sense of connection with God, or sense that it is based on geography. This only articulates how a person may or may not practice a specific rite and tradition.

While there is only one mention of the term *k'lal yisrael* in the Talmud, other Talmudic passages are highlighted in later discussions of *k'lal yisrael*. The most frequently cited Talmudic line is found twice, in Shavuot 39a and Sanhedrin 27b. The quoted line is "*kol yisrael arevim zeh b'zeh.*" "All of Israel is responsible for each other." In both situations, the text is discussing who is responsible for certain sins of the community. The Gemara asks: if people follow the evil ways and misdeeds of their fathers, do they really not suffer from the sins committed by the people who came before them. The Gemara answers "that one stumbles by the sins of the others."[26] This is why all Israel is responsible for one another, because the sins of the community are passed down and are a reflection of the larger community.

It is important to note that the Talmudic passages that are used most to expound upon the concept of *k'lal yisrael* appear in a negative context. The idea of mutual responsibility does not deal with a Jew who might be poor and in need of money or

[25] Rashi on BT Sanhedrin 58b. Translation Schottenstein Edition.
[26] BT, Sanhedrin 27b. Tranlsation E. Prosnit.

shelter. The mutual responsibility does not deal with helping a Jew who has trouble fulfilling certain mitzvot. Rather, the two Talmudic passages that discuss mutual responsibility are in regard to Jews who might make false oaths or follow the sins of their fathers. According to these selections of Talmud, a Jew is responsible for the sins committed by his fellow Jew, if he could have objected to their actions and failed to do so.

The Hebrew word used for "responsible" is *ahreivin,* which literally means "surety." To be responsible for someone in legal terms means to be that person's guarantor. "Thus, Judaism introduced the 'burden' of responsibility... It is telling us that we carry the burden of responsibility to impact the way other Jews act and behave. We don't have the right to impose on people who are not of our religion. But we have the obligation of imposing upon our own people."[27] Rabbi Nissim of Gerona, an early 14th Century Talmudic scholar from Spain, interprets "*kol yisrael arevim zeh b'zeh*" to mean that each person has some merits and some faults, and when we join together, the connection benefits from the sum of the different merits of each individual.[28]

Today, "*kol yisrael arevim zeh b'zeh*" does not convey the sense of being responsible for the sins of fellow Jews. Instead, it is has become a rallying cry for when Jews are in need or in trouble. The principle is articulated to obligate each and every Jew by virtue of being part of *k'lal yisrael* to look after the entire collective.

> This articulation expands the mandate of the imperative. We are not only talking about mutual responsibility, where I help you because I expect that you will help me someday, but also about joint responsibility, where I help

[27] http://jpeoplehood.org/themes/mutual-responsibility/about-the-theme 3/11/2014.
[28] Ibid.

> you purely because of the responsibility I feel for you as a member of the collective, and not from any expectation of reciprocity.[29]

Beyond Sanhedrin 58b mention of *k'lal yisrael* and the two Talmudic passages that cite "All is Israel is responsible for each other," there is another term found throughout the Talmud that sheds light on understanding the larger idea of the Jewish people. This term is *knesset yisrael*. *Knesset yisrael* literally means "the gathering of Israel." This term is similar to *k'lal yisrael* in that it involves a group of people together. Yet, it appears that the term often is used to discuss or highlight the larger Jewish community's relationship with God. Ezra Bick articulates, "Most often, this term is used in dramatic dialogues between a single figure, *knesset yisrael*, and God, and expresses the emotional relationship between them. Clearly, the term embodies the unified collective, a single personality, with a life of her own."[30] One example of this dynamic conversation is found in Ketubot 111b, when *knesset yisrael* converse with God, saying, "Master of the Universe! Hint to us with your eyes that you are happy with us, which is sweeter than wine and smile upon us which is sweeter than milk."[31] In the Babylonian Talmud, *knesset yisrael* is found over twenty times and used to illustrate the covenant between God and the rest of the Israelite community. In later 19th Century works, *knesset yisrael* and *k'lal yisrael* become synonymous term articulating the groupness of the Jewish people.

K'lal Yisrael in Other Rabbinic Literature

The term *k'lal yisrael* is found occasionally, but still marginally, throughout the rest of rabbinic literature. *K'lal yisrael* is not used as frequently as *knesset yisrael* but the

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Bick, E. "Synagogue and Community: Understanding the Practice of Halakaha" *The Israel Koshvitsky Beit Midrash.*
[31] BT Ketubot 111b. Translation E. Prosnit.

idea of a Jewish peoplehood is still discussed in rabbinic literature to a deep extent. However, like the different concepts of Jewish peoplehood found throughout the Tankah, *k'lal yisrael,* when used in rabbinic literature, has many different applications. The rabbis use the term to discuss geography and location of a group, for practical and government operations, and to define who is a Jew. This section will highlight a number of different rabbinic texts that use *k'lal yisrael* in these various ways.

K'lal Yisrael as practical application/government operations

In Bamidbar Rabbah, the writers use the phrase *k'lal yisrael* to exclude a group of Israelites from the larger Israelite community. Bamidbar Rabbah is one of the later midrashim, said to have been codified around the 11th and 12th Century and is a commentary on the fourth book of the Torah. *K'lal yisrael* is used in Bamidbar Rabbah when discussing the census taken at the beginning of the Book of Numbers. In this section the Levites are not counted in the census alongside the rest of the tribes of Israel.[32] The midrash tries to understand why the Levites are not counted and argues that the Levites are not part of *k'lal yisrael*, stating:

> They were not counted the Levites in *k'lal yisrael*. Why? That they are the Roman legion of the king. In this manner they are alone from the rest of the nation. As it said, according to that all appointed before the Holy One blessed be God, that his future will die in the wilderness. None of them died from the Levi Tribe, as they would not die first. For this reason, the holy one blessed be God did not want the Levites to be counted among *Am Yisrael*.[33]

The use of *k'lal yisrael* in this passage can be viewed in two ways. First, if the Levites are not considered part of *k'lal yisrael*, then one would assume that this term conveys some

[32] Numbers 1:47.
[33] Numbers Rabbah, Perek 1, edition Buber, S. Translation E. Prosnit.

sort of hierarchy. *K'lal yisrael*, when used by the rabbis, could be a method of separating the Levites from the rest of the Israelite people. *K'lal yisrael* refers to the majority of the people, the normal members of the group, the ones with no additional or special responsibilities. Separating the Levites from the rest of *k'lal yisrael* symbolizes their unique responsibilities and their closer relationship with God. This is further supported by the explanation for why the Levites are not counted, as the Midrash says that no members of the Levite tribe will die in the wilderness, separating them even more from the larger group.

Another way one could read this section from Bamidbar Rabbah is that the term *k'lal yisrael* is used for practical taxation reasons. To be part of *k'lal yisrael* may refer to the group of individuals who are required to pay taxes to help maintain the costs of the sanctuary. The Levites did not pay taxes or tithes, "as it would be hard to conceive that the tithes, the only income assigned to the Levites, takes the form of charity and this in compensation for the ongoing risks involved in laboring for the sanctuary."[34] The authors of Bamidbar Rabbah used the term *k'lal yisrael* to distinguish the people who were to be counted and who were supposed to give taxes or donations.

Bachya Ben Asher, a mid 14th Century scholar, also used the term *k'lal yisrael*, as a term to specify a group for practical and logistical terms of a community. In Bachya's commentary on the book of Exodus, expounding on *parashat V'yakhel* he writes, "All of *k'lal yisrael*, men and women volunteered the silver and the copper, the blue and the argon, and the scarlet."[35] Bachya is commenting on how all of *k'lal yisrael*, no matter

[34] *JPS Numbers Torah Commentary*, 433.
[35] Bachay Ben Asher -- Commentary on Parshat V'yhakel Perek 36. Translation E. Prosnit

their status, would bring gifts to help build the sanctuary. The entire community felt obligated to offer these gifts. According to Bachya Ben Asher, a shared goal united the people, which ultimately defines *k'lal yisrael*.

K'lal Yisrael in Terms of a Physical Location

K'lal yisrael is also found in Peskita Zutra where the author uses the term to signify a certain geographical location of the Israelites. Peskita Zutra is also known by the title of Midrash *Lekach Tov,* a midrashic work on the Torah and Five Scrolls compiled by Rabbi Toviah ben Eliezer HaGadol of Greece and Bulgaria, a scholar of the late 11th Century. There are two complementary texts to examine how Eliezer HaGadol used *k'lal yisrael* ; each give readers a strong understanding of what he believes the term means.

The commentary on Parashat Re'eh in Peskita Zutra reads, "Moses included himself in *k'lal yisrael*."[36] However the commentary on Parsahat B'haalot'cha reads, "There Moses knows that he will not pass the Jordan and will not include himself in *k'lal yisrael*."[37] How can Moses be included in *k'lal yisrael* in one parasha and not included in another? Eliezer HaGadol uses the term *k'lal yisrael* to refer a group of people being together in a specific location. In Parashat Re'eh, Moses can be considered part of *k'lal yisrael* because he is with the Israelites bringing personal belongings to the Mishkan. Yet, in Parashat B'haalot'cha, Moses does not consider himself part of *k'lal yisrael* because he realizes he will not physically be with Israelites as they cross the Jordan. The use of the term in P'skita utra illustrates Eliezer HaGadol's interpretation that to be a part of *k'lal yisrael* is to be in close locational-proximity to the rest of the group.

[36] P'skita Zutra, D'varim Parshat Re'eh Daf 18b. Translation - E. Prosnit
[37] P'skita Zutra, Badmidbar Parshat B'haalot'cha. Translation - E. Prosnit.

K'lal Yisrael as Who is a Jew

Otzer HaMidrashim, an anthology of midrashim composed by Julius Eisenstein at the beginning of the 20th Century, uses the term *k'lal yisrael* to mark who is a member of the Jewish faith. This term is used in Eisenstein's narrative about a non-Israelite man who stumbles upon a group of captives and a young Jewish girl. The midrash states:

> A young girl cries with a bitter soul and I come close to her and say to her my daughter why do you cry? And why do you cry out? She told me, Master I am Jewish and I am afraid that the goyim will expel me from these nations from *k'lal yisrael*, and it will be your desire to exile Jews to places and where you will ransom them to gentiles.[38]

The captive girl is nervous that she will be exiled and be forced to convert to a new faith. Eisenstein uses *k'lal yisrael* to illustrate the groupness of the Jewish people and though she is not with Jews at that moment, she still feels connected and nervous about leaving the faith.

The foundations of K'lal Yisrael throughout Rabbinic Literature

Throughout rabbinic literature, built the foundation for the use of *k'lal yisrael* in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Similarly to the examples of what constituted a group in the Tankah, *k'lal yisrael* is used throughout rabbinic literature to understand the multi-faceted approach of what it means to be a group of people. *K'lal yisrael* is described as a people connected with God, through geography, through a shared vision, and through mutual responsibility. These characteristics of *k'lal yisrael* shaped the English definition of the term that is used most frequently to convey Jewish peoplehood which can be understood as "the awareness of the underlying unity that makes an individual Jew a part

[38] Eisentein, J. Otzer HaMidrashim, Masiyot 323. Translation - E. Prosnit.

of the Jewish people."[39] In the next chapter, the idea of peoplehood and *k'lal yisrael* will be further analyzed through the lens of 19th Century history and theology.

[39] Ravid, S and Kedar, S. "Peoplehood Now," sponsored by the NADAV Foundation, 11.

Chapter 2: Modern Interpretations of *K'lal Yisrael*

> Over the past 200 years, due to general and particular Jewish historical developments since the French Revolution, both Jews and non-Jews have changed their perception of the concept of *k'lal yisrael*, the worldwide commonwealth of the Jewish people.[40]

While the term *k'lal yisrael* has its foundational roots in the bible and is used in rabbinic literature, the concept of Jewish Peoplehood and its usage of the term were rare during the rabbinic period. Some historians believe that the term became more widely used after the French Revolution. Other scholars believe that *k'lal yisrael* was not used frequently until the mid-1900s, after the founding of the State of Israel and in response to the horrors of the Holocaust. This chapter traces the development of the term *k'lal yisrael* from the 1800s to today. After discussing the rise of the term, an investigation of how four different theologians have used *k'lal yisrael* will illustrate both the historical and theological undercurrents of the ideas of Jewish Peoplehood.

Yosef Gorny traces the concept of peoplehood and believes the term gained ground and understanding after the French Revolution. He explains that the idea of a larger society was broken down in four different ways: by laws of religious tradition; by geographic location; by lack of political sovereignty; by multiple identities including religious, cultural, and political dimensions.[41] Gorny's understanding of the key factors that led to the establishment of *k'lal yisrael* is similar to the peoplehood factors illustrated in the Tanakh and throughout rabbinic literature. Gorny understands *k'lal yisrael* to represent a group of people in the same location. Moreover, he also understands that *k'lal yisrael* could have a greater meaning connecting people together through history and

[40] Gorny, Y. "Klal Yisrael: From Halakah to History," 11.
[41] Ibid.

religious tradition.

Gorny states that the concept of *k'lal yisrael* ultimately changed after the French Revolution when the collective entity of the Jews needed defining. After the French Revolution, Jews were emancipated and received rights. This enabled them to leave their organized communal infrastructures and enter more fully into non-Jewish society. This necessitated the creation of new Jewish communal frameworks as well. Gorny describes three different 19th Century historians who defined the idea of peoplehood in different ways. Isaac Jost saw the Jews as primarily a religious community, noting that at the middle of the 19th Century the Jews were in the process of integrating into an Enlightenment-molded society. Zvi Graetz defined Jews as a spiritual-religious nation with a mission and a moral calling vis-a-vis the world at large. Simon Dubnow saw the Jews as a dispersed people that possessed a national identity despite their de-territoralization.[42] According to these three different historians, Jews after the Enlightenment were a spiritual people, a social group with religious foundations, and a dispersed group that maintained its relationship with its own idea of a nation. These historians looked at the concept of *k'lal yisrael* differently because of contemporary historical implications, yet each viewed the idea through a lens of diaspora centered around Europe. As we will see, the usage and idea of *k'lal yisrael* continued to change as theologians and historians witnessed the destruction of the European diaspora and the creation of the Jewish State.

While the concept of *k'lal yisrael* was in the air in the 1920s and 1930s, the English equivalent of *k'lal yisrael*, "Jewish peoplehood," was only coined in 1942 by

[42] Ibid., 12.

Mordecai Kaplan.[43] (Mordecai's Kaplan's definition of Jewish peoplehood will be explored later in the chapter but the historical undertones of this term are defined and investigated here.) The concept grew in the 1930s, as Jews from different backgrounds, denominations, and organizations realized that they needed to join together to focus their attention on the rising threat to Jews in Europe. Jonathan Krasner writes about various American Jewish groups who stood together for "Jewish welfare and defense, which included rescue and liberation in Europe, unhindered immigration and political sovereignty in Palestine, and social amelioration and psychological adjustment at home."[44]

The idea of a Jewish collective continued to intensify after the Holocaust, the formation of the State of Israel, and as Jews integrated into western countries. The conditions were ripe for an understanding that Jews needed to be united and responsible for each other's wellbeing. History of persecution, a need to support a State of Israel, and an increase in assimilation were all factors that led Jewish thinkers to develop a stronger idea of groupness. This idea went beyond geography, religion, and family relationships. This new understanding was a unique situation and created a stronger collective consciousness than other racial, religious, and cultural groups.[45] Gorny further explains that "*k'lal yisrael* arose against the backdrop of a unique cultural, economic, political, and historical reality: The 'community' was global in character and, as a consequence of the dispersion, did not have common territorial, economic, or even cultural foundation, as

[43] Krasner, J. *Benderly Boys*, 325.
[44] Ibid., 343.
[45] Gorny, Y. "*K'lal Yisrael* from Halakaha to History," 13.

was the case with other nations that constructed their national identities."[46]

To understand the growth of the term *k'lal yisrael*, one only has to look at Jewish education to see how the concept gained ground at the turn of the 19th Century. In The Benderly Boys & American Jewish Education, Krasner writes about Samuel Citron, a devoted follower of Samson Benderly, the leader of modernizing Jewish Education in the early 1900s. Citron called *k'lal yisrael* "the essence of Jewish life today, charged with meaning. It brings to mind the flow of Jewish history through the ages."[47] He added that *k'lal yisrael* "motivates the Jew so strongly that it has become the major aim and emphasis in Jewish education. All that we teach is geared toward developing within our children a sense of identity with our past and a feeling of belongingness to *k'lal yisrael*."[48] For many American Jews, they were 1st and 2nd generation American, who still had close ties to their European roots and extended families. This was a major factor as Jewish education, especially under the jurisdiction of the American Association for Jewish Education, capitalized on their close ties to European Jews. Moreover, they outlined the challenges facing the Jewish people and emphasized the teaching *k'lal yisrael* to build this idea of responsibility for North American Jews who were better off, who felt more established than Jews around the world, who were fiscally more prosperous, and who had the pressure of carrying out the great Jewish traditions and learnings that other communities could not.[49]

Concurrent with the growth and interest in using *k'lal yisrael*/peoplehood to frame Jewish Education, there was also push back within the Reform, Conservative, and

[46] Ibid.
[47] Krasner, J. *Benderly Boys*, 325.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

Orthodox Movements. These Movements felt that teaching a concept of Jewish peoplehood would prevent their constituents from identifying with their own Movements and dilute Jewish education. Krasner articulates that the Movements were interested in fostering "denominational loyalties" and "a community-centered ideology," so teaching about *k'lal yisrael* was unacceptable to the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Movements as it did not focus on their particular needs.[50] The Movements' rationale for not teaching a broad sense of Jewish Peoplehood was that it took away time from the study of Hebrew, denominational activities, and the participation of religious life in congregations. "*K'lal yisrael* Judaism…. was a Judaism of lowest common denominators: combating anti-Semitism, safeguarding Israel's security, maintaining social welfare institutions, and cultivating Jewish pride, especially among the young."[51]

While the increased sense of denominationalism led to a negative approach to Peoplehood education, there were also leaders of Movements that saw peoplehood as way to bring Jews together. One of these leaders was Solomon Schechter, President of the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1902 to his death in 1915, who was a strict traditionalist but believed that Jewish law and practice should be determined by "catholic Israel," or the whole community of Israel. Schechter wrote,

> Since ... the interpretation of Scripture or the Secondary Meaning [in addition to what it meant originally] is mainly a product of changing historical influences, it follows that the center of authority is actually removed from the Bible and placed in some *living body,* which, by reason of its being in touch with the ideal aspirations and the religious needs of the age, is best able to determine the nature of the Secondary Meaning. This living body, however, is not represented by any section of the nation, or any corporate priesthood, or Rabbihood, but by the collective

[50] Ibid.
[51] Krasner, J. *Benderly Boys*, 326.

conscience of Catholic Israel as embodied in the Universal Synagogue.[52]

While Schechter and others believed in "catholic Israel," the passive resistance from the Movements slowed the rise of *k'lal yisrael* education in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Peoplehood was not the top priority of the Movements and they were not actively speaking about *k'lal yisrael.* While Peoplehood was never the mainstay of Jewish education, the aftermath of the Holocaust was a turning point in the usage of *k'lal yisrael*, as it was a reminder to North American Jews that they could have done more to help the Jews in need. The Holocaust was the major event that changed the perspectives of Jewish communities worldwide. In later decades events like the 1967 Six Day War and the Movement to free Soviet Jews in the 1970s and 1980s are examples of how Jews began to act with a great consciousness and commitment to the collective. These moments when Jews needed greater support financially, socially, and physically spurred an unprecedented level of communal activism within the Jewish community. Institutions began to use the term *k'lal yisrael* as a rallying cry for support of Jews in need. While the mid-1900s was a time of growth and understanding around *k'lal yisrael*, there still was limited sustained intellectual, organizational, and religious focus on the Jewish Peoplehood. [53] Not until the 21st Century did Peoplehood become defined and *k'lal yisrael* became a common phrase in institutional Jewish life, the final chapter of this thesis will expound upon the growth of the term.

Theologians and *K'lal Yisrael*

Along with the increase in Jewish institutions teaching about global Jewry and

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[52] Schechter, S. *Studies in Judaism,*16-17.

[53] Kopelowitz, E. and Engelberg, A., "A Framework for Strategic Thinking about Jewish Peoplehood," 3.

creating curriculum that emphasized responsibility to other Jews in need, Jewish theologians began to write and teach about the concept of Peoplehood and groupness. For many, the response was reactionary. Like the historians and educators, theologians saw Zionism, the Holocaust, and assimilation as factors that were the impetuses to discuss connections between Jews and where God fit within *k'lal yisrael*. Four theologians are particularly noteworthy here; each has a different background and denominational affiliation and wrote and taught in different times throughout the 1900s. Yet highlighting their usage of the term *k'lal yisrael* in their writings, sheds light on their understanding of what it means to be a part of a Jewish community and how God plays a role in Jewish peoplehood.

Rav Kook Views on K'lal Yisrael

> The unity of existence, in its yearning to be included in the lofty, majestic, and refined life of the divine, has its bastion in the community of Israel whose national spirit embraces all spiritual tendencies as its historic purpose.[54]

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, also known as Rav Kook, wrote and taught on the meaning of Jewish existence and the character of the Jewish people. He thought about Israel as a people like no other, in line with traditional Jewish thought grounded in the Bible.[55] Rav Kook was the first Ashkenazi rabbi of Palestine in the early 1900s and is known as the major religious Zionist thinker of the 20th Century. While Kook does not use the term *k'lal yisrael* in his writing, he does use the term *knesset yisrael*, a term that was used throughout Midrashic and Kabbalistic literature. Similarly to the ways *knesset*

[54] Kook, A., "On the Reason for the Commandments" *Essays on the thoughts and philosophy of Rav Kook,* 277.
[55] Shapiro, D. "On World Perspective." *Essays on the thoughts and philosophy of Rav Kook,* 194.

yisrael is used in the Talmud and midrashic work, Kook uses the term to emphasize the connection to God and the choseness of the Jewish people. Kook believed that the Jewish people were the "quintessence of humanity" and that "Jewish history is the essence of all human history."[56] Through this understanding of Jewish history and the Jewish people, Kook articulates that *knesset yisrael* was the "sublimest phenomenon in creation."[57]

Kook emphasized that holiness could be truly revealed only to a congregation, the Jewish collective rather than Jewish individuals.[58] Kook believed that being in community was the only way to fulfill the will of God, which is greater than oneself. To illustrate this belief, one can look at Rav Kook's signature in many of his letters that read, "A slave to a holy nation in the holy land." This symbolizes that Kook believed that an individual can only be sanctified "when he is part of a greater whole, when he frees himself from himself and becomes a 'slave' to the needs of *k'lal yisrael*."[59]

Kook's was a leader of the religious Zionist Movement and his views and opinions were transformed as he witnessed the development that led to the founding of the State of Israel. He saw religious and non-religious Jews going to Palestine to build a homeland for the Jewish people. Jews were moving from all over the world, this resonated with Kook, and though the Jews had different motives to immigrate, he recalled the oneness of the Jewish people as they all shared an ultimate goal. In one of his letters, he reflects on this goal as he writes:

> In this extraordinary time, in which God's hand is seen so wondrously in world history and in our nation's history, it is bewildering that there are people with dim minds and unfeeling hearts who have the presumption to

[56] Ibid., 195.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Shtiglitz, M. "Kedusha" Chicago Kollel, 2009.
[59] Ibid.

> speak out with the purpose of minimizing and dissolving the great original Jewish wholeness - at this moment when the awareness of it is so necessary for our whole status in history.[60]

Kook's concept of *kenesset yisrael* is connected to the chosenness of the Jewish people, the connectedness to God, and the oneness to reach an ultimate goal.[61] While Kook does not use the term, *k'lal yisrael*, his understanding of the Jewish people is evident. His ideas become even stronger once the State of Israel is established, ultimately articulating that *k'lal yisrael* is based on the oneness of helping to establish a State for the Jews and following God's path.

Rabbi Soloveitchik Views on K'lal Yisrael

> The Jewish Divine relationship: They are both covenants, both involve commanded action and both intimate significance: The covenant of fate and the covenant of destiny.[62]

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was a 20th Century Orthodox rabbi who was born in Poland but spent most of his life in the United States. He is considered to be the preeminent figure of Modern Orthodoxy and was the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva University in New York City. Throughout his life, Rabbi Soloveitchik had no hesitation in speaking about what Jews must do in order to be Jews. He believed strongly in this covenant mentality and the importance of the Jewish people as a group. Soloveitchik argued that two elements are necessary for binding Jews to one another: a covenant of fate and a covenant of destiny. The former refers to a sense of a shared collective situation, and the latter to the particular of common enemies.

Soloveitchik saw Jewish history as pivotal in defining the Jewish people. He

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[60] Kook, A. "Selected Letters," 246.
[61] Ibid., 64.
[62] Soloveitchik, J. "Kol Dodi Dofek: The Voice of my Beloved Knocks." *The Man of Faith*, 86.

recounted that history bore inescapable normative lessons, and one could trace in it the presence of God.[63] Through this lens he created a dual approach to understanding the Jewish people's relationship to God and also to Jewish peoplehood: a covenant of fate and a covenant of destiny. "It is noteworthy that Soloveitchik describes both in terms of Jewish-divine relationship: they are both covenants; both involve commanded action and both intimate significance."[64]

"For him [Soloveitchik], the covenant of fate, it is a part and parcel of the God-Israel relationship. Hence, it demands a willingness to remain distinctive in attitude and action, and to foster unity in the face of persecution or vilification, and formulate an effective response."[65] This covenant of fate was created when the Jews were still enslaved in Egypt. Soloveitchik believed that this demanded that Jews empathize with Jewish misfortune and act in unison in the face of danger. This idea is still commonly "explained" by the simple statement that: "We are one people."[66] Soloveitchik's understanding of a covenant of fate has three core elements related to the concept of *k'lal yisrael*. He believed that a Jewish person had: 1. to overcome and face historical circumstances, 2. share in the suffering with other Jews; 3. a responsibility to act.[67] Soloveitchik understood these as individual challenges that a Jew must face as being part of a covenant of fate. All Jewish individuals shared in the history, ideology, and beliefs and therefore had to confront the realities together.

For Soloveitchik, being a Jew is not merely a matter of fate. He believed that

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[63] Eisen, A. "Four Questions Concerning Peoplehood – and Just as many Answers," 7.
[64] Rosenak, M. "The Problem of Jewish Peoplehood," 15.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] http://www.jewishfederations.org/local_includes/downloads/23566.pdf, 39.

nobody was alone and that every Jew must move beyond the individual and be a part of a group.[68] This idea led Soloveitchik to describing the covenant of destiny, established after the Israelites were liberated from Egypt. As opposed to the covenant of fate, which was established when the Israelites were an enslaved people who lacked free will, the covenant of destiny was made with a free nation which could and did make up its own mind.

Soloveitchik believed that fate is uncontrollable and destiny can be directed. "For the contemporary Jew, who may have suffered through little of what might constitute an experience of fate, the covenant of destiny represents a new paradigm that can create a greater connection to the whole. The covenant of destiny is predicated on several core concepts: collective possibility, collective responsibility, collective identity."[69] While Soloveitchik understood the Jews as individuals, he also believed that Jews were a group of people that had a shared destiny and together, as *k'lal yisrael*, that was there was an ultimate goal to achieve, connecting to God as a community. Soloveitchik sums up his beliefs on Jewish peoplehood when he states,

> In a word, the patriarchal covenant [covenant with our ancestors] finds expression in the sense of oneness with Klal Yisrael, in one's participation in the lot of the Jews, and in the consciousness of the fact that being a Jewish is singular and unique. One who lacks this mentality and does not see himself as bound to the strange paradoxical Jewish fate, lacks the sanctity of the patriarch covenant.[70]

Mordecai Kaplan Views on K'lal Yisrael

> We insist that the concept of Jewish peoplehood, which is basic to the whole Reconstructionist position, involves the translation of ethical principles into concrete laws and institutions. We deplore and are

[68] Borowitz, E. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought,* 237.
[69] http://www.jewishfederations.org/local_includes/downloads/23566.pdf, 39.
[70] Soloveitchik, J. *The Rav Speaks,*146.

> endeavoring to correct the communal disorganization which has made the Jewish people impotent to enforce standards of ethical behavior in the relations of man to man.[71]

In Mordecai Kaplan's 1942 article from The Reconstructionist, the term "Jewish Peoplehood" was born and solidified in the language of the Jewish people. The concept of *k'lal yisrael* no longer had an obscure meaning; Kaplan's term of Jewish peoplehood defined what it meant to be part of *k'lal yisrael* and not just a part of a certain group of Jews. In coining a new term, Kaplan was trying to capture a sense of communal identity beyond nationalism.[72] However, this term did not come easily to Kaplan, and he had to develop an understanding of what peoplehood meant and why it was important to the Jews.

Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, who was ordained as an Orthodox Rabbi, spent the majority of his life teaching at the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), and late in his life, founded Reconstructionist Judaism. The majority of his writings took place during his time at JTS, 1910-1963.[73] In his 1934 (first and most famous) book, "Judaism as a Civilization," Kaplan does not use the term peoplehood but rather he uses the term nationhood. Kaplan believed that nationhood was more than the 19th Century idea of gaining political self-assertion but rather about the entire process of gaining democracy and autonomy for a specific group.[74] Yet, when he denied the request to reprint his book for a second edition, he noted that one of his reasons was he was now uncomfortable with the term nationhood.[75] He felt that nationhood was a term too closely

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[71] Kaplan, M. "In Reply to Dr. Gordis." The Reconstructionist. November 27, 1942, 15.
[72] Galperin, M and Brown, E. "The Case for Jewish Peoplehood," 14.
[73] www.jtsa.edu 3/11/2014.
[74] Borowitz, E. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*, 100.
[75] Ehrenkrantz, D. "The Primacy of Peoplehood," *Contact.* Spring 2008, 3.

tied to a state and land, and now that Zionist efforts were strengthening, it was not the right term to use. Moreover, as atrocities against the Jews were on the rise in Europe, Kaplan felt the term nationhood had no resonance for Jews in North America to the larger concept of a Jewish people. Ehrenkrantz noted that, "Kaplan's purpose in developing the idea of peoplehood was to create an understanding of Judaism broad enough to include everyone who identified as a Jews regardless of one's individual understanding or approach to that identity."[76]

Specifically, after the horrors of the Holocaust, Kaplan's concept of *k'lal yisrael* deepened and he believed it was of utmost importance for the Jewish people. Kaplan saw peoplehood as an organizing principle and that Jews could have greater influence as a group rather than identifying with certain Movements or as individual Jews. Beyond the Holocaust, Zionist ideology influenced Kaplan greatly, and he understood that one can not speak of individual Jewish identity without talking about corporate nature of Jews.[77]

> Kaplan's immediate hope was that a strong sense of communal identity would strengthen Jews' connection to Jewish life and to each other—something he felt was in danger of being weakened by the restrictive visions of the Orthodox and Reform movements. But his ultimate goal was nothing less than universal salvation, a healing of the world brought about by people's commitments to one another.[78]

In Kaplan's 1948 book, "The Futures of American Jew," he expounded upon the understanding that fostering *k'lal yisrael* served as a religious function. He wrote, "The function of a religion is to enable those who live by it to achieve salvation, or life abundant. If the indivisible peoplehood of the Jews is as indispensable a means to the salvation of the Jew, as the Church is to that of the Christian, it serves a religious

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Borowitz, E. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thoughts,* 100.
[78] Ehrenkrantz, D. "The Primacy of Peoplehood," *Contact.* Spring 2008, 3.

function."[79] Kaplan saw that deepening the sense of peoplehood connected Jews not only with the larger Jewish community but also led to deeper connections with God.

Kaplan was challenged with the connection between peoplehood and chosesness. While many theologians saw the idea of Jewish community and chosesness going hand and hand, Kaplan rejected this belief, the sense of choseness, "by infusing his naturalist, anti-revelational vision of Jewish civilization with a thorough commitment to humanist ethics and religiosity.[80] Ultimately Kaplan saw that peoplehood and the concept of *k'lal yisrael* meant that Jews have loyalty to the community and in turn are responsible for meeting the diverse needs of the Jews in the community.[81] For Kaplan, peoplehood was a term to help provide a common way to define Jewish identity over the centuries. He saw that building an understanding of *k'lal yisrael* between all Jews would help the Jewish people survive the present age of transitions. Kaplan dedicated himself to reconstructing Jewish peoplehood so that the community could be a self-affirming people that could express authentic Jewish connections and responsibility to each other.

Eugene Borowitz Views on K'lal Yisrael

> There is a common reason among many Reform Jews for why they choose to maintain some level of kashrut observance; attention to the mitzvah is a daily reminder that one is a Jew and can link us to the generations before and the wider *K'lal yisrael*. My personal observance of many mitzvot is motivated, in large part, by my understanding that "this is what Jews do" and my own personal actions, of course, contribute to the enduring validity of such a statement; as a Jew, therefore, this is what I do."[82]

Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, one of the eminent leaders and theologians of the

[79] Kaplan, M. "The Future of the American Jew," 100.
[80] Borowitz, E. "A Life of Jewish Learning: In search of a Theology of Judaism," 28.
[81] Ibid., 106.
[82] Borowitz, E. "The Autonomous Jewish Self," *Modern Judaism*, 39-57.

Reform Movement, looked at the concept of *k'lal yisrael* through the lens of his Reform Jewish background. He suggests that if *k'lal yisrael* had been such an important concept in the 19th Century, progressive Judaism would never have been created. He believes that the creation of Progressive Judaism seriously divided *k'lal yisrael* by defying the accepted community leadership and the established traditions of our people.[83] While Borowitz believed that one of the reasons Reform Judaism was created was the lack of a global feeling of Jewish connectedness, nonetheless, he also described *k'lal yisrael* as a pillar of Judaism and especially Reform Judaism.

Borowitz defined *k'lal yisrael* as the entirety of the community of Israel and notes that the Reform Movement is a part of the collective and that their actions and decisions affect the rest of the Jewish community. He highlights how the Reform Movement's decisions impact the rest of *k'lal yisrael* when he discusses the Reform Movement's decision to affirm patrilineal descent, writing:

> It had a major impact on the rest of the Jewish world which did not recognize the child of only a Jewish father as Jewish. This sentence calls on us to take into account the effect that stands taken by the Reform Movement will have on the rest of the Jewish world–and on our own members as they interact with the rest of the Jewish world. This does not mean that we should avoid taking principled stands that are at odds with the rest of world Jewry–it does mean that we should make every effort to help other Jews understand the reasons for our decisions so they may better empathize with us, even as we need to empathize with the reasons for their opposition. But *k'lal yisrael* is a two-sided commitment. Because all Jews have common problems, a commitment to *k'lal yisrael* may also commit us to be more assertive in urging Jews in other movements to deal with our common problems through solutions that they may find more compatible than ours–but to deal with them, and not hide from them by merely attacking our solutions.[84]

[83] Borowitz, E. "Co-Existing with Orthodox Jews." *Journal of Reform Judaism*, 57.
[84] Borowitz, E. "Commentary on the Principles of Reform Judaism." 1999.

Borowitz's understanding of Jewish peoplehood goes beyond the idea that *k'lal yisrael* is just a concept of a community of individuals tied to one another. He believes that Jewish peoplehood means that there is a connection or a desire for a group of people to connect to God too. He illustrates this idea by saying,

> The concept of *k'lal yisrael* has even less weight in traditional Judaism. Neither the Bible nor Rabbinic literature significantly employs the term. Rather, its recent currency derives from secular Jews who, having abandoned God and Torah, love the Jewish folk enough to make it their supreme value. Believing Jews and here Progressive and Orthodox Jews stand as one will seek the good of the Jewish people not in some law though common denominator but in terms of what they believe God wants of the people.[85]

Borowitz's view on *k'lal yisrael* has a realist perspective as well as a divine leaning. He sees the difficulties defining Jewish peoplehood but he challenges not just Reform Judaism but also the other streams of Judaism, as well as secular Jews, to create a sense of Peoplehood. Beyond his realist approach, Borowitz believes fostering *k'lal yisrael* and the responsibility that Jews have to each other also can lead towards connections with God and strengthen the covenant.

Conclusion

Kook, Soloveitchik, Kaplan, and Borowitz all had different understanding of the definition of *k'lal yisrael* and the importance of groupness to the Jewish people. Their beliefs stemmed from their own religious upbringings, their geographic location, and their beliefs in God and tradition. While their views differed, all four of these theologians cared deeply about the future of the Jewish people. Through their writings and teachings they struggled with how *k'lal yisrael* could come together or be represented through

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www.ccarnet.org.

[85] Borowitz, E. "Co-Existing with Orthodox Jews" *Journal of Reform Judaism*, 57.

connections with mitzvot, God, and Jews from different parts of the world and denominations.

Chapter 3: *K'lal Yisrael* in the 1990s, 2000s, and Today

In the first two chapters of this thesis, the development of the term *k'lal yisrael* was mapped beginning with the Torah, tracking its usage through rabbinic literature, and then investigating its use through Jewish education and theology of the 19th and 20th Century. It was concluded that the idea of Jewish groupness was an ancient concept originating in the Book of Genesis and one that continued to be a major part of Jewish history throughout rabbinic and medieval periods. However, the terms, *k'lal yisrael* and Peoplehood, were not used in the Tankah and used infrequently throughout rabbinic literature and in 19th and 20th Century writings. A search of major English language dictionaries showed that the first time Peoplehood appears in a dictionary was in the 1992.[86]

A major shift beginning after the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel took place with regards to the term *k'lal yisrael*. While the word was not yet in use, the idea behind the concept of Jewish Peoplehood strengthened in the 1950s and 60s, as North American Jews achieved safety and status within American society and saw other Jews around the world who were at risk and in need. After the horrors of the Holocaust, American Jews felt they needed to respond and develop deeper connection with Jews who were not as well as off as they were. In 1978, Arthur Waskow wrote:

> Many Jews believe that in different parts of the world, Jews are under attack largely because they are Jews, and therefore will find their best help from other Jews. This belief may be the most primitive, but is almost certainly the most widely held and most strongly expressed element of a desire by Jew for a strong, united, Jewishly conscious Jewish people.[87]

[86] Kopelowitz, E. and Engleberg, A. "A Framework for Strategic Thinking about Jewish Peoplehood." September 2007, 3.
[87] Waskow, A. "The future of the Jewish Peoplehood." Fall 1978, 8.

While this belief is still present today, it is not the only motive behind building a feeling of *k'lal yisrael* among global Jewry. There was a major surge in the use of *k'lal yisrael,* and an accompanying desire to build Jewish community in the late 1900s and early 2000. This surge can be attributed to a couple of different factors discussed here.

Some suggest that in the 1970s Jewish organizations and congregations lacked "an organized framework for making life meaningful."[88] Jewish Peoplehood became a rallying cry to help engage different constituents and larger segments of the Jewish community in finding meaning in their Jewish life. The emphasis on *k'lal yisrael* was "an attempt by the leadership of major Jewish organizations and movements in the center of the Jewish socio-political and religious spectrum to respond to the loss of compelling of 'middle of the road' ideological vision."[89]

Beyond the need for a new ideology to try to connect Jews on the margins, another factor contributing to the increase in *k'lal yisrael* education and programming took place in the late 1990s. As the world became more globalized, the Jewish community in-turn did so as well. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, wrote:

> David Hume noted that our sense of empathy diminishes as we move outward from the members of our family to our neighbors, our society and the world. Traditionally, our sense of involvement with the fate of others has been in inverse proportion to the distance separating us and them. What has changed is that television and the Internet have effectively abolished distance.[90]

Jewish communities around the world were (and continue to be) in desperate need of

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[88] Kopelowitz, E. and Engleberg, A. "A Framework for Strategic Thinking about Jewish Peoplehood." September 2007, 5.
[89] Ibid., 6.
[90] Sacks, J. The Dignity of Difference, 2003, 30.

Jewish connections, education, role models, and resources. The ease of technology has given organizations and institutions the ability to connect with these communities.

Of course, Jewish communities have been connected and have partnered with each other before these advances in technology. Programs like the b'nai mitzvah twinning that connected bar and bat mitzvah students in North America to Jews in the Former Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the sister congregation movement that dedicated resources and created connections between Reform Congregations in North America and Israel in the early 1990s, demonstrate these connections. However, as the world shrinks through technology, North American Jews know more about Jews in far off places of the world and vice versa. It is easier and faster to connect with these communities, leading to an increase in connecting, partnering, and learning from each other.

Peoplehood is not just a mentality of helping Jews in need; in 2014 it goes beyond that. Kopelowitz and Revivi state, "Prior to 2000, 'Jewish Peoplehood,' as a term, was rarely employed by Jewish organizations or intellectuals, today it is a central concept in strategic planning of an increasing number of leading Jewish organizations."[91] The continued shift towards Jewish Peoplehood work has led to the development of many education programs that bring Jews from different geographic locations together. "A new educational paradigm is emerging which focuses on transnational Jewish Peoplehood and employs bi-directional travel and parallel programming to foster understanding of Jewish life in both Israel and the Diaspora and to support the Jewish identity and reciprocal

[91] Kopelowitz, E. and Revivi, M. "Jewish Peoplehood Change and Challenge." 2008, xiii.

engagement of both populations."[92]

These Peoplehood programs have created a new educational agenda that was not present twenty years ago. Besides the ease of travel that makes these programs possible, other factors have led to the growth of these experimental learning programs. One of the major factors in the growth of these encounter programs is their appeal or "sexy" factor. In a time when Jewish organizations in North America and around the world are looking for ways to connect with the non-affiliated or the "just Jewish" young adults, travel, as well as service, has become that entry point. These programs are engaging, easy to recruit for, help strengthen the Jewish identity of young adults and professionals, and help broaden their sense of the global Jewish world. "For Jewish educators in the American Diaspora the goal is to translate the personal sense of Jewish identity that many students already have into a more global sense of connection and responsibility for Israel and a worldwide Jewish community."[93]

This chapter investigates five Peoplehood programs dedicated to building and fostering *k'lal yisrael*. The methodology, for selecting the programs highlighted in this thesis, was to choose diverse experiences that served different target audiences and geographic locations. These five programs are a sampling that illustrate a wide range of programs focused on building connections around the Jewish world. The commonalities between the five programs include that each program creates an encounter experience between Jews from different geographic locations and invite diverse mix of Jews to participate in the programs. The five programs serve varying age groups including: high

[92] Chertok, F., Mittelberg, D., and Laron, D., "From Mifgash to Peoplehood: The Challenge of Peoplehood Education within an Israeli- American School Twinning Initiative." June 3, 2013, 2.
[93] Ibid.

school students, recent college graduates, young professionals and entrepreneurs, and adults looking to further their education. The target audiences also included North American, European, and Israeli Jews. The programs take place around the world in Europe, Latin America, Israel, Nepal, and "virtually" too.

When selecting these programs, it was also important to note that they provided a range of different techniques and strategies to building *k'lal yisrael.* The five programs have different foci including social action, adventure and text study. Ezra Kopelowitz and Ari Engelberg developed a four-part framework to discuss the different goals of Peoplehood programs. They identified the purpose of Peoplehood programs as either to build obligation, mutual responsibility, social capital, and conversation.[94] While many Peoplehood programs overlap in their frameworks, most have a specific focus when trying to build *k'lal yirsael.* In the five programs highlighted, each illustrate a category of this framework.

K'lal Yisrael **Programming Focused on Obligation**

The first two selected programs, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's (JDC) Insider Trips and the Szarvas Fellowship, focus on Peoplehood through obligation. These travel experiences open the eyes of the North American participants and give insight into the challenges, as well as the opportunities, facing Jewish communities around the world. They create experiences where one feels that they must act to stay connected to the new Jewish communities they experience. North American participants are confronted with the idea that they have the resources, both financial and educational, to remain connected. After the trips, participants remain

[94] Kopelowitz, E. and Engelberg A. "Guide to Jewish Peoplehood." September 2007.

connected to both the travel group and the community through alumni programming that helps them carry out their new-found obligation. These new experiences are wake-up calls for many participants and for the first time they see themselves as resources to Jewish communities around the world.

1. JDC's Global Jewry Insider Trips

The JDC's young leadership branch, Entwine, organizes trips for young professionals all around the world. These trips are "designed with an eye toward the interest of this specific demographic" and "offer a unique opportunity to understand and impact global Jewish and humanitarian challenges around the world."[95] These trips are week long experiences for about twenty North American Jews to learn or work with different global Jewish communities around the world including Argentina, India, and countries of the Former Soviet Union. According to the JDC's website, "Some of the trips are service-based, featuring up to five hours per day of volunteer work to meet needs in international communities. Others focus more heavily on issue-based learning."[96]

Naomi Sage, managing director of Entwine and founder of the Insider trips, explained that her motivation behind these week-long experiences is Jewish Peoplehood. She states, "There is so much meaning in being connected with the larger Jewish people and feeling those ties is so powerful. I recognized for myself how Jewish Peoplehood drives my Jewish identity and I know there are lots of people like me that would find their Jewish identity by being part of the Jewish people and not through another avenue."[97]

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[95] www.jdcentwine.org/trips 3/09/2014
[96] Ibid.
[97] Interview with Naomi Sage 11/15/2013.

The itinerary of the Insider trips for the North American contingent includes joining into the local Jewish community for the entire week. Through meetings with leadership, visits with the elderly, activities with Jewish young professionals from the community, social justice projects, and Shabbat experiences, North American participants learn about the history, the culture, and the needs of that particular Jewish community. Sage measures the success of these trips through surveys and through the impact it has both on the local community and on the North American participants. She shared that individuals who come back from the trips always want to do more. Participants want to stay connected with the community; run educational programs about the community they visited, and go on other trips with the JDC.[98]

These trips impact both participants and the local Jewish community they visit. Sage explained, "For local communities, anecdotally, we hear that young people from those communities had this amazing opportunity and realize that they are part of something larger. For them, they still feel isolated from the larger Jewish world but the feeling that there are Jews in other places who care about me and I can talk and connect that is really powerful."[99] While these week-long trips have a great impact, Sage also knows they are not the end all and be all of fostering *k'lal yisrael*. They are "a spark" that the JDC hopes ignites individuals' feelings as part of the greater Jewish world. The greatest challenge is that these trips are time limited and their hope is that deep connections are made.

For Sage, "*k'lal yisrael* means that we are more than a religion- that we are part of people. We are a people that are bound together by time and space, bound together by our

[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

history, through our collective memory, and through living today as a people. And with that comes responsibility for each other. I feel a responsibility to take care of my family."[100] This feeling is what she hopes is created on these week long trips to Jewish communities around the world.

2. The North American Szarvas Fellowship

The Szarvas Fellowship is a North American program for high school aged students, who are selected to spend two weeks at the Szarvas Summer Camp in Hungary. The Szarvas summer camp is an international Jewish youth camp founded by the JDC in 1990. The camp is for Jewish youth from all over world, mostly Central and Eastern European countries, who spend the summer participating in camp activities and building and learning about their Jewish identity. Szarvas encourages meaningful interactions and mutual understanding between youth from around the world.[101]

The North American Szarvas fellows arrive at camp with their peers from different countries, ready to learn from and share with one another. By joining together in classic summer camp activities, group dialogue, and identity workshops, participants are able to build relationships in a relaxed, fun, environment.[102] Seth Bronstein, the director of the fellowship program, says, "The twelve days are really intense. The North Americans are exposed to things all day long, being asked some really tough questions, in engaging in dialogue in difficult issues, and laugh and go crazy because we are in camp. All this rolled up in one allows the experience to be transformational."[103]

The fellowship provides participants with the unique opportunity to gain a first-

[100] Ibid.
[101] www.szarvascamp.eu 3/09/2014
[102] www.szarvasfellowship.org 3/09/2014.
[103] Interview with Seth Bronstein 12/9/2013.

hand understanding of their own roots, as well as the backgrounds and experiences of their peers from other countries. They share in Jewish learning and Shabbat celebrations, as well as conversations about what it means to be a Jewish teenager in their respective countries. Bronstein opines, that the "number one goal is to allow the North Americans to feel connected to global Jewish people. This is not a service learning trip; this is trip for forming one's own Jewish identity and building a feeling of connectedness. There is no better setting for American Jews to experience and learn about their personal Jewish identity and heritage than in Europe itself."[104]

One of the challenges of the program is that the North American fellows have a greater understanding of Judaism than the Szarvas campers and sometimes even the counselors, who are usually camp alumni. For many of the campers, this is the first time they are doing anything Jewish, so the education level is sometimes too imbalanced for the North American participants. While this is a challenge, it is also eye opening for the North American fellows. Bronstein believes that this is why the program is so successful.

Bronstein agrees that measuring how successful the program is in building *k'lal yisrael* is difficult. Though it can be measured alternatively through surveys and evaluations, like other program directors interviewed, he believes that the best data is qualitative – demonstrated by the relationship building and future of alumni activities and involvement.[105] The fellowship is successful if alumni continue to engage in the Jewish world with a focus towards Peoplehood. The fellowship has done its job, if, when participants hear about something happening with Szarvas or Jews around the world and

[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

feel like they want to engage and be present.[106] For Bronstein, this fellowship is all about *k'lal yisrael*.

> I want participants to see the Jewish world as a larger whole. In other words, it is not about the different fractions that we have… but in order to be *k'lal yisrael*, you have to be able to conveniently critique one another. We must see ourselves in the same covenant and we are able to critique one another. *K'lal yisrael* is about the understanding, the deep genuine belief, that every Jew you meet is part of that covenant, and you feel a need to help that person become engaged, finding that spark of connectedness.[107]

K'lal Yisrael **Programming Focused on Mutual Responsibility**

The third program, Tevel b'Tzedek is focused on Peoplehood through mutual responsibility. A core component of this program is bring together Jews from different geographic locations to participate in community service projects in a non-Jewish location. Through this program the Jewish participants create a shared vision of the work that they need to do. By developing this shared vision, the program builds mutual responsibility between the Jewish communities from different geographic locations. At the worksite, participants learn through Jewish values and texts about their responsibility to act, while simultaneously working together to make this world a better place.

3. Tevel b'Tzedek

Tevel b'Tzedek, the Earth-in Justice, is an Israel-based non-profit organization promoting social and environmental justice by creating a community of Israeli and Diaspora Jews who "work together with impoverished communities to enhance their livelihood, capacity, and wellbeing" from a place of deep commitment to the "Jewish people and its ethical and spiritual traditions."[108] In this six to twelve month fellowship,

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[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] http://www.tevelbtzedek.org/tevel-fellowship-2 3/11/2014.

Jews from Israel and around the world join together as one group in Nepal, work directly with Nepali people on an environmental project. The belief of Tevel b'Tzedek is that "human beings can only reach the realization of their unique self within community, in friendship and fellowship with others. Living, learning and working together with others opens our hearts, activates our souls, and challenges our minds."[109]

During the Tevel b'Tzedek fellowship, the Jewish participants live together, work together on projects in the local community, participate in dialogue sessions, and celebrate Shabbat and holidays. Tevel b'Tzedek believes that "communities are the basic component through which social change can occur. Alone we have just a little strength—together we can do so much more."[110] Micha Odenheimer, the founding director of Tevel b'Tzedek, had two purposes in mind vis vis the Jewish people in creating this program. First, he wanted to connect more Jews and Israelis together in order to create a broader perspective of global responsibility. Secondly, he wanted to stretch Judaism in the direction of universalism but in a way that grounds it in the strong identity of the Jewish people.[111]

Odenheimer sees Tevel b'Tzedek successful in building *k'lal yisrael*, though he notes it is a hard concept to measure. Similarly to the Szarvas Fellowship to measure the program's success, he relies on alumni stories. He illustrated that alumni of Tevel b'Tzedek are more involved in Jewish life, many more are now connected with social service organizations, and most of the participants remain connected to their Jewish peers

[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Interview with Micha Odenheimer 11/20/2013

around the world.[112] He even joked that he has had some North American and Israeli marriages from the program too. What would be more successful than that?[113]

He believes that one of the greatest strengths of the program in building a feeling of a larger Jewish people is that Americans and European Jews meet Israeli Jews on neutral ground. In other programs, a group has a geographic advantage but because it is the first time to Nepal for all participants it is a new experience for everyone. This takes everyone out of their comfort zones, makes everyone a little vulnerable, and forces the group to rely on each other even more. Odenheimer believes "that if *k'lal yisrael* has a soul, it is the collective aspirations of the Jewish people."[114] He created this program so Jews from around the world could contribute to a shared vision to improve the world and create warmth and excitement about the Jewish people together.

K'lal Yisrael **Programming Focused on Social Capital**

The fourth program, Junction, focuses on Peoplehood through social capital. Kopelowitz and Engelberg write, "Social capital speaks to the knowledge, resources and institutions that enable individuals to connect with others to create and maintain community."[115] Junction concentrates on: building relational networks; helping Jews from different countries connect to build Jewish identity; and developing business teams to create a better organization, project, or product.

4. Junction

Junction is a European organization for Jewish professionals, entrepreneurs, thinkers, artists and innovators across Europe. Every six months, Junction holds a

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Kopelowitz, E. and Engelberg A. "Guide to Jewish Peoplehood." September 2007.

networking conference for Jews in their late 20s – 40s. The ultimate goal of Junction is to serve as a platform for European Jews to build bridges professionally, socially, and Jewishly. Jews from all over Europe, as well as Israel and sometimes North America, join together for five days of trainings, speakers, networking, Jewish learning sessions and a pluralistic Shabbat experience. The mission of Junction is "bringing together Jewish movers and shakers from different walks of life and professional backgrounds, to create an exclusive European crossroads for a new generation."[116]

When interviewing Lela Sadikario, a Junction organizer, she explained that the idea of Junction came to her when she saw the vast differences between Western and Eastern European Jews. Many young Western European Jews have a strong Jewish backgrounds, attended Jewish schools, and affiliate with synagogues and Jewish organizations. In contrast, most young Eastern European Jews either did not know they were Jewish or lacked the resources to learn about what being Jewish might mean. Sadikario believed that the Junction conference was a solution to narrow the gap between European Jewry. Junction brings young professionals, who are starting their careers together to talk about how to improve their business, start-ups, and also to discuss their Jewish identity and how it relates to their work.[117] Sadikario strongly states that bringing Jews together to network can serve as an entry point into building *k'lal yisrael* and an individual's personal Jewish identity.

Sadikario explained, "Nothing is better than connecting two Jewish individuals, one from Macedonia and another one from Paris, and bringing them together at Junction to create a new business idea or start-up. The work they do together now becomes Jewish

[116] www.openjewishnetwork.org 3/13/2014.
[117] Interview with Lela Sadikario. 1/15/2014.

work as we connect them through their Jewish identity."[118] Beyond connecting business people together, Junction engages Jews from all around the world in deep discussions about what it means to be Jewish. The Junction staff knows that there is no real formula for building Jewish peoplehood, but they strongly believe that sharing one's Jewish story is key.

When asked how she would define *k'lal yisrael,* Sadikario answered, "Being aware. Being knowledgeable about each other's existence and past, and about supporting each other's future."[119] She believes that this is happening at Junction. While they have quantitative data that shows the number of people that participate in another Junction conference is above fifty percent, Sadikario believes that stories reveal more about the success of building *k'lal yisrael*. She shared a story of a Junction participant who told her that "he went to Junction as an Israeli and he came back as a Jew. He did not know what it meant to be a Jew and at Junction he found a spiritual connection with other young Jews from all over the world."[120]

It is interesting to note that there are an extremely limited number of Peoplehood programs that are run through European organizations or are exclusively for European Jews. Most Peopleood programs are organized by American or Israeli organizations. The small numbers of programs based in Europe or the ones targeted towards European audience tend to be more about framing Jewish identity in Europe and working with Europeans to build stronger Jewish communities. There is less of a global perspective of *k'lal yisrael* and more of a Euro-centric focus. This mentality can be understood because

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.

of the higher rates of anti-Semitism in Europe, the greater lack of resources for these communities, and the need to strengthen their own community before building the larger global Jewish world.

***K'lal Yisrael* Programming focused on Conversation**

The last program, Project Zug, builds on the understanding of Peoplehood through conversation. Project Zug stresses the importance of a conversation between Jews and Torah as an important common resource for deepening the Jewish conversation. Not just the five books of Moses, but the idea that deep conversation can be around Jewish texts, history, and philosophy too. To build Peoplehood, programs can use our ancient and modern texts in conversation, a strategy that appears less utilized than other techniques. In order to be successful in this, Geller writes, "the first step is to engage Jews in the conversation. The second step is to lift up the dimensions of Peoplehood that deepen the conversation around Torah' and it must be made more transparent that Torah study is not just about personal growth… but about being connected to a community of other people who also study Torah."[121]

5. Project Zug

Project Zug is a grassroots effort led by a team of Israeli and American Jews seeking to strengthen relationships between Jewish communities across the globe. The program accomplishes this by combining "the ancient Jewish method of '*hevruta*' with modern technology of distance learning," to bring Jewish communities together.[122] In its pilot year in 2013, Project Zug included participants from Israel and the United States. As

[121] Geller, L. "A New Understanding of Peoplehood: The Jewish Conversation." in *Jewish Peoplehood: Change and Challenge*. 2008, 78-86.
[122] www.projectzug.com 3/09/2014

the program grows, the goal is to bring together Jews from all over the world for deep study on topics of their choosing. Course options range from rabbinic text to philosophy to current events in Israel. Three of the courses offered this year include: 1) "Rumors of Revelation: Reflections on the Torah, and its ability to Unite and Divide Jews; " 2) "Blueprint: Place, Space, Structure and Architecture in Ancient and Contemporary Jewish Expression;" and 3) "Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and The Roots of Activism.[123]

Benjamin Ross, the co-founder of Project Zug, states that the ultimate goal of the program is to bring different Jewish communities together through study instead of the more common ways of service and travel. Technology is the vehicle to accomplish this goal. He believes that Jewish communities have much to offer each other, and Project Zug can "create pathways to engage one another at a deeper level, reflecting on the cycle of our lives, Shabbat, and the holidays."[124] The conversations that the pairs have are not only about the courses, but also about topics that lead to building relationships and to one-to-one dialoguing about texts, identity, culture, and traditions. Ross states, "this is how we build Jewish Peoplehood, through intellectual and authentic conversations."[125]

Project Zug is a groundbreaking program, and the UJA-Federation is strongly monitoring the program's results to see if it can develop this sense of Peoplehood. Among those in the first cohort, forty-seven of the fifty pairs completed the enrolled courses.[126] Ross sees this as a great success and the feedback from the *hevruta* has been

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[123] Ibid.
[124] www.huc.edu/news/2013/11/18/project-zug-receives-funding-uja-federation-new-york-and-jewish-agency-israel 3/11/2014.
[125] Interview with Benjamin Ross 2/27/2014.
[126] Ibid.

very positive. Ross realizes that the true measure of the success of these virtual classrooms, with regards to fostering Jewish connections, will only be seen in a couple of years. He is interested to see if participants remain connected to their *hevruta* and if their global perspectives of Jewish communities shift. Ross explains that there are so many Jews that feel really alone, and technology can be a pathway to connecting them to the primacy of relationships with other Jewish individuals.[127]

Analysis of the Peoplehood Programs

"Peoplehood demands that our attachments to each other serve a greater purpose than our own, our family's, or even our immediate community's well-being; and that those attachments be part of a multi-faith, multicultural effort to make a better place for all its inhabitants."[128] These five programs - JDC's Insider Trips, the Szarvas Fellowship, Tevel B'Tzedek, Junction and Project Zug bring Jews together from different walks of life in order to build Jewish Peoplehood. All of these programs conduct their work through unique lenses, yet their strategies have all been successful in developing a feeling of greater Jewish Peoplehood for their participants. It is interesting to note, that like definitions of *k'lal yisrael* throughout rabbinic literature, each of these programs adds a layer to what it means to be part of a Jewish people, to build obligations, mutual responsibility, social capital, and conversations. Steven Cohen writes that "among its [Jewish Peoplehood] key elements are: a sense of kinship and common descent, an interlinked history, shared threats, and ultimately a shared destiny. Correlatively, Jews

[127] Kaminer, M. "Project Zug Promotes Jewish Textual Study Using Internet Video Technology." The Jewish Daily Forward. February 7, 2014.
[128] Ehrenkrantz, D. "The Primacy of Peoplehood." Contact Magazine. Spring 2008. p. 3

have also believed that they resemble one another."[129]

Can Peoplehood be measured?

> The concept of Jewish Peoplehood is so broad and encompassing that, perhaps, any effort to measure it and reduce it to quantifiable and comparable terms is destined to be inadequate. But that suggests we need to be bolder in developing ways of thinking that both express what we mean by peoplehood and can be operationalized to assess how it functions. As Kurt Lewin famously said, 'there is nothing so practical as a good theory.' We need better theory and with it will come the means to understand how to reach our aspiration ideal of Jewish peoplehood.[130]

Throughout the conversations with different organizers of the Peoplehood programs, the question that was hardest to answer was, "Is the work of developing *k'lal yisrael* measurable?" Many of the Peoplehood programs survey participants at the end of this experience to gauge their growth and how their ideas of the global Jewish community shifted. Two organizations reached out to alumni six months and one year later to see how the program impacted their current ideas and plans. Yet, rather than sharing data, for the most part, program directors shared individual stories to demonstrate the effects of the programs. These stories illustrated continued relationships with a new Jewish community or stories of participants who joined a service-corps to continue the work they started on their Peoplehood experience.

Shlomo Ravid, the director of the Center for Jewish Peoplehood education, notes that a successful Peoplehood program creates a spark. The spark leaves the individual wanting to know more, do more, and continue to connect with other Jews. Moreover, a successful Peoplehood program develops Jews who are responsive in times of crisis but

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[129] Cohen, S. JAFI Consultation on Jewish Community and Peoplehood. 2003, 10.
[130] Saxe, L. and Phillips, B. "Jewish Peoplehood: Greater Than the Sum of its Parts," Peoplehood Papers 4. October 2009, 34.

also who are actively oriented towards a Peoplehood consciousness.[131] Grant and Ravid write, "A Peoplehood consciousness is a multi-layered endeavor that includes developing both an emotional and intellectual connection to the idea and reality of the Jewish People and practical contexts for Jews to act on behalf or as part of Jewish collective."[132] While surveys can measure Peoplehood consciousness, stories and anecdotes of participants are key in determining if these programs are successful in creating participants who are emotionally and intellectually connected.

Beyond developing a Peoplehood consciousness, Grant and Ravid state, "A graduate of successful Peoplehood educational process feels personally responsible for the future of the Jewish people and seeks ways to act upon that conviction."[133] To create a successful Peoplehood program, participants not only have to be actively engaged but also have to be committed. Engagement is the easy part. Engagement in a Peoplehood programs looks like in Project Zug studying with your *hevruta* member for the entire course, or on a JDC Insider trip fully participating in a new Shabbat experience in the Former Soviet Union. However, there is a difference between engagement and commitments. Grant and Ravid further state, "Commitments are developed through a process of knowledge acquisition, compelling experiences, critical reflection, and emotional connection that ultimately lead to new forms of engagements."[134]

If done correctly a Peoplehood program, gives opportunities for participants not only to learn and grow during the experience but also to have a plan to stay committed

[131] Interview with Shlomo Ravid. 12/12/2013.
[132] Grant, L. and Ravid S. "Creating a Sustainable Sense of Peoplehood: Towards a pedagogy of commitment." Jewish Educational Leadership: Teaching for Commitment. Volume 9:2 Winter 2011, 5.
[133] Ibid., 4.
[134] Ibid.

after the experience is over. Commitment looks different for each highlighted program. For Junction, it is the commitment to work with another Jewish professional in partnership or to continue to network with global Jews and discuss how Judaism impacts their professional careers. For alumni of Insider Trips and Szarvas Fellowship, it is a commitment to run educational programs and lesson for their peers back in their home city and teach about the community they visited, sharing insight into the global Jewish world. For Tevel b'Tzedek, commitment for alumni looks like continued dialogue with their peers who joined them in the field and creating outlets to continue their environmental project. For Project Zug, commitment looks like a desire to continue to learn and remain connected with your learner and to create new opportunities to study.

Pillars to creating Successful Peoplehood Programs

After analyzing the five programs highlighted in this thesis and reading articles on what successful Peoplehood work looks like, I have developed three key pillars in creating a strong peoplehood experience. For a program to be successful between Jewish communities around the world, I believe that: 1) Participants need to be out of their comfort zone; 2) There needs to be a plan for further commitment after the experience; and 3) These experiences need to be based on authentic conversations and interactions with global Jews.

1. Going out of the Comfort Zone

Educators know that one of the best ways to learn is when a learner is out of his/her comfort zone. When this happens, a learner is open to personal growth and sharing and engaging in new ideas. For me, I have had the most transformative Peoplehood experiences when I have been with a new community, in a far off country,

and where I feel a bit uncomfortable. When I am unfamiliar with my surroundings, I not only rely more on the community I am with but also I am more open to looking into myself and examining the feelings I'm experiencing.

2. A Commitment Plan

After a transformative experience on the ground, Peoplehood experiences can fall flat if there is no thought out extensions to the programs. If the program does not provide opportunities for alumni to remain connected, then the week-long trip, the three-month fellowship, or the year long conversations become finite experiences. A strong Peoplehood program is visionary in its thinking and is practical in its plans to provide alumni with opportunities to continue their powerful journey. These opportunities do not need to be another trip; they can be educational seminars, phone conferences, or other ways that learners can stay connected to each other and the community that they were a part of. One-shot programs are good, but developing a Jewish Peoplehood consciousness can only be done through ongoing learning and experience.

3. The Importance of Authenticity

The last tenet of creating a successful Peoplehood program is probably the most obvious but also the most important. Authentic relationships and conversations need to happen during the program. I have been a participant on a program sitting down with a fellow Jew from a different global community, and realized that my partner did not want to be in the room. There was no way that I was going to build an authentic relationship with him when his youth advisor forced him to join the American group for a study session. Authentic conversations and relationships are not hour-long meet-ups. Instead, they are thoughtfully planned interactions and dialogue between different Jewish

individuals. An example of these authentic relationships is over a Shabbat experience, where both participants share their feelings, their struggles, and their beliefs on Shabbat, God, Israel, or their own Jewish identity. Authentic relationships are created when both partners have a desire to learn from each other and share their own passions. Without these conversations, there is little chance that we can build a mutual feeling of *k'lal yisrael.*

Conclusion

> "My assumption is that while Peoplehood is a vague and complicated concept, deep down inside we actually understand it, some simply feel it. While we may have issues articulating exactly what it means (how many of us can articulate the social contract that constitutes our social structures?), many of us are able to embrace a sense of belonging to a people that is meaningful, reasonably coherent and one that frames significant parts of our lives as members of the collective. Some of us do it because we feel 'we have gone a long way together' and Jews are responsible for each other. Others because they believe the Jewish People has a unique role and capacity in making this world better. Some believe that "Ahavat Israel" is a religious command and others see the People as their extended family."[135]

When I traveled to Almaty, Kazakhstan, I felt that deep down sense of Peoplehood that Ravid describes above. I stood before fifteen Kazakhstani young adults, as I led a Joint Distribution Committee mission to Almaty, and held high a havdalah candle. It was the first havdalah ceremony that many of these young Jews had ever experienced, and they were excited to learn more about Judaism. During this trip to Kazakhstan and trips to other Jewish communities around the world, I have realized that world Jewry is in desperate need of connections. The Jewish world abroad, as well as the Jewish community in North America, is strengthened by the concept of the greater Jewish people.

When I began writing this thesis, I wanted to tackle the history and the meaning behind the term *k'lal yisrael*. Through my work with different Jewish communities in the United States and around the world, I have heard many people use this term, but I felt that we did not have a common definition for it. I agree with Gedzelman when he writes, "When peoplehood is not defined substantively, its meaning is left to speculation that can justifiably assume a narrow xenophobia, tribalism, even racism on the part of those who

[135] Ravid, S. "What is Jewish Peoplehood?" United Jewish Communities. November, 2007, 1.

champion the idea of Jewish People."[136]

Like Gedzelman, when beginning this process, I thought that we needed to develop one definition of *k'lal yisrael.* I believed that in order for the Jewish community to foster this sense of *k'lal yisrael*, we needed to be on the same page with what we were trying to create. Yet, after analysis of rabbinic texts, investigation of Jewish theologians, and discussions with individuals organizing Peoplehood programs around the globe, I have changed my opinion. *K'lal yisrael* definitions should be personal because that is what ignites people to foster, build, and create interconnected Jewish communities.

While the term was used sporadically throughout rabbinic literature and not at all in the Tanakh, the framework and key pillars of *k'lal yisrael* and Jewish Peoplehood have developed over time. *K'lal yisrael* went beyond a group of Jews together in one geographic area. It meant communities that shared vision and passion, a group that felt responsible for the deeds and misdeeds of others, and a people that felt connected through tradition, ritual, and customs. These are all feelings that continue to ring true when people define *k'lal yisrael* today.

An aspect of *k'lal yisrael* that I did not think about before this thesis was the greater idea of covenant and *k'lal yisrael*'s relationship with God. Kook, Soloveitchik, Kaplan, and Borowitz all highlighted the importance of thinking about the relationship with God when creating a sense of *k'lal yisrael*. Each theologian highlighted that bringing Jewish communities together and having people feel the importance of a larger Jewish world was essential; each felt it should be done through the lens of connecting with the Divine. The greater purpose of creating a feeling of *k'lal yisrael* for Jews is to

[136] Gedzelman, D. "The Idea of the Jewish People." Contact Magazine. Spring 2008, 6.

help build avenues to connect with God and to understand that the Jewish community has a covenant with each other and also God.

My discussions with individuals who are developing Peoplehood programs inspired me. Not only was I inspired by their work of connecting Jews from different parts of the world, but also by their thoughtful strategies to build a Peoplehood consciousness. Through my conversations, it was evident that the majority of alumni from these programs feel a stronger and deeper sense of connection to the larger Jewish world. These programs broadened my perspective of how one can build Peoplehood, from text studies, to travel, to social justice programs, to Shabbat and holidays observance.

This thesis has shaped my definition of *k'lal yisrael*. I believe *k'lal yisrael* is a covenant that Jews have with other Jews all around the world, a covenant where we carry out a shared vision of mutual responsibility to deepen and strengthen our connections to each other, to our tradition, and to God. My hope is that I can continue to reinforce this feeling of *k'lal yisrael* within myself, and in so doing, in the congregations that I am lucky to serve, and for the larger Jewish world.

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