PRACTICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD:

A CASE STUDY OF PROFESSIONALS AT THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF GREATER LOS ANGELES

By

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Abstract

The term "Jewish Peoplehood" is frequently used in program descriptions and fundraising pitches, but what does it mean? Despite its frequent use, few Jewish scholars, let alone professionals or laity, agree on its definition. While academics debate its meaning in the abstract, Jewish communal professionals engage with Jewish Peoplehood on a daily basis throughout the natural course of their work. This led me to wonder, how do professionals in the field understand Jewish Peoplehood?

In an effort to explore this question, I selected the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles as a case study, interviewing nine employees across the organization's structure and hierarchy. While no single understanding of Jewish Peoplehood was expressed, it became clear that participants' responses could be classified into three dimensions: emotive, cognitive and demonstrative. When viewed through this heuristic, common threads can be found across the disparate answers of the study's participants. Key to the emotive dimension were the senses of belonging, connectedness, and responsibility. The cognitive dimension incorporated value statements and mindsets concerning community, diversity, education, and service. The demonstrative dimension was characterized by acts of learning and contribution, as well as by Jewish folkways and practices.

The study notes that professionals rarely engage intellectually with conceptions of Jewish Peoplehood, despite working in an environment and field conducive to such inquiry. As such, I recommend that Jewish nonprofit organizations dedicate resources to create opportunities for their employees to grapple with the concept of Jewish Peoplehood. In doing so, organizations can help professionals find deeper meaning in their work, prevent Peoplehood from becoming jargon, and promote a Peoplehood-based paradigm for Jewish belonging. I further recommend

that all Jews — scholars, professionals, and laity — continue to invest in immersive Jewish experiences where all three dimensions of peoplehood can be found, like summer camp, Israel trips, and community *Shabbatonim*.

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Introduction and Literature Review

What does Jewish Peoplehood mean? A feeling of warmth and connection? A particular experience? A commitment to a shared destiny? A fundraising buzzword? None of the above? With its origins in 1920s and 30s America, 'Jewish Peoplehood' is an evolving concept with many definitions. Over the past decade, there has been an increasing effort to not only define and describe Jewish Peoplehood, but also to elevate Jewish Peoplehood as a new paradigm for understanding Jewish authenticity and identity formation.

In some areas of Jewish communal life, there is a sense that the Jewish People is slowly breaking apart. The external factors that once kept the Jewish People together have all but eroded in the 21st century and have been replaced, in America in particular, by "a host of assimilating and individualizing forces that allowed for personalization and connection outside of a set of communally established norms" ("Conceptual: What is Peoplehood?," 2014). Today, for better and for worse, every Jew is a "Jew by choice" (Solomon, 2014, p. 38).

In the absence of the external forces that once defined authentic Jewish identity and expression, internal paradigms have arisen to take their place. Now Jewish authenticity is increasingly determined by adherence to various ideological frameworks, such as denominationalism or nationalism. However, these Jewish ideologies, when taken to an extreme, can begin to resemble a type of ideological chauvinism. This threatens the Jewish People from within and strains the bonds that hold our people together, putting us at risk of disintegration.

Ideology alone need not be a concern and is simply (perhaps importantly) "a statement about the relationship between values," indicating "which values fit together, and which don't" and "which values seem to conflict with one another, and how this apparent conflict might be resolved" (Aron, 2015). Jewish ideologies, therefore, constitute frameworks for engaging with

the key elements that make the Jews a people – our shared history, language, geography, religion, and culture – and allow us a measure of certainty and authenticity in our own Jewish identities.

Chauvinism, "*undue* partiality or attachment to a group or place to which one belongs or has belonged," (Merriam-Webster, 2015) is the real culprit. Sadly, the roots of Jewish ideological chauvinism are often well-intentioned efforts to promote group cohesion, enhance identity formation, and support the Jewish People through activities such as summer camps, religious schools, youth movements, and more. All of these endeavors, and those like them, generate social capital, the "connections among individuals" and the "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Smith, 2009). Social capital, then, is a desirable resource when attempting to create a cohesive community.

Unfortunately, these efforts primarily create *bonding* social capital, which "may be more inward looking and have a tendency to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups" (2009). As a result, ideological chauvinism comes to resemble dogma, "a belief or set of beliefs that is accepted by the members of a group without being questioned or doubted," (Merriam-Webster, 2015) and generates strict adherence to an externally composed and imposed ideology which is assumed to be categorically true. Thus we witness the birth of Jewish ideological chauvinism that enforces a rigid conception of Jewish authenticity, which in turn promotes exclusivity, requires unquestioned belief, imposes certainty, stifles innovation, and creates crises of "identity" throughout the Jewish People.

In contrast, a paradigm for Jewish authenticity that is based on Jewish Peoplehood allows for an elevation and integration of all of the robust elements that make up the Jewish People, permitting a much broader understanding of what constitutes legitimate Jewish belief and

practice. Instead of a system that discourages divergent thinking and stifles innovation, a Jewish Peoplehood-based paradigm favors openness and dialogue. It encourages Jews of diverse backgrounds and beliefs to wrestle with the shared elements that make the Jews a people alongside one another, both as individuals and as a community.

This capstone thesis is based on my desire to understand how Jewish professionals understand Jewish Peoplehood and what workplace conversations, if any, currently take place around the concept. My hypothesis is that I expect participants to possess an understanding of what Jewish Peoplehood means to them, but that no single understanding of Jewish Peoplehood will emerge. I predict that responses will vary widely, and because of this I will seek to examine how participants' responses may cluster around discrete values or concepts, and what, if any, underlying threads connect each different understanding.

These questions are important to answer for several reasons. Assuming that underlying dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood can be found, agencies can institute programs to develop and strengthen these dimensions among their employees and constituencies. By extension, agencies which already are doing a good job promoting these dimensions can be models for other organizations and initiatives that seek to promote a peoplehood-based paradigm of Jewish authenticity. Since these are employees of Jewish nonprofits, they are already in a position to put their newfound knowledge and connections into practice, strengthening the presence of the peoplehood paradigm in their place of work, with their lay leadership and constituencies, and within the communities they serve.

Additionally, this research attempts to determine to what extent conversations about Jewish Peoplehood take place outside of Jewish academia; is Jewish Peoplehood just an intellectual construct or does it have relevance to the greater Jewish populace? Peoplehood

scholar Erica Brown worries that, "the very intellectual nature of the conversation has meant that it has lost traction within Jewish communal organizations and has stayed largely in the Academy, where its impact is least significant" (2014, p. 12). Interviewing Jewish nonprofit professionals will provide an indication of how the concept of Jewish Peoplehood is understood in a non-academic, practical setting.

This capstone thesis also addresses an acknowledged gap in the research surrounding Jewish Peoplehood. Dr. Ezra Kopelowitz and Ari Engelberg note in their position paper, "A Framework for Strategic Thinking About Jewish Peoplehood," that aside from anecdotal evidence, "little research exists" regarding Jewish leaders who have adopted a peoplehood focus (2008, p. 7). They assert that, "where there is certainty about the meaning of Jewish life, the concept of Jewish Peoplehood is not used as an organizing concept" (p. 7). My research tests this claim.

I chose this topic because I am dismayed by the current paradigm that frames Jewish authenticity and identity formation. A system that favors ideological chauvinism "leads to an overemphasis of one aspect of the Jewish experience or another" and divides the Jewish People into artificial sub-groups that insist theirs is the only right way express a commitment to the people (Engelberg & Kopelowitz, 2008, p. 11). As a result, Jewish authenticity is primarily understood through the lens of religious observance or nationalism, both of which ignore other key elements that together embody the robustness of Jewish life. Additionally, Jews who do not fall neatly onto either of these two dominant spectra, like those who possess strong connections to other elements of Jewish life, may feel as if they do not "belong" and run the risk of drifting away from the people entirely. A peoplehood-based paradigm, on the other hand, would foster an environment in which all aspects of Jewish life are valued, and Jewish authenticity would be determined not by adherence to strict ideology, but instead by the nature and depth of the relationship to the elements that define Jewish life. Such an orientation would create a system

that simultaneously respects and validates the individual experience while creating a framework that emphasizes the individual's relationship to the people.

This topic is also important to me because I am concerned that the Jewish People may be losing a sense of direction or purpose. For many, the current goal of the Jewish People seems to be simply survival. I do not believe that this is sufficient. I would like to see the Jewish People thrive, not just survive, and to live up to its mission to be "a light unto the nations." Yet, there is no single right way to carry out this mission. A framework for Jewish authenticity and identity formation based in Jewish Peoplehood would allow for the discovery of multiple authentic Jewish purposes, around which Jews could rally, impacting the world for good.

Furthermore, this research questions the use of Jewish Peoplehood as a fundraising or programmatic buzzword, devoid of deep meaning and substance. The concept of Jewish Peoplehood could easily become jargon, so overused that it will lose the unifying power that it possesses, and the Jewish People will continue to drift apart.

Peoplehood is a challenging concept for Jews and non-Jews alike. A search for the term 'peoplehood' on Wikipedia results in "The page 'Peoplehood' does not exist." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Search?search=peoplehood&go=Go). Interestingly, the first suggested search result on Wikipedia following this response is the entry "Jewish peoplehood," with a significant number of the following results covering a variety of Jewish-related topics. When searching Google, a similar phenomenon occurs, with the Wikipedia article on Jewish Peoplehood as the first result.

Sociologists Julia Chuang and John Lie define peoplehood as, "the inclusionary and involuntary identity of a territorially based group with a putatively distinct way of life" which "encompasses groups usually classified separately under the categories 'race,' 'ethnicity,' and

'nation'" (2008, p. 1035). They add that, "[p]eoplehood is characterized by both common descent—a shared sense of genealogy and geography—and contemporary commonality such as language, religion, culture, and/or consciousness" (p. 1035).

Jewish scholar Gideon Shimoni offers a similar definition. He notes that peoplehood is the state of being a people, much like childhood is that state of being a child (Shimoni, 2013). A people is a defined 'ethnic group,' and an ethic group, or ethnicity, is a group of people who share a primary common origin story, as well as any combination of shared language, location, religion, and cultural practices (2013). While the Jewish People possesses all of these traits — an origin story as presented in the *Tanakh*; a language, Hebrew; a location, the Land of Israel; a religion, Judaism; and cultural practices — there is in reality extensive variation within each of these five categories.

As such, defining Jewish Peoplehood has proven to be a challenge. While a sense of belonging to the Jewish People has existed for over two millennia, Jewish Peoplehood is a modern concept. As Professor Noam Pianko notes in his recent talk entitled, "Does Jewish Peoplehood Have a Future?", the idea of the Jews as a discrete people first begins to take shape in the beginning of the 20th century largely as a result of the efforts of Theodor Herzl and Mordechai Kaplan (2015). The conception of Jewish Peoplehood exploded in popularity during the 1940s as the answer to the question, "How do you be both a national group AND an American citizen?" (2015).

Much like the Jewish People has evolved over time, so too has the definition of Jewish Peoplehood. Jewish scholars offer many answers to the question, "What is Jewish Peoplehood?" Their responses can be categorized based on their emphasis of either the *content* of Jewish Peoplehood, those things that Jews have in common (such as a shared past, present, and future),

or the *form*, those frameworks that exist to bring disparate Jews together (such as intentional dialogue and experience).

Scholars who focus on the content of Jewish Peoplehood "tend to look for the common resources and obligations that people draw on when they join a community or are members of a society" (Kopelowitz & Engelberg, 2007, p. 14). These scholars seek to emphasize those shared elements of the Jewish People and collective Jewish belonging. For Anna Michel, Program Director at JCC Global, the heart of Jewish Peoplehood rests in "our traditions, history, values, culture, customs and everything that we define as part of our Jewish lives" (2014, p. 26). Shauna Waltman, Executive Director of UJA's Community Connect, echoes this sentiment, sharing her belief that, "[p]eoplehood is feeling a part of […] a collective history, a shared tradition and culture, a nation held together by timeless values" (2014, p. 44). These scholars envision Jewish Peoplehood to be a concept with depth of meaning that can be harnessed for educational and programmatic purposes. Dr. Alex Sinclair, Director of Programs in Israel for the Jewish Theological Seminary, asserts that, "[b]eing more explicit about the content of Jewish Peoplehood will propel it from being a nice but somewhat amorphous term into a robust and compelling educational framework for our work as Jewish educators and communal professionals" (2014, p. 37).

Conversely, scholars who focus on the on the form of Jewish Peoplehood celebrate the ideal of conversation, "the ability of Jews of different types to meet and talk with one another," with the act of talking being more important than the content of the conversation (Kopelowitz & Engelberg, 2007, p. 17). They are less concerned with determining a concrete definition of Jewish Peoplehood, and instead emphasize experiences that create meaningful relationships between disparate Jews. As David Bryfman notes, "[a]t the end of the day maybe it is not the

unified terminology that we need, but the accumulation of all of our individual stories that will determine who we are, and what this Jewish Peoplehood enterprise is ultimately all about" (2014, p. 15). "Relationships define and strengthen Jewish Peoplehood," according to Rachel Gildiner, Director of Gather the Jews, adding that, "[w]e must transcend traditional boundaries such as background, education, or level of observance, and come to deeply know one another" (2014, p.16). These scholars acknowledge that these conversations can be uncomfortable, and that this discomfort should be embraced. Lisa Grant, Professor of Jewish Education at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, notes that, "[d]ebate and equivocation are very much a part of our reality today, within the Jewish collective and beyond," and that, "[w]e need to cultivate the curiosity, habits of minds, skills to meet across difference" (2014, p. 19).

There are also those who emphasize both the content and the form of Jewish Peoplehood. According to the Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education, Jewish Peoplehood is, *"*a sense of belonging to the Jewish collective," which *"*reflects a deep identification with a collective consciousness that is a product of the long, rich, historical journey of the Jewish People" ("Conceptual: What is Peoplehood?," 2014). Furthermore, "[b]eing part of the Jewish People offers every Jew the ownership, as a member in the collective, of the Jewish People's assets accumulated throughout history, be it Jewish texts, Jewish values, practices, languages or Jewish civilization in its various manifestations" (2014).

I, too, believe that the Jewish People flourishes within a context in which individual Jews engage with the contents of our shared Jewish past alongside Jews of varied backgrounds and beliefs. I believe that Jewish Peoplehood can be best understood as an ongoing practice of challenging individual and group Jewish comfort zones in a communal context. In doing so,

practitioners grapple with difficult topics, learn about themselves and others as Jews, discover their own sense of authenticity within the Jewish People, and develop an openness to the possibility of multiple legitimate Jewish purposes.

While I believe that Jewish Peoplehood, and particularly Jewish Peoplehood as a practice, can serve as a new paradigm for Jewish authenticity and identity formation, I wanted to determine how Jewish Peoplehood is presently understood in a practical, non-academic context, and to see if there is a receptive audience for such a new interpretation. Therefore, I decided to examine how Jewish professionals understand Jewish Peoplehood and what Jewish nonprofits could do to enhance, reinforce, and expand their understanding. While a larger sample of Jewish nonprofits and Jewish professionals would add some insights and refinements, I chose to focus on the Jewish professionals working at the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, as that organization engages in efforts that promote Jewish Peoplehood and combat Jewish ideological chauvinism. As will be detailed in the section on Methodology, my research consisted of in-depth interviews with Jewish professionals in a number of different divisions of the Federation and across different levels of job responsibility.

Ultimately, I hope my research helps determine that the conversation about Jewish Peoplehood should be expanded to a wider audience. It may inspire both Jewish organizations and Jewish educational institutions to modify their current programming or adopt a new emphasis that focuses on peoplehood education. It may also inspire the creation of new Jewish educational initiatives that emphasize a peoplehood-focused Jewish education. The primary audience for the findings and recommendations of this capstone thesis are those in academia who are already discussing Jewish Peoplehood, as well as those who work in Jewish nonprofits who may not yet be engaging actively in the topic. Hopefully the research is also of value to those

interested in promoting an internally generated system of Jewish authenticity, greater interactions between Jews of varied beliefs and backgrounds, and a peoplehood-based paradigm of Jewish authenticity and identity formation.

Methodology

Discourse surrounding Jewish Peoplehood is complex and often laden with complicated feelings, lending itself more to qualitative than quantitative study. Because of this, I created an interview protocol for this thesis to enable participants to express themselves freely and delve deeply into their sentiments surrounding the issue.

I conducted nine interviews between November 25, 2015 and December 17, 2015, each lasting between 35 and 70 minutes, and taking place in either the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles' Westside office (6505 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA) or their Valley Alliance office (19710 Ventura Boulevard, Suite 105, Woodland Hills, CA) for the convenience of the participants. Selected verbatim notes were documented, and an audio transcript was recorded with the consent of the participants (see Appendix A for copy of consent form). Participants are referred to using pseudonyms throughout the thesis.

Interview subjects were all employees of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles because of the size and diversity of its staff, its central position in the LA Jewish community, and its mission which embraces a broad perspective on Jewish Peoplehood. In addition, the LA Federation has a longstanding relationship with the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institution of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Los Angeles, consistently taking on graduate interns from the Zelikow School of Jewish Nonprofit Management and frequently serving as a setting for their research. Additionally, the LA Federation possesses a wide array of programmatic efforts, divided into clearly defined initiatives, which might lead to different perspectives on the issue of Jewish Peoplehood. I sought to interview two employees (one management and one non-management level employee) within each strategic initiative – 'Caring for Jews in Need,' 'Engaging Our

Community,' and 'Ensuring the Jewish Future' – as well as employees in the 'Campaign' and 'Creative Services' divisions, and one member of the 'Executive Team.'

The interview protocol was divided into five sections (see Appendix B for complete protocol). The first section contained questions concerning the participant's Jewish identity, focusing on his or her Jewish upbringing or lack thereof, and his or her relationship to the common elements that constitute the Jewish People; shared history, language, geography, religion, and culture. The second section contained questions concerning the participant's level of interaction with the Jewish People, focusing on his or her likelihood to participate in Jewish experiences outside the context of work or engage in difficult conversations with other Jews, as well as past memorable Jewish experiences. The third section contained questions concerning the participant's thoughts on what factors characterize the Jews, focused around answering the question, "Who are the Jews?" in order to further examine what aspects of the Jews, if any, seem to be shared across the Jewish People. The fourth section contained questions concerning the participant's views on Jewish Peoplehood, focusing on soliciting their thoughts surrounding the term, as well as their views on the purpose of the Jewish People. The final section contained miscellaneous questions designed to elicit from the participant gut reactions, or sense-feelings, regarding the characteristics of the Jewish People, and preempt overly analytical or curated responses. As such, they were inserted into the protocol at varied intervals as determined necessary by the researcher. Similarly, while the order of the first four sections remained constant, the researcher allowed for variation within each section as necessary in relation to the responses of the participant.

As a case study of the range of understandings of Jewish Peoplehood among professionals who work at the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, it is not an exhaustive

sample and is necessarily limited in its scope. However, it suggests some approaches which could be tested on other types of Jewish communal organizations, large and small, national and local, in order to better understand how Jewish Peoplehood is perceived in the Jewish professional community.

Findings

Participant responses are divided into three overarching categories as they relate to conceptions of Jewish Peoplehood; feelings, thoughts, and actions. Each of these categories corresponds to a different dimension of how Jewish Peoplehood can be understood:

- **Feelings** refers to the emotions and sensations that give texture to the emotive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood.
- **Thoughts** refers to the principles and ideological frameworks that define and give shape to the cognitive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood.
- **Actions** refers to the acts and experiences that embody the demonstrative dimension of Jewish Peoplehood.

Tellingly, all three dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood – emotive, cognitive, and demonstrative – are present in each interview. However, they are expressed across the interviews in a variety of ways, which accounts for the sub-categories present within each overarching meta-category. It is also important to note that, due to the multi-faceted nature of Jewish Peoplehood, there is frequent overlapping among the dimensions. Feelings and thoughts may inspire actions, while actions may engender thoughts and feelings. As such, these categories are not meant to be mutually exclusive. Rather, they are selected as a lens through which to conceptualize the various perspectives toward the complex entity that is Jewish Peoplehood.

The Emotive Dimension - Feelings

The emotive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood is perhaps the most difficult to talk about, given its intangible nature. Monica, a senior member of the 'Caring for Jews in Need' division, states this challenge best:

> I think it's really hard to articulate who the Jewish people are. […] There's like an essence, a *neshama* [soul, breath], that is very hard to put into words. […] I struggle with the facts versus the emotional response, and I can't really articulate the emotional side of who those people are.

With that caveat in mind, I identify three key feelings associated with Jewish Peoplehood: a sense of belonging, a sense of connectedness, and sense of responsibility.

Sense of Belonging

Participants frequently express the part a sense of belonging plays in the emotive dimension of their understandings of Jewish Peoplehood. In this context, a sense of belonging is characterized by feelings of bonding and closeness with like individuals, such as between those who may share a common background or ideological framework, as well as feelings of comfort and warmth. In the interviews, participants share this sense of belonging in both direct and indirect ways. At times, participants speak explicitly of a sense of belonging as playing a key role in their understanding of Jewish Peoplehood. As Monica notes, "I would say for me, Judaism is about community, it's about a sense of belonging." Similarly, Bethany, a member of the 'Engaging in Our Community' division shares, "I think there's a character and warmth associated with belonging to a people, and having a sense that you belong within that community."

Yet in many instances, participants speak implicitly of the role a sense of belonging played in the emotive dimension of their understanding of Jewish Peoplehood. Bethany, reflecting on her college experiences, shares, "I went to college and realized I was much more comfortable around Jewish people, that was my entire life. I'm so thankful for being exposed to diverse opinions and getting out of my bubble, but at the same time, I found a home within the Jewish community in college." Instead of speaking exclusively about a sense of belonging, Bethany notes the feelings of comfort she felt within the Jewish community on her college campus, equating it with feelings of home. Hannah, a member of the 'Campaign' division, offers a similar story of her time in college. While relating a time when she and fellow members of her

campus Hillel were walking to observe an anti-Israel event, she notes, "I had such a sense of pride, that all the people that were walking with me were not just people who believed in the same thing that I did, but that they were all my best friends, and I had this realization that I made the right choices, I'm with people that care about the same things that I care about." For Hannah, feelings of pride and certainty within her chosen community function as a stand-in for a stated sense of belonging. Similarly, Michael, a senior member of the Campaign Division, speaks of Jewish Peoplehood as meaning a, "community of Jews where you can feel safe and be your own person [and] express yourself." For Michael, belonging manifests as feelings of security and self-expression.

Sense of Connectedness

Akin to a sense of belonging, participants express the part a sense of connectedness plays in the emotive dimension of their understandings of Jewish Peoplehood. In this context, a sense of connectedness is characterized by feelings of commonality that act as a bridge between individuals of differing backgrounds or ideological frameworks. Much like when expressing sentiments related to a sense of belonging and the role it played in participants' understandings of Jewish Peoplehood, sentiments regarding a sense of connectedness are expressed explicitly and implicitly. Deborah, a member of the 'Executive Team,' notes the first thing that comes to mind when hearing the term Jewish Peoplehood is, "Tents of Jacob. It's the prayer of looking out and seeing the tents. And that again talks to the variation within… within a sense of connectedness." In spite of the diverse nature of the Jewish People, which Deborah illustrates vividly by conjuring the image of the tents of Jacob, this variation functions within a discrete sense of connectedness.

This sense of connectedness is not limited to Jews whom the participants have met personally, but spans across time and place. Julia, member of the 'Creative Services' division, recalls the emotions she felt when standing at the Western Wall in Old Jerusalem for the first time, "[…] just touching that piece of history and understanding how many people have stood there and had that shared experience […] You're connected to all these people throughout space and time." For Julia, this sense of connectedness is transcendent, linking her to Jews past, present, and future.

Monica, when asked to describe what Jewish Peoplehood means to her, speaks similarly about the sense of connectedness she feels toward fellow Jews that transcends time and place:

> It means that I feel more connected to somebody who is Jewish that could be thousands, or however many, miles away, that I may not know, but that we have a shared sense of some of those characteristics that we discussed, and a connection to one another, without even knowing each other. It means that, I could be somewhere in a foreign country, and if I meet a Jew on the street, we could strike up a conversation and find an affinity almost instantaneously. It means that I could be in this synagogue in Cuba last week, and have never met this person, and all of a sudden we have this connection, and after sitting next to each other in a half hour service, giving each other hugs goodbye as if we've known each other forever.

For Monica, the sense of connectedness she feels to the Jewish People allows her to form not only instantaneous, but deep connections with Jews all over the globe, no matter how limited the interaction. Later, Monica shares that it is this sense of connectedness that she would miss the most should the Jewish People cease to exist:

> I, personally, would miss the connection to the other people. I feel very connected, as I said, to Jews here, in Israel, all around the world, and I would miss that commonality, that affinity, that instantaneous connection that you feel like you know somebody and can just pick up even if you haven't.

Using words like, “commonality,” “affinity,” and, “instantaneous connection,” Monica gets at the heart of the complex set of emotions that comprise the sense of connectedness present when discussing Jewish Peoplehood.

Monica is not alone in speaking of the immediate nature of the connection felt between Jews. Later in her interview, Julia shares an experience from a recent trip to Budapest in which she and her tour group encounter a group of Jewish women from Texas who had been hoping to say *Kaddish* for a member’s recently departed mother, but had missed services:

> And so our group surrounded her and we stood there on the sidewalk and we said *Kaddish* with her, and it was really powerful […] there’s the connection, I mean, I don’t know who she is, I don’t know her name, but it was halfway around the world and you stood there and made a minyan for her so she could say *Kaddish* for her mother.

These women who had never met before are able to share an intimate and powerful moment, all because of the sense of connection inherent in the emotive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood.

As is the case with a sense of belonging, some participants speak implicitly of the sense of connectedness that characterizes the emotive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood. Danielle, a member of the ‘Ensuring the Jewish Future’ division, when offering what sights, sounds, or smells remind her of Judaism, speaks of moments when the Jewish community comes together in solidarity over an important issue. She notes: “when you see as a community, different ages, different generations, different backgrounds, are coming together to say, at the end of the day, what we stand for is what ties us together more than the things that distinguish us.” For Danielle, the values Jews stand for connect us and bring us together more than the distinguishing features may keep us apart. Elana, a senior member of the ‘Ensuring the Jewish Future division,’ echoes the sentiment of those participants who speak of the transcendent nature of this sense of connectedness:

> I think the idea that, as a Jew, no matter where you go throughout the world, you can walk into synagogue and know at least something […] At least something is going to be familiar, in terms of the liturgy or perhaps the music or the way people are dressed, or there is going to be something that's going to resonate.

For Elana, it is these points of connection, such as dress, liturgy, and music, that give her the ability to walk seamlessly into a foreign synagogue and feel a sense of connectedness to Jews she has never met before.

Sense of Responsibility

Furthermore, participants express the role a sense of responsibility plays in the emotive dimension of their understandings of Jewish Peoplehood. This sense of responsibility is characterized by innate feelings of caring and compassion towards others; be they other Jews, the needy, or the world at large. As with the two previous senses, this sense of responsibility is expressed directly and indirectly. Several participants make explicit references to the sense of responsibility they feel toward either the Jewish People and/or the world. Monica, when discussing what Jewish Peoplehood means to her, shares, "It means that when I get a call in my work, from a Jew who is in trouble somewhere, I feel an immediate sense of responsibility to help that person." For Monica, Jewish Peoplehood goes hand-in-hand with a sense of responsibility for Jews in need. She is quick to clarify, however, that her sense of responsibility toward those in need is not limited to the Jewish community. She notes, "I feel I do what I do because of my Jewish background, roots, and sense of responsibility, and even if I had chosen to not work in the Jewish community, and, let's say, use my social work background, I would still feel like I have that responsibility as a Jew." Even had she not worked within the Jewish community, Monica reveals that it is her sense of responsibility "*as a Jew*" that drives her to care for those in need.

Deborah shares a similar perspective while attempting to answer the question of "Who are the Jews?" She explains, "they [the Jews] have a responsibility in the world to act on behalf of […] each other, with a primary responsibility to each other, and then to the entire world." Like Monica, Deborah speaks of the sense of responsibility inherent in the Jewish People, one that begins with the Jewish community and then extends beyond the Jewish People to all people of the world. In discussing this sense of responsibility, Deborah posits three questions. When discussing the synagogue involvement of Jews who, on one hand, are extremely knowledgeable in their respective fields, but, on the other hand, are illiterate in Hebrew she asks, "how do we make sure *they* feel comfortable coming in?" Later, while discussing the same topic she asks, "how do you make people feel competent in their Judaism?" On the topic of Jewish engagement generally she asks, "how do we find the things that resonate to them so that they're getting something from there?" These three questions offer a powerful illustration of the sense of responsibility that characterizes the emotive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood, which compels Jews to address questions of this nature in order to better the lives of their fellow Jews.

Just like with the senses of belonging and connectedness, some participants speak implicitly of the sense of responsibility that characterizes the emotive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood. When discussing what shared characteristics might define the Jewish People, Julia notes the protectiveness felt toward other Jews. "'So you're a member of the tribe,' 'so you're one too?' 'So I am too, so now you're part of my family' kind of thing, someone I would protect more than someone who wasn't." For Julia, this sense of protectiveness is a manifestation of the responsibility she feels towards members of the Jewish People. Later in her interview, when discussing what would be missed if the Jews were to vanish from the world Julia notes, "There's sort of this basic, deep caring, compassion, that I feel Jews have for the world […] A compassion

for the world that the Jews bring that would be missed." To her, not only does this sense of responsibility manifest in feelings of protectiveness, but also as a deep and fundamental compassion for the world.

Danielle, while attempting to recount her most memorable Jewish experience, speaks of the responsibility she feels when engaging in acts of service (a topic to be addressed later when examining the demonstrative dimension of Jewish Peoplehood). "When I'm doing *Tikkun Olam* [acts of repairing the world] and participating in certain community service days, and you feel that mass sense of commitment to the community, I feel overtly Jewish." For Danielle, her Jewishness is intrinsically linked to the sense of responsibility that both results from, and results in, acts of service.

The Cognitive Dimension - Thoughts

The cognitive dimension deals with the thoughts and mental frameworks associated with Jewish Peoplehood. I identify two key aspects of the cognitive dimension: value statements and mindsets or orientations. In addition to these aspects, it is important to discuss the role that conscious choice plays as a bridge between the cognitive and demonstrative dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood.

Value Statements

In discussing their understandings of Jewish Peoplehood, participants make frequent use of value statements. These value statements represent the transformation of abstract feelings into more concrete thoughts, which serve as a foundation to help define and direct action related to Jewish Peoplehood. Each of these key value statements possess a corollary in the following sub-

section of the cognitive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood, that of mindsets and intellectual orientations.

One of the most referenced values across the interviews is that of community. To Bethany, community, and specifically the ability for Jews to associate with one another, is the crux of Jewish Peoplehood:

> The concept of association is very strong to me. You also think about times of war, whether it was the Spanish Inquisition or the Holocaust, whatever it might be, when Jews weren't allowed to associate with one another […] this has happened over and over again in our history, when you take away association, you take away a community, you take away peoplehood.

Without the core value of community, Bethany asserts there would be no sense of Jewish Peoplehood. It is interesting to note that for some participants the value placed on community is greater than that which is placed on Israel. As Ira, a member of the 'Engaging in Our Community' division, shares when discussing what aspect of the Jewish People he hopes would remain the same one thousand years from now:

> I think the knee jerk reaction we're supposed to have is: 'Israel. I want Israel to be around in one thousand years, a state, a Jewish state, in one thousand years.' And of course I would want that, but if you're asking me to choose one thing, I would choose a people that are together rather than a state that is divisive and not together.

Powerfully, Ira asserts that it is not Israel, but the value of community that must remain one thousand years from now in order to ensure a vibrant Jewish People.

Another of the most referenced cognitive values is that of education and learning. As Elana notes while discussing those characteristics that define the Jewish People, "Education, that has been something that across generations has really been a priority." Ira shares a similar sentiment, "Intellectual… education is essential and ongoing if not eternal. Again there's the Talmud thing, […] 'You're forbidden to live in a town that doesn't have a school.'" Citing the

Talmud, Ira drives home the historical emphasis Jews have placed on education and the pursuit of knowledge; that education is a perpetual process for the Jewish People is a testament to how it is valued. Looking at the present day, Deborah reveals the importance of education to the contemporary Jew. When discussing her lack of Hebrew literacy, in a society where illiteracy is a "terrible concept," she shares, "[…] if you even ask people who aren't Jewish, what do you think of the Jews? It's educated and all of that, so when you put a Jew in a position of being uneducated, illiterate, incredibly uncomfortable, it's critical to their relationship." Linking her own relationship with Hebrew to those otherwise educated members of modern society, she touches on a crucial point: for a Jew, the prospect of being uneducated is loathed, and feeling as such in a Jewish setting is detrimental to one's involvement in the Jewish People.

Deborah's sensitivity to issues of Hebrew comprehension is well placed, as Hebrew ranks high as another key value associated with the cognitive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood. When describing the role Hebrew plays in her Jewish identity, Bethany asserts emphatically, "Hebrew, it's like a badge of honor to me." Bethany's valuation of Hebrew is so high that being able to speak it offers a sense of pride. Echoing Deborah's sentiment, Hannah shares:

> I would feel more Jewish if I could speak Hebrew because I have such family roots in Israel. My parents immigrated by way of Israel to the States, so we have a large family that still lives there, and they all speak English, but I think it's a slight barrier to feeling a little bit more connected to that part of the family.

Though Hannah's desire to learn Hebrew stems from a desire to be able to better connect with her family, the value she places on being able to speak the language is key, so much so that she would, "feel more Jewish" were she able to do so. Monica also places knowledge of Hebrew at the heart of her Jewishness:

> Hebrew is actually pretty important in terms of my Jewish identity. […] It stems from my experience in a Zionist youth movement, […] 'Young Judea,' so it's camp during the summer, it was youth movement year-round, it was summer

> Israel trip, it was a yearlong Israel trip, and then also being a leader in those, running those trips as well. Hebrew was infused into those experiences, and has stuck with me, and has made that association, as defining who I am as a Jew.

As a result of her heavy involvement in the Zionist youth movement 'Young Judea,' Monica is immersed in Hebrew, which becomes a core tenet of her Jewish identity and an indispensable element of her understanding of Jewish Peoplehood.

A third key set of cognitive value statements are those surrounding the role of compassion and caring. When discussing the idea that Israel is unique from the countries that surround it Julia notes, "as a parent it's tantamount in terms of raising other human beings, that the most important thing I think you can be is tolerant and compassionate." For Julia, tolerance and compassion are key values that parents must impart upon their children, and values which Israel possesses in contrast to its neighbors. Along the same lines, Danielle, attempting to answer the question, "Who are the Jews?" shares what she sees as the secret to Jewish greatness:

> I think we're very compassionate to the world, and no matter how great we are, which I think we are great and amazing and badasses, that part of that greatness stems from our sensitivity and compassion to our fellow humans, and the fairness I hope most of us have in our eyes about humanity. My grandpa always says, "The most important thing in a person is their level of humanity."

Danielle aptly notes that it is the Jewish predilection towards the values of compassion and fairness that results in Jewish "greatness."

A final value statement key to participants' understanding of the cognitive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood is diversity. When considering if the Jews possess a discrete set of shared characteristics, Julia replies, "Honestly, no. […] And I think that's actually one of the nice things about Judaism, that it […] lets you engage with it at any point along the spectrum that you want to, and it's all good." Though she asserts that the Jewish People share no discrete traits in common, this lack of commonality is, if anything, one of the factors that adds value and richness

to the Jewish People by allowing for multiple points of entry into the community. When discussing her involvement with denominational Judaism, Monica reveals the role pluralism plays in her relationship to the Jewish People, "It's actually a value I hold near to me, […] it would be very boring if we were all the same; […] we have a lot to learn from each other." In this sense, diversity is a key to a vibrant Jewish People. Michael shares a similar view when discussing the likelihood of his engaging with Jews with whom he differs on matters of observance, "Because I've worked in the community for so long I know many different Jewish communal professionals, as well as clergy, and we don't all agree. That's what makes the world go round, […] you don't want people to all be the same." For Michael, diversity is not only an enriching element, but necessary to ensure the continued turning of the Jewish world.

Mindsets and Orientations

In addition to frequent use of value statements, participants express a variety of mindsets or orientations that frame their thoughts regarding Jewish Peoplehood. These mindsets represent the organization of value statements into discrete frameworks of thought, which in turn may serve as a blueprint for action related to Jewish Peoplehood.

Having a community-focused mindset is a key element of the cognitive dimension of how participants understand Jewish Peoplehood. When discussing his most memorable Jewish experience, Michael shares why his career is such an important factor of his relationship to the Jewish People, "Bottom line is, we're helping not only build Jewish community, but sustain Jewish community." Monica, when discussing the importance of pluralism, expresses a similar sentiment regarding the need to create community, "[…] there's also a reality that we all are living in the community together, and we can't really build community with others if we don't

build community first with ourselves, and the only way to do that is through dialogue and building those relationships." Like Michael, Monica views the importance of diversity through the lens of community. For Bethany, the sense of belonging she feels to the Jewish People filters through a community mindset. "[…] It would be a very sad place if Jewish Peoplehood, if the Jewish People no longer felt like a community, never felt like an organized people."

Having a service-focused mindset is a key element of the cognitive dimension of how participants understand Jewish Peoplehood. When discussing the special character of the Jewish People, Danielle reveals her service-focused mindset, "[…] we may be great, and we may be wonderful in creating all these different technologies, which is important to me because I'm a competitive person and it's exciting to feel that you're part of a winning team, but I think we're good people, which is why we can be a winning team at the end of the day." Julia, too, reveals the role that service-mindedness plays in the cognitive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood, "I think that the whole concept of *Tikkun Olam* is sort of the main overarching thing for the Jews, and trying to make the world a better place, repairing the world, helping the world, […] that the world's not here for you, you're here to do something better for the world.**"** Monica shares a similar sentiment, "I think that the Jewish people have a responsibility to the larger society, world, whatever word you want to use, to use our knowledge, our education, our history, to make the world a better place." Both Julia and Monica stress the need to view the world through the lens of service, drawing on the sense of responsibility present in the emotive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood and using it to inform this service mindset.

A natural outgrowth of the value placed on diversity, a diversity-oriented mindset is another key element of the cognitive dimension of how participants understand Jewish Peoplehood. When discussing the question, "Who are the Jews?" Ira references the classic joke

of the Jew who, while marooned on an island, builds two synagogues, one which he or she actually attends, and the one that he or she wouldn't be caught dead in:

> If you really dig into that, […] you know, that really says a lot about our people, it really does. […] Not just that we have this relationship, this "I couldn't go there," but that we *depend* on having the synagogue that we wouldn't go to, so much so that he would actually build one. I can't be a Jew without the opposition and without a formal existing, solid opposition that I say no to.

Though it can be seen as being phrased in the negative, Ira highlights the mindset where diverse opinions are indispensable to the effective functioning of the Jewish People. When discussing what Jewish Peoplehood means to her, Danielle looks to the broad variation that exists within the Jewish People:

> I think it's almost a disservice to clump peoplehood as one word, because we're all so different and we have so many layers to us, as a community, and it's not just about your religious expression or where you live geographically, whether you live in Israel or LA, it's like we're such a complex culture, that peoplehood almost dulls that complexity for me.

Possessing a strong mindset oriented towards diversity, Danielle rejects any understanding of Jewish Peoplehood that does not account for the rich complexity that is the Jewish People. Deborah possesses a similar outlook when discussing if she considers the Jewish People to possess a discrete set of characteristics, "It would be harder to find that kind of commonality you're talking about. No, I think we're incredibly varied, I was just sharing with some of my laypeople the website for Be'chol Lashon, it's for Jews of color. […] It's all about the wild variety of Jews in the world."

Participants also reflect a mindset that is future-oriented and forward thinking. When discussing what she considers to the be the purpose of the Jews, Danielle shares:

> I think, as a whole, we think about that more than the average person on the street, what we leave behind, and what comes next, rather than what's just happening now. And I think we're also, in general, not necessarily as reactionary, we're more progressive and we have a lot of forethought as a community.

As Danielle notes, it is this progressive mindset endemic to the Jewish People that guides our desire to contribute to the world and to that which comes after us. Michael shares a similar perspective when discussing his reasons for working in the Jewish community, "I do what I do because I want my son to feel comfortable in his Jewishness like I always have, and that's why I continue to work in the Jewish community, and continue to make things better and ensure the Jewish future for not only my son but future generations to come." For Michael, this future orientation guides and colors his career, to ensure that the community is strong for his children.

Stemming from the value placed on education, another mindset present in the cognitive dimension focuses on the pursuit of education and knowledge. Elana, when discussing who are the Jews, shares that, "[among Jews,] there's definitely what seems like a thirst to understand the world." For Elana, being education-minded manifests as an insatiable desire on the part of the Jewish People to understand the world around them.

Monica, offers additional insight into this knowledge-focused orientation, "[…] that's what I love about Judaism, there's always room for questions, there's always room for commentary." Due to being education-minded, for Monica the Jewish People nurtures inquiry and debate. Ira shares a similar sentiment, "[…] we don't take anything on faith, we have to explore and argue about all of it." Not content with face-value, the knowledge-minded Jew tests all aspects of an issue.

Though Israel did not arise as a prevalent value statement in relation to participants' understandings concerning the cognitive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood, the centrality of Israel as a mindset was abundantly present. The mindset that regards Israel as a central component of the Jewish People is most visible when participants contemplate whether they consider Israel to be the homeland of the Jews. Elana answers this question, "I think there is a unique role that

Israel plays for the Jewish People. […] Israel is, in some sense, perhaps the centerpiece, […] it's aspirational for a lot of Jews around the globe." Echoing this sentiment, Deborah says, "It is. It's home. It's the homeland of the Jewish People. […] Yeah. It's a definitional absolute." Danielle, in considering the role of Israel as the Jewish homeland, explains where this mindset may find its origins:

> You grow up hearing that, you see it, you feel it when you go there; you know, it's such a concentration of Jewish community, you don't really get that in the same way anywhere else in the world, so naturally it feels more like home than if you drop yourself in London or […] Amsterdam or wherever you go.

As Danielle notes, this mindset is likely the result of efforts to instill in youth a profound relationship with Israel. Thus, when viewed through this mindset, Israel becomes the epitome of Jewish community, unparalleled throughout the world.

A Word About Choice – The Intersection between Thought and Action

Before discussing the third dimension of Jewish Peoplehood, it is important to note the role that intention and choice play in the intersection between the cognitive and demonstrative. Blurring the lines between thought and action, several participants assert that entry into, or being a part of, the Jewish People is predicated not on religious or cultural prerequisites, like descent or conversion. Rather, it is predicated on the *conscious choice* to affiliate with the Jewish People. On one hand, participants argue that this conscious affiliation is a matter of thought. Michael, while discussing what might be the purpose of the Jewish People, states this opinion plainly, "The only entry I would say is if you consider yourself Jewish, and you espouse Jewish values, you're welcome in." In this sense, entry into the Jewish People is predicated simply on considering oneself Jewish. Hannah shares a similar sentiment when discussing the question of who is a Jew:

> Whoever wants to identify as a Jew, there are so many different types of Jews in this world who don't fit into this little pretty box like they used to once upon a time. It's not like you can walk down and point, "You're a Jew, and you're a Jew, and you're not a Jew." I think it's… it's the way that somebody wants to identify and connect.

As can be seen in the responses of Michael and Hannah, for many participants, thinking of oneself as a Jew is sufficient for entry into the Jewish People.

On the other hand, when pressed further, many of these same participants conceded that *active demonstration* of this thought is preferred, if not necessary. Later in her interview, Hannah speaks to the value of active participation in the community. Sharing a story about learning that a former student from her time working as a Hillel professional was not halakhically Jewish, she notes:

> He immersed himself in the community, he wanted to be part of it, he did all of the things that would make you naturally feel like he was part of the community, one minor detail, his dad is actually not Jewish […]. But, to me, he's Jewish, if he wants to go and have that conversion for him, then absolutely go do that, but for all intents and purposes, the community has opened our arms and our hearts to him, just as much as he did.

For Hannah and for the members of her Hillel community, it wasn't just that her former student considered himself Jewish, it was that he consistently demonstrated his commitment to the Jewish People.

Shortly after sharing his belief that entry into the Jewish People is a matter of thought, Michael shares a similar story and sentiment as Hannah's when discussing a participant of a recent men's mission to Washington D.C. Michael recalls:

> We had one guy come on the mission with us whom this was his third mission out of four. He's not Jewish, his wife is, they're raising their kids Jewish, he had two kids at New Community Jewish High School, and he's accepted as the guys. And if you say to him, "Are you Jewish?" he would say, "No." If you asked him are you raising a Jewish household, he would say, "Yes." So, does he have values that are very similar to mine? Absolutely. Is he a part of our community? Absolutely.

For Michael and members of the men's group, even an individual who does not claim to be Jewish, but engages in Jewish actions such as raising a Jewish family, merits a place within the Jewish People by virtue of his active commitment.

Bethany is much more forceful in her assessment of the role of active association. When offering the first thing that that comes to mind when she hears the phrase "Jewish Peoplehood," Bethany insists, "Peoplehood requires some level of opt in to activities, opt in to the community; […] you're an active participant in that community." Elaborating on the role of this active association as a key element of her understanding of Jewish Peoplehood, she adds, "You have to opt in, you have to be more active and participate, you have to engage in some way with your identity in order to have this framework of peoplehood." For Bethany, it is not enough for an individual to consider him or herself Jewish or possess a commitment to the Jewish People, he or she must demonstrate that commitment. Considering oneself a member of the Jewish People, then, must be an active association, not only a thought-based one.

The Demonstrative Dimension - Actions

As the previous sub-section alludes, the demonstrative dimension of Jewish Peoplehood concerns the actions, expressions, experiences, and deeds associated with the Jewish People. Key actions associated with Jewish Peoplehood include acts of learning and education, acts of service and contribution, and enacted folkways.

Acts of Learning and Education

One of the most prevalent sub-categories of actions participants associate with Jewish Peoplehood are those pertaining to learning and education. These acts are characterized by the pursuit of knowledge or understanding, the desire to share knowledge or understanding, or both

acts simultaneously. One prominent act of learning was the study of Judaism. Many of those interviewed attended some type of formal Jewish study throughout the course of their lives and/or made a point of providing such experiences for their children. Elana, when discussing her most memorable Jewish experience, tells of the year she spent studying with the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem. "It definitely opened my eyes in a lot of different ways to the Jews from different walks of life and different perspectives, and through the study, both when I was wrestling with something the teacher was saying or really behind something a teacher was saying, it helped me grow and understand myself." For Elana, study is a means of learning not only about Israel and about the Jewish People, but also a means of learning about herself and her place within the people.

However, not all acts of study mentioned by participants take place in formal settings. While discussing the role of Hebrew in her Jewish identity, Deborah makes reference to PJ Library, a free service for parents to receive Jewish books to read with their children:

> On the flaps, the inside flaps of the book, on both sides, there are things to the parents. So on one side it might be the explanation of whatever the Jewish value or holiday or concept is in the book explained to them, and the other is how you can deepen your conversation with your child around it. For people who would not be able to teach their child, because they don't have that knowledge themselves […] this way, the parent is learning and being set up to be the teacher.

Deborah observes that PJ Library does not provide Jewish books simply to provide books to those who are interested. Rather, PJ Library promotes study and learning on the part of the child *and* the parent, a group often overlooked when it comes to active Jewish learning.

Another prevalent act of learning was that of dialogue. Elana, when discussing the first thing that comes to mind when she hears the phrase "Jewish Peoplehood," shares the importance of dialogue, "I think that by meeting and by being in dialogue with people, with Jews from around the world, we can learn a lot about ourselves and how we fit into that sense of

peoplehood." In this sense, Elana highlights the growth of self and the sense of discovery of her place within the Jewish People that takes place as a result of engaging in dialogue. Julia places a similar importance on engaging in acts of dialogue, sharing that she's, "always happy to talk," adding, "in fact I'm always engaged by the intellectual discussions about religion and interested to see how other people use their religion."

The importance of engaging in debate, a type of dialogue, is also a common refrain. While attempting to answer the question, "Who are the Jews?" Ira references a joke in which two members of a synagogue are arguing over whether it is traditional for members of their community to stand or sit while reciting the *Shema*. The two members turn to the eldest living member of the congregation and say: "'We can't decide, we keep having an argument over this,' and then the old person goes, 'the argument is the tradition!'" As the joke reveals, the Jewish People place great emphasis on debate, so much so that it is valued higher than the actual outcome. This emphasis on spirited debate is not limited to dialogue between members of the Jewish People, or even with other people, as Ira notes, "I would say we argue with God, in fact, we are, […] depending on how you read it, *commanded* to argue with God, God wants us to argue." Perhaps, even more than a cultural trait, for the Jewish People, debate possesses what can seem like divine significance.

Acts of Service and Contribution

Another of the most prevalent sub-categories of actions participants associate with Jewish Peoplehood are acts of service and contribution to society. These acts are characterized by the desire to have an impact for the better, be the scope local or global, specifically Jewish or universal. Danielle, when discussing what would be missing should the Jews cease to exist

shares, “I think as a community we give a lot, and not just to ourselves, to people outside of us, so I think that there would be a huge loss for the rest of the world in not having such large masses of people who are naturally inclined to give money, give talent, give time, give resources.”

However, these acts of service are not limited to philanthropic endeavors, as Monica reflects:

> I think that the Jews do, in many ways, add so much and make […] contributions to society. I mean, some of it is in terms of […] repairing the world and making it a better place, but we also have contributions in every other arena, whether it be education, medicine, […] it crosses the gamut.

Not only do the Jewish People engage in acts of service, but they engage in actions that contribute to the vibrancy and innovation of the world. Danielle also highlights the creativity of the Jewish People when discussing the question, “Who are the Jews?” She shares, “[…] we are creating the craziest medicines to cure diseases, you know? We’re coming up with the most innovative technologies to move the world forward.”

It is important to note that these acts of service need not be grand in their scope; sometimes they are small acts of kindness that have a tremendous impact. Hannah, while discussing her most memorable Jewish experience, shares a memory from her time during the Brandeis Collegiate Institute summer program. One evening, a fellow camper discloses to the group that, due to the traumatic childhood experience of watching her house burn down, she has never been able to light Shabbat candles. Upon learning this, Hannah recalls:

> One of the staff people throughout the next week went out into a field with her and progressively helped her light large pieces of wood, and progressively throughout the week get down to something smaller like a match […] so that by the next Shabbat, she felt more comfortable lighting a match. And that next Friday night, we all stood in a circle around her in the rotunda, this beautiful, spiritual, round, hub of Judaism, right? Arm in arm, we all stood around her as she lit her first Shabbat candles, and there wasn’t a dry eye in the room.

Hannah's story illustrates that acts of service, like acts of learning, come in all shapes and sizes, and are not limited to issues of global proportions; they can simply be one-on-one interactions with an individual in need.

Folkways and Practices

The third most prevalent sub-category of actions participants associate with Jewish Peoplehood are those pertaining to folkways and other traditional practices. Though presented here within the demonstrative dimension of Jewish Peoplehood, folkways and practices conjure feelings and thoughts as well, perhaps more than any other sub-category of action related to Jewish Peoplehood. This is perhaps because they are the acts and experiences that give texture to Jewish life and meaning to a sense of Jewish Peoplehood. These acts may be religious or cultural in origin, and their implementation varies among participants interviewed.

One of the folk-acts participants most frequently reference is that of preparing and eating special foods. When discussing the possibility of the Jewish People possessing shared characteristics, Elana reflects:

> I think food is very central to Jewish life. I don't think it's an accident that [in] every holiday we have there are very distinct foods, and […] depending on what part of the world you come from, they might be different, but they are very telling of the community. And I think no matter where you are on the observance spectrum or something, often food plays an important role.

Regardless of Jewish background or belief Elana observes the making and eating of foods possesses deep importance to the Jewish People. Other participants' responses confirm that food, and the rituals frequently associated with its preparation and eating, act as a link between the demonstrative and emotive dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood, stirring diverse emotions even when simply spoken of.

Another key folk-act frequently mentioned by participants was that of Shabbat. Later in her interview, when discussing what aspect of the Jews she would like to guarantee remain one thousand years from now, Elana touches on the importance of engaging in a practice of Shabbat:

> I think Shabbat as a concept and as a practice is exceptionally grounding and healing and I think really provides balance in a world where we really hardly have any. And its only from that stepping away from the everyday that you really can be in the everyday […] in a more present way. I'm always amazed that people don't take advantage of that.

Shabbat, for Elana and other participants, provides an opportunity to slow down, to spend time with friends and family, and tap into the emotive and cognitive dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood.

A third key folkway is storytelling. Participants' interviews are filled with first and secondhand accounts, as well as anecdotes, jokes, and fables, belying the importance of storytelling to the Jewish People. Bethany, when considering what she would miss if the Jews were to disappear, speaks to that importance, "I know a lot of people who, like me and my Jewish friends, we love telling stories, the more details the better. If I can smell the story, where the story took place, by the end of your session, then you've done a good job. […] We're storytellers." Storytelling is an important act of Jewish Peoplehood because of how it taps into both the emotive and cognitive dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood. Storytelling allows feelings to be expressed and shared, and values and mindsets to be articulated and debated.

An emphasis on language itself provides the final key folkway of the demonstrative dimension of Jewish Peoplehood. Julia, when discussing the role of Hebrew in her Jewish identity, offers a story of when she and the youth director of her synagogue worked together to solve a problem, after which the youth director thanks her publically on Facebook. In writing a response to the youth director's kind words, she shares:

> The only thing that I could think of to say was "אני ואתה נשנה את העולם", [You and I will change the world], but that's how it came in my mind, not in English, […] so that's what I wrote on Facebook. So I guess there are things that are infused into your experience in […] that language that make more sense in that language.

Julia's story speaks to the power inherent in language itself. Whether it be Hebrew, Yiddish, or English, language conveys culture, shaping the feelings, values, mindsets, and actions of those who use it.

In Summary

What appears at first glance to be a series of disparate responses, randomly diverging and converging, belies a deeper conceptual framework. The feelings, thoughts, and actions that participants share are in fact representations of the emotive, cognitive, and demonstrative dimensions of how Jewish Peoplehood is understood. Though they are present in different forms, each one of these dimensions is found within the responses of each interview participant, indicating their broad applicability to understandings of Jewish Peoplehood.

Concluding Thoughts, Recommendations, and Connection to Curriculum Guide

Discussion of Findings

My findings have confirmed my hypothesis that there is no one understanding of Jewish Peoplehood among the Jewish professionals interviewed for this capstone thesis. As predicted, a wide variety of understandings exist concurrently, and no individual understanding was identical to another. However, after analyzing participants' responses, it became clear that these diverse understandings *did* share common traits. It was these shared feelings, thoughts, and actions that led me to identify three dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood — emotive, cognitive, and demonstrative. When viewed through these lenses, many of the distinctions in participants' responses become less pronounced, revealing common sentiments shared throughout. Though manifesting in a variety of ways, each participant offered responses that illustrated all three of these dimensions.

Of the three, the emotive dimension was the most difficult for participants to articulate. Because the emotive dimension deals with feelings and sensations that the participant may be only somewhat consciously aware of, efforts to articulate them were oftentimes strained or obscured. Yet, this was also the dimension that had the least variation in how it was manifested, making common threads easier to identify. All participants shared a sense of belonging and a sense of connection, and nearly all participants spoke of a sense of responsibility. Tellingly, feelings found within the emotive dimension of Jewish Peoplehood were often conjured as a result of engaging with the demonstrative dimension. Not only did participants speak of experiences that generated these types of feelings, the act of recalling memorable experiences generated these feelings as well.

In contrast, the cognitive dimension showed the greatest diversity of responses among the three dimensions. Since the cognitive dimension deals with the values and mindsets participants engage on a daily basis, they were easier to articulate, and responses were many and varied. Due to the volume of responses that fell within this dimension, efforts to discern common thinking proved more challenging than discerning the sensations representative of the emotive dimension.

However, it is worth noting that several participants shared that they infrequently, if ever, engage in efforts to conceptualize Jewish Peoplehood. As Bethany shares, "I have a lot of opinions, and I've never formulated them for myself, […] I don't have to think about these things during the day, or ever really." In spite of engaging with Jewish Peoplehood on a daily basis, Bethany does not take, or is not afforded, opportunities in the workplace to formulate values and mindsets related to her understanding of Jewish Peoplehood.

Elana shares a related sentiment, viewing Jewish Peoplehood as an almost alien term:

> I wouldn't say that I really connect to the word 'peoplehood,' although we've been using it a lot in our work lately. […] The word itself […] is not a word I grew up hearing, it feels much more like an academic word that has been placed on some of our work, so I think it's all in how you operationalize, how you define that word that makes it meaningful.

While Elana is familiar with the term, it is not one that she has chosen to define for herself, and therefore it feels foreign or "academic" to her. This echoes Erica Brown's worry (in the Introduction and Literature review section) that, "the very intellectual nature of the conversation has meant that it has lost traction within Jewish communal organizations" (2014, p. 12).

Perhaps even more disconcerting to those wishing to promote a Jewish Peoplehood-based paradigm for Jewish belonging, my research indicates that there are those who find no meaning in the term whatsoever. As Danielle reveals when asked to share the first thing that comes to mind when hearing the term Jewish Peoplehood, "Jargon. […] It's just another one of

those thesaurus words that fill in the blank. It doesn't mean much to me really, personally, I just think it's like fluff." For those like Danielle, Jewish Peoplehood is an empty term, devoid of any meaning whatsoever.

Recommendations:

My findings indicate that while many Jewish professionals may have an inherent resonance with Jewish Peoplehood, they are not being provided with opportunities to explore this in an intentional and systematic way. When Jewish professionals encounter the concept of Jewish Peoplehood in their daily lives, and specifically in their place of work, it is likely to be incidental or as part of an organizational program or fundraising pitch. For Jewish institutions, this suggests that they should offer more opportunities for staff to engage deeply in the three dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood, specifically creating opportunities to discuss issues important to them as Jews. For example, giving professionals opportunities to *think* and talk more about peoplehood, to help supplement the *feelings* and *actions* that they express or engage in on a daily basis. In doing so, organizations can address the worrying trend that shows Jewish Peoplehood becoming little more than a buzzword.

In doing so, the demonstrative dimension proves most important by providing the circumstances in which the emotive and cognitive dimensions can be developed and examined. It is important to note here the special role that immersive experiences play, not only within the demonstrative dimension of Jewish Peoplehood, but within the varied understandings of Jewish Peoplehood generally. While elements of the three dimensions can be found in many different settings, they appear to reach a critical mass, and seem to have the greatest significance, when they occur in immersive settings; such as summer camp, day school, and trips abroad.

Particularly for Jewish Professionals, the workplace could be a powerful venue for engaging with the three dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood. The first, and perhaps most obvious, reason is that a Jewish professional's place of employment serves as the single most immersive Jewish experience in his or her life. The second reason is that Jewish professionals naturally encounter the three dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood as they go about their work. These professionals may be interacting with one or more of the dimensions simply by engaging in their day-to-day responsibilities.

Lastly, a few participants felt that they were fulfilling their Jewish quota within the context of their work, and once they left at the end of the day, they had little desire to pursue more. Therefore, the workplace for some becomes the only venue for engaging in the three dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood.

To be most effective, proponents of a Jewish Peoplehood-based paradigm of Jewish authenticity and identity formation should support existing immersive settings, such as camp or the workplace, as well as create new ones. It is clear such experiences provide unique opportunities to engage with all three dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood.

Relationship to Curriculum Guide:

My analysis of the findings seeks to provide a common language that can be used when teaching and discussing conceptions of Jewish Peoplehood, as different conceptions invoke different combinations of these three dimensions. As mentioned previously in the Introduction and Literature Review, academic understandings of Jewish Peoplehood can be divided into two camps based on their emphasis of either the *content* of Jewish Peoplehood, those things that Jews

have in common (such as a shared past, present, and future), or the *form*, those frameworks that exist to bring disparate Jews together (such as intentional dialogue and experience).

Both conceptual frameworks of Jewish Peoplehood seem to share a common foundation in the emotive dimension while differing in their emphases on the cognitive and demonstrative dimensions. Whether focusing on the content or on the form of Jewish Peoplehood, feelings of belonging, connectedness, and responsibility are prevalent. For scholars who focus on content, the sensations of the emotive dimension are elevated alongside an emphasis on the shared values and mindsets that characterize the cognitive dimension. Those who focus on form, however, utilize the acts and expressions found within the demonstrative dimension to generate and reinforce the feelings that characterize the emotive dimension.

This terminology that I have been developing will benefit the curriculum guide that I have been creating concurrently with this capstone thesis as my culminating project for the Masters program in Jewish Education at HUC-JIR's Rhea Hirsch School of Education, tentatively entitled "Creating Communities of Jewish Peoplehood Practice - Harnessing Discomfort to Bring the Jewish People Together." This guide is designed to equip participants with the skills necessary to wrestle with their Jewish comfort zones and begin to view Jewish authenticity and identity formation through a lens of Jewish Peoplehood.

Instead of falling into either the content or the form camps, I offer an alternative framework for understanding Jewish Peoplehood. Rather than an inert concept to be learned or a single experience to be had, I view Jewish Peoplehood as the ongoing practice of wrestling with the shared elements that constitute the Jewish People, our history, language, geography, religion, and culture, together with diverse Jews in a communal setting. Each of these three dimensions – emotive, cognitive, and demonstrative – are present when viewing Jewish Peoplehood as a

practice. Engaging in a practice of Jewish Peoplehood brings disparate Jews together to engage *intentionally* in the acts and expressions that characterize the demonstrative dimension, providing the opportunity to wrestle *openly* with one another's values and intellectual orientations, and, in doing so, generate and reinforce sensations of belonging, connectedness, and responsibility to the Jewish People.

A key component of the guide is the discussion of the various ways that peoplehood can be understood generally and Jewishly. Introducing the three dimensions that characterize Jewish Peoplehood will provide a strong template and allow for greater nuance when the curriculum calls for examining these understandings. Moreover, my findings offer examples of the kinds of feelings, thoughts, and actions that arise as a result of engaging in a practice of Jewish Peoplehood, which will prove beneficial when offering examples for how to engage in such a practice.

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Appendix A – Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

DESCRIPTION: You are asked to participate in a research study about Jewish Peoplehood. The researcher, Ben Zeiger, wants to learn "How do the employees of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles understand Jewish Peoplehood?" I wish to determine what, if any, understanding, or understandings, of Jewish Peoplehood is/are present at the LA Federation among its employees. If multiple understandings exist, I wish to examine how they compare with one another. Furthermore, I wish to examine how this/these understanding(s) relate(s) to my own proposed understanding. You are asked to be interviewed as part of this study. The identity of all participants will remain confidential – no names or other identifying information will be disclosed.

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT: Ben Zeiger, 530-219-2071, Ben.Zeiger@huc.edu, masters candidate in Jewish Nonprofit Management and Jewish Education at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no risks associated with this study. Benefits include contributing to scholarship about the Jewish people, clarifying how Jewish Peoplehood is viewed at the LA Federation, and adding to the growing understanding of Jewish Peoplehood.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: A single interview involving no more than 60 minutes of your time.

PAYMENTS: There will be no payment for participation in this study.

AUDIO RECORDING: The recordings will be heard by Ben Zeiger, (and if necessary, that of a transcription aide). The recordings will remain in Ben Zeiger's possession.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand that your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish – Erik Ludwig, Director of the HUC-JIR School of Jewish Nonprofit Management: eludwig@huc.edu, 3077 University Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90007, or toll-free at 800-899-0925

Please sign and date: I give consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded for this study.

SIGNATURE _____ DATE_____

The extra copy of this consent form is for you to keep.

Thank you for participating!

Appendix B – Interview Protocol

Identity

1. Jews today describe themselves in many ways, how would you characterize your relationship to Judaism?
    a. Do you consider yourself a part of any of the denominational movements?
2. Did Judaism play a role in your upbringing? If so, how would you describe that role? If not, how would you describe your introduction to Judaism?
3. How would you describe the amount of Jewish stuff in your life? Does it feel right, too much, not enough? How so?
4. What sights, sounds, or smells remind you of Judaism? Please elaborate.
5. Where might you place the role of Hebrew in your Jewish identity? How do imagine this came to be?
6. Do you consider Israel to be the homeland of the Jews? How so or not so?
7. Has your relationship to Judaism changed over time? How so or not so?

Interaction

1. How often do you participate in Jewish activities outside of work? Describe a recent experience
2. One a scale of 1-5 (1 being the least likely and 5 being the most likely) how likely are you to engage in an open conversation with a Jew whose views differ from yours regarding…
    a. Level of observance?
    b. Stance towards Israel?
3. What is your most memorable Jewish experience? What makes it stick out in your mind?

Who are the Jews?

1. If Martians descended from space tomorrow and asked you the question, "Who are the Jews?" how might you answer them?
2. Do you see the Jews / Jewish people as possessing a discrete set of shared characteristics? If so, what might they be?

What is Jewish Peoplehood?

1. When I mention the phrase, "Jewish Peoplehood," what is the first thing that comes to mind? Please elaborate.
2. What does Jewish Peoplehood mean to you?
3. What do you consider to be the purpose of the Jews / Jewish People?

Miscellaneous:

1. If you had a magic wand that could guarantee one aspect of the Jews / Jewish People that would remain the same 1000 years from now, what would it be, and why?
2. If the Jews / Jewish People were to vanish from the face of the earth tomorrow, what would you miss the most?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for your time!