

Interrogating Jewish Peoplehood: Concepts, Challenges, and Policies Final Report

Session 1

March 1, 2010

Topic: Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman, “What do we mean by ‘Jewish Peoplehood’ – and should it matter?”

Advance Readings:

Memo, February 25, 2010, from Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman, about the opening session.

Sylvia Barack Fishman, “Making Coalescence Work for Jewish Life,” in *Jewish Life and American Culture* (State University of New York Press, 2000), 186-190.

In-Session Readings:

Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (1986), 52-53; 60-61.

Session Summary:

Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman began the first session of the Interrogating Jewish Peoplehood series by introducing how the concept of Jewish Peoplehood has developed and evolved, and how and why. In her view, the ways in which the statement, “Jews are a people who...” has and continues to change over time is a fundamental element of the history of Jewish Peoplehood.

Professor Fishman’s central argument was that the distinctiveness of a people has to be established by something that defines who is inside the people and who is outside the people. Historically, what made Jews different were particular values, sets of behaviors, and their understanding of themselves. All aspects of Peoplehood - ethnicity, religion, ritual, social morality, culture, language, artistic expression - used to be interwoven together into a distinct whole that defined what being Jewish was. These distinctive traits were what identified and unified Jews until the Enlightenment and the French Revolution provided western European Jews with unprecedented opportunities to integrate with the majority population. However, with universalism Jewish Peoplehood in fact narrowed because different aspects were separated out of the single integrated picture of Peoplehood. Making the world a better place had been one aspect that now became the central message and purpose of the Jewish people. These events set off a historical progression leading directly into the central question of the session and perhaps of the entire series: what might Jewish distinctiveness mean or how might it be defined today,

particularly in the United States where Jews are so acculturated and young Jews are very much like young non-Jews?

One element of Jewish Peoplehood that emerged very quickly, by about 500 B.C.E., was the perception that Jews come from a specific geographic area, Judea, although even then diaspora communities already existed. The significant role geography has played for a formative part of Jewish history in defining what makes Jews Jews, is especially interesting in light of the current heated arguments about how vital Israel needs to be to Jewish Peoplehood today.

Professor Fishman used the brief Philip Roth excerpts to illustrate the many different ways a single individual as well as different generations can interpret Jewish Peoplehood and to lead off an active group discussion about identity, Jewishness, and Peoplehood. Very broadly, she said, there are two overarching concepts of Jewish Peoplehood, one that is encapsulated in religious feeling, and one that is not. During the discussion Professor Fishman urged participants to keep two factors in mind. First, distinctiveness, which is vital in order for there to be a people. Second, the group rather than the individual: “Jews are a people who...” rather than “A Jew is a person who...” should guide our reflections on Jewish Peoplehood.

One of the main discussion threads inspired by Professor Fishman’s comments and the Roth readings was about past, current and competing notions of where “authentic” Jewishness or Judaism can be found. For some it is in intense religious or community experiences (such as Chabad or Birthright Israel), for others it exists in social justice and moral and ethnic values, for still others, such ideas of authenticity are simply outdated and no longer relevant. This latter view can be tied to the second main discussion thread, regarding what Steven Cohen described as an “intergenerational conversation” between an older generation that believes Jewish Peoplehood is very important, even if they cannot quite define it, and that young people should feel the same, and the younger generation that is not convinced that Jewish Peoplehood is important and is skeptical of the whole (undefined) concept. The few younger people in the room, when asked, confirmed feeling uncomfortable with being linked to a single identity, particularly one with tribal or ethnic associations. Instead, they described an attraction to particular elements of Jewish Peoplehood, less religion or practice, and more having to do with culture, social justice, a sense of community, connection to Israel, elements that directly correspond to their broader values, beliefs, interests and obligations.

It was pointed out that authentic Jewish experiences can be found in immersive non-religious experiences like camping, Birthright, day schools, which are distinctive yet open, engaging without being exclusionary. The key to the generational difference seems to be that younger Jewish Americans identify not necessarily first and almost certainly not only as Jewish, but as Jewish and American and this, that, and many other things. Another concern with the intensive religious experiences, such as the one experienced by Roth’s protagonist in *Mea Shearim*, are often perceived as being authentic, but also across a line that many do not want to cross, which keeps the observer from feeling part

of what could be the Jewish people, because the lens of what defines that Jewish people is too narrow or extreme and is not something they can personally or experientially connect to. Professor Fishman argued that historically there was more than one authentic Jewish people, but she urged participants to leave that argument behind and to focus on distinctiveness of boundaries or of cultural intensity instead of on authenticity.

Disagreement over the notion of Jewish pride arose during the conversation. Some participants viewed pride as an integral element of Jewish Peoplehood, even as the emotion that made them feel most connected to being Jewish, while others, especially those disconnected from a sense of historical pride about survival and continuity, expressed uncertainty as to what the pride was or what it should be for or about. In many ways these divergent viewpoints paralleled those running throughout the entire discussion: Is Peoplehood about certain feelings or emotional connections, or is it about distinctive behaviors, actions and experiences? Are the traditional leading Jewish organizations trying to compel young people to understand and accept the significance of Jewish Peoplehood in the same way that past and older generations have, rather than listening to the younger generation and finding ways to meet its changing needs and desires? Is the concept or are the concepts of Jewish Peoplehood enough, or should the younger generation's demand for something to believe in, something they can identify with and be inspired and engaged by in the Jewish community, be taken more seriously? The session concluded with a question about Jewish obligation, which had not come up during the conversation, and whether or not that was or should still be part of thinking about Jewish Peoplehood.

Session 2

April 12, 2010

Topic: Sarah Bunin Benor, "Challenging Jewish Peoplehood: Or, why younger Jewish leaders seem to care less about Jewish Peoplehood," Shifra Bronznick responding.

Advance Readings:

Jack Wertheimer, "The High Cost of Jewish Living," *Commentary Magazine*, March 2010.

Jill Jacobs, "Non-Zero Sum: Helping Others and Ourselves," *Forward*, March 10, 2010.

Additional Suggested Advance Readings:

Gary Rosenblatt, "What Passover Tells us About Peoplehood," *The Jewish Week*, March 24, 2010.

Alisa Rubin Kurshan, "Jewish Peoplehood as Outcome," *The Jewish Week*, April 7, 2010.

Session Summary:

Professor Sarah Bunin Benor began the second session by recounting three anecdotes, noting that there were hundreds of other possible examples, that reveal how young people, including committed young Jewish leaders, have a different sense of responsibility to the Jewish community than older generations, especially vis-à-vis what they feel is their human responsibility. While in the first session Professor Fishman traced this shift to the Enlightenment, Professor Benor offered three explanations for the current generational shift: changing Jewish needs, changing Jewish identities, and changing progressive stances towards Israel.

Changing Jewish needs: Today there are greater dire needs among others than among Jews, who make up a tiny proportion of those suffering in the world today. In addition, though antisemitism is on the rise in some places, today's Jews do not have mobilizing events such as pogroms, the Holocaust, the founding of Israel, that guided their parents and grandparents. Young people feel comfortable in America, have close friends and relatives who are not Jewish, and so do not have the strong us-versus-them mentality of older generations. Judaism is also manifesting in increasingly personally rather than in strictly collectively meaningful ways. Jewishness is now just one of many identities and young Jews are finding creative ways to express the multiple aspects of who they are, like Matisyahu, Jewish LGBT groups, or Operation Bubbe.

Changing Jewish identities: Framed by the Wertheimer article and Jacobs' response, Professor Benor focused on the mostly but not only younger Jews who support organizations not necessarily focused primarily on Jews and that are committed to Israel, yet feel conflicted about Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. Her research demonstrates that those in for-profit professions such as real estate and law and with upper class or upwardly mobile orientations tend to be strongly committed to more traditional, mainstream, Jewish organizations and causes. Similarly, establishment leaders with the strongest sense of responsibility to Israel and to Jews tend to come from two groups: the orthodox and immigrants or children of immigrants. Those involved with social justice and culture groups tend to be in non-profit and to have a non-establishment orientation.

Changing progressive stances towards Israel: The strong pro-Palestinian stance common in progressive circles today often manifests as an anti-Israeli stance. However, many young people even within those circles feel a strong commitment to Israel and so are uncomfortable with that stance, yet they feel the need to articulate some protest against or some responsibility for Israeli actions toward Arabs.

Professor Benor expressed agreement with Jacobs, but also sympathy for Wertheimer's concerns and appreciation for his ideas, like for a Jewish Teach for America. Her critique of Wertheimer stems from her belief that changing Jewish needs, identities and stances towards Israel should not be rejected, but should be recognized so that they can be worked with. She emphasized that Jewish social justice organizations are not *causing* young Jews to donate to and volunteer for non-Jewish causes. Instead, they are taking those tendencies into account and working with them to engage young Jews with other

Jews and with Jewish organizational life. In certain cases these social justice groups are in fact serving as gateways to further Jewish involvement.

Professor Benor concluded on a personal note, describing herself as a tribalist who takes a universalist approach to many issues. She recognized that not all participants in the session share her admiration for Jewish social justice groups, but she encouraged all as Jewish leaders to accept new approaches to Jewish Peoplehood and to find ways to work with them as a means to entice young Jews into greater Jewish involvement. Such openness will offer young Jews opportunities to learn about their past, to strengthen their current Jewish networks, and to gain a new sense of commitment to the Jewish future.

Shifra Bronznick structured her response around three somewhat different current trends: changing identities, not just Jewish, changing Jewish organizations, and enduring values. Agreeing with Professor Benor, Ms. Bronznick argued that Jews are not being lost to Jewish social justice organizations. Rather, these new groups are serving as doorways into Jewishness for those born Jewish but without the desire to have anything to do with Jewishness. She suggested that when thinking about changing identities, simultaneity is a better word than multiplicity because people are literally experiencing all the multiple aspects of their identity simultaneously.

Ms. Bronznick's central concern is with the establishment, the established Jewish community, the legacy organizations, and their resoluteness in the face of the very real renaissance of Jewish life that is currently underway. There is substantial evidence that the world has changed, it is not just rhetoric, and so unchanging legacy organizations must embark on the same types of changes that new leaders, such as those of Professor Benor's social justice organizations, are naturally and organically doing. Ms. Bronznick argued that the world we live in is very different and we cannot pretend not to know about it. We cannot pretend not to know that rape is now a main weapon of war. As Jews we have no choice but to act based on what we know. The money these organizations raise is for the public good and therefore for the Jewish future and its good. That is why she is demanding they step back, look at all the money coming in and being allocated out in a collaborative manner, with other organizations, in order to identify where money is being wasted and how funds can be more effectively distributed, and even which organizations might no longer be necessary or relevant, a process she called, "an accounting of the soul." She concluded by arguing that we also have to ask, what are the enduring values of being Jewish, because the story of the next generation of Jewish leaders will still be a deeply Jewish story.

One of the first comments leading off the discussion stated that in fact there is widespread ignorance about how great need among Jews is, arguing against Professor Benor's point about changing Jewish needs. But this was contentious, as others thought that in the current economic downturn Jews can either take care of their own through traditional Jewish agencies, or can locate themselves within the broader economic reality to work together, in partnership with others, to address common needs. The latter view is based on the belief that taking the broader social justice approach actually takes care of

internal Jewish needs as well. Tension emerged between the belief that the legacy organizations should strictly focus their efforts on Jewish needs, and the fact that they actually already benefit a lot of non-Jews, which is not as publicized as it should or could be. Here Professor Benor pointed out that this tension reveals how porous the boundaries can be between the establishment and the newer social justice organizations, and between their leaders, whether lay or professional.

A concern expressed by more than one participant was the relationship between the new social justice organizations and their relationships with or support for Israel, or their lack thereof. Another concern regarded the strength of the extremes on both ends of the spectrum, those who will only support something if it is clearly Jewish, and those who do not want their interests to be connected to any overt Jewishness at all, those who support Israel fully and unquestioningly, and those who support Israel but have serious problems with some of its actions and decisions. The question of where the middle ground is, where both Jewish people and humanity in general can be served, whether by the legacy organizations or by the social justice groups and by their respective supporters, was asked repeatedly.

There was also some agreement on the need to find a way to incorporate god into these discussions. One suggestion was for a new, non-orthodox theology that will offer something new and vibrant to replace an older, traditional theology which for many young people is stale and no longer relevant. This was tied into a discussion about the need for meaning, that Jewish Peoplehood has to offer something meaningful in order to remain relevant and attractive to young people who are seeking meaningful experiences and encounters in their lives. People are drawn to social justice because they believe it is meaningful, so the legacy organizations must also find a means and message that is perceived as meaningful.

Session 3

April 21, 2010

Topic: Jay Michaelson, “Challenges to Jewish Peoplehood – Or, why Israel may now present an obstacle to identification with the Jewish people,” Rabbi Gordon Tucker responding.

Advance Readings:

Jay Michaelson, “Peoplehood: There’s No There There,” *The Forward*, April 16, 2008, issue of April 25, 2008.

Jay Michaelson, “How I’m Losing My Love For Israel,” *The Forward*, September 16, 2009, issue of September 25, 2009.

Forum, “Where Is the Love for Israel?,” *The Forward*, October 21, 2009, issue of October 30, 2009.

Jay Michaelson, "It's Complicated: Why Ambivalence is Good for Israel...and American Jews," *The Forward*, March 10, 2010, issue of March 19, 2010.

Session Summary:

Jay Michaelson began by outlining what he views as the two major collision courses between Israel and Peoplehood as values. The first is the sort of natural collision of how Peoplehood intersects with Israel. He argued that the growth of Peoplehood as a public institutional Jewish value is largely to replace a focus on Israel. The second collision, which he focused on as an example of what is actually happening on the ground now, is that if we want a community that stands for something, for example, for the existence of the state of Israel, that value is in conflict with the value of building a fully inclusive Jewish community because there are Jews who do not believe in or support the legitimacy of Israel. Inclusion on one hand, support for Israel on the other, these are two different values. Is Jewish Peoplehood a tent large enough to include all people and all viewpoints, or are certain groups going to be "voted out" because their views are perceived as too far to the left or the right of what is considered mainstream?

The overarching reason Mr. Michaelson sees behind the collisions between Israel and Peoplehood as values has to do with content. As he described it, Peoplehood to some extent is non-teleological, content-free. There is no end point to which it is pointing, only to more Peoplehood, to more continuity. This is a strength in that it is nebulous enough to include a wide range of conceptions and iterations of what it means to be Jewish. Israel, on the other hand, is highly teleological, it is very content-full. There is a Jewish and democratic state in the Middle East, we should care about it, it has content to it and thus promotes disagreement. Should it be more Jewish or more democratic? What is a Jewish state? Is it religious? Is it secular? We can argue about it because there is something there to argue about.

The second collision was so present in Mr. Michaelson's mind because he had just returned from a trip to San Francisco where the Federation had recently instituted a policy of not funding programs or individuals critical of Israel. He felt, as a result, that the community was in a state of clamp-down and fear, with even tenured professors and top leaders afraid to speak their minds for fear of losing their positions or programs which all depend to some extent on philanthropic support. He compared the current atmosphere in San Francisco to McCarthyism, with people whose views on Israel were considered outside of the mainstream, being blacklisted. The question that arises is, "who calls the shots," because there is a significant problem when a small number of people who have particular views and who are major donors are able to dictate how Jewish organizations spend their money. The San Francisco example also contradicts the rhetoric of Peoplehood as ostensibly being content-free, a unifying bond, a kind of lowest common denominator that brings everyone together regardless of different ideological persuasion. This notion is in conflict with the notion of there being a kind of entrance exam for being a kosher member of the Jewish community, and that is having certain views, which right now are mainstream views, about Israel.

Mr. Michaelson's last point was to express concern about the unexpected response to his personal essay, "How I'm Losing My Love For Israel," which for him was an ambivalent reflection of the evolution of his feelings and growing alienation regarding Israel. The piece seems to have largely been read, however, as an unambiguously anti-Israel and evidence of younger people being alienated from Israel. Others who read it correctly responded with relief that he had articulated the ambivalence that they felt they could not, out of fear for their positions in the Jewish community. The disappearance of nuance and ambivalence from conversations about Israel that both these responses point to is a dangerous road to go down, because if younger unaffiliated college students in particular are presented with a black or white choice, you are either for us or against us, they are going to pick against us. He concluded by stating that if the goal is not only to promote Peoplehood but also to promote Israel within the American Jewish community, current tactics are 180 degrees backwards.

Rabbi Gordon Tucker began his response by expressing agreement about the need for ambivalence and nuance and how he has also perceived these options to be disappearing from the table. He also urged that we not give up on thinking about Peoplehood and trying to figure out what it is. In his view, a lot of people are motivated to do what they do Jewishly and in the Jewish world by a sense of Peoplehood. He gave as an example his undeniable sense of kinship with Jews whose understanding is so radically different from what his is, that he concludes that they actually practice a different religion. Still, he feels they are *mishpachah*. The question is, what creates that sense, despite the enormous differences? He concluded that the problem of inclusion versus commitment, though not necessarily commitment to Israel, has been a source of tension and conflict throughout Jewish history. It is not unique to current generations or to the issue of Zionism. In his view, there has always been an idea that there is a way of understanding all Jews as being part of Jewish Peoplehood, and still defining a normative center.

The question of inclusion, of how you define who is in and who is out, was a central aspect of the ensuing discussion. An analogy was made to family, which presents a similar problem. Some people might consider a fourth cousin family, while others would not have any idea who their fourth cousin was. So where are the boundaries, how do they get drawn, and by whom? Extending from Rabbi Tucker's comment about kinship came the idea of a mysterious love, of a tender protective love that we have even for those who are incredibly different. There was disagreement, however, as some argued that there are those about or for whom the word *mishpachah* means nothing, about or for whom those deep emotional bonds are simply not there. In those cases, ideas of love, kinship and *mishpachah* become exclusive, rather than inclusive.

Much discussion also centered on the question of ambivalence and ambiguity. While there was general consensus on the need for space for and acknowledgement of the gray areas, there was also agreement that sometimes the black or white position has to be taken, even if it is uncomfortable or not the position one would normally take, because Peoplehood ultimately depends on people taking stands for one another. To illustrate, Mr.

Michaelson gave the example of J Street taking a firm stance against Iran when it comes to the nuclear issue, which he argued could help legitimize their more ambiguous stance regarding the Palestinian issue. He also shifted from talking about nuance and ambivalence, to talking about pluralism, which he defined not as a mushy gray mass in the middle, but as an accommodation of many different strongly held views and identities. Real progress would be accepting that diversity rather than fearing it as emblematic of the disintegration of Jewish Peoplehood.

Attention was also paid to the question of Israel and whether the central need is to increase knowledge about Israel, especially among young people, so that they would be more motivated to stand up in its favor, even if it is not perfect, because of its history and because of its many positive aspects. Without that knowledge, when they hear Israel being criticized or hear negative news stories about Israeli actions, they feel no need to defend Israel, and by extension Jewish Peoplehood or themselves. At the same time, it was argued that commitment to and support for Israel is no longer a critical given for the younger generation, rather, it is contingent upon feeling that Israel is in line with a person's human values and beliefs. That makes the problem not knowledge or education, but finding a way to support Israel even while being highly critical of some of its actions and positions.

Mr. Michaelson concluded the conversation by stating that Israel problematizes Peoplehood. He appreciated the idea of love, but argued that love of anything heightens his responsibility to check that he is being rational with respect to that thing. So if we love Israel we have a higher obligation to make sure our love of the place is not clouding our ethical concern for the Palestinian other. If we love Judaism and Jews we have a heightened obligation to make sure that love is not swaying what should be objective ethical determinations. Israel could be seen as the test case. Can we as a people rise above our deeply felt and perhaps even holy kinship bonds with Klal Yisrael to also see our even more holy and even more ethical bond to all of humanity? The concern is that with regards to Israel, Jewish Peoplehood is armed with enough power to potentially become oppressive.

Session 4

May 10, 2010

Topic: Dr. Jack Ukeles, "Policy Implications: Changing Conceptions of Jewish Peoplehood and what to do about them," Clare Hedwat responding.

Dr. Jack Ukeles began by identifying the perception that many young Jewish people are not resonating with the concept of Jewish Peoplehood as the central issue of these conversations. He pointed out that this common perception is stemming from much anecdotal information, though there is very little hard data. The available data indicates that it depends which young people you are talking about, as young orthodox, more conservative, and parents with children tend to feel more connected to Jewish Peoplehood than to single Jews or those more on the reform side of the spectrum. Since large numbers of young Jews are single it could be argued that statistically

substantial numbers probably do not resonate with the concept of Jewish Peoplehood. At the same time, numbers of orthodox Jews are growing so it is a mistake to leave them out of the equation.

Dr. Ukeles noted that in the previous three sessions, no working definition(s) of Jewish Peoplehood had been provided. He suggested that Jewish Peoplehood has a double meaning, the first is descriptive, factually describing the existence of the Jews as a people, the second is normative, a value describing the feeling of commitment and belonging to the Jewish people. Both are relevant, but the second is of particular interest here.

To return to the perception that young Jews are not connecting, Dr. Ukeles asked, is this true, if so, should it bother us, and if yes, then what can we do about it? First he identified what we cannot do about it, which is to coerce or guilt. He sees Judaism as about choice first, obligation second, people cannot be harangued into it. He does believe a sense of Jewish Peoplehood is good for Jews because it strengthens identity and because Jewish core values are good for the world. Therefore, it is worth investing energy in keeping the sense of Jewish Peoplehood alive. One way in which this can be done, without coercing or guilting, is to focus on the Jewish narrative, which is found in Jewish texts, history, experience, as well as in the land of Israel. The Jewish past is embedded in our present and ultimately in our future. The way to strengthen Jewish Peoplehood is to tell the Jewish story clearly and effectively, and hope that many Jews will be moved by it. If they are moved by it they can be connected by it. If we do not tell it, they will not know it.

Dr. Ukeles suggested that the Jewish narrative could be disseminated by cloning the Hagaddah, a story told to those who love it, those who hate it, those who are pretty much oblivious. The four sons is a model for telling the story to multiple audiences, including ourselves. We live in sea of compelling strong narratives and at the moment, the Jewish narrative is being drowned out by competing narratives. He expressed much greater concern about the delegitimization of the Jewish narrative than about the delegitimization of Israel, because he believes one flows from and into the other. Underpinning Jewish Peoplehood is the role of land in that narrative and the role of restating that narrative.

In her response, Clare Hedwat countered that Dr. Ukeles' starting perception is incorrect, that young Jewish people do feel connectedness, but that does not necessitate a connection with Jewish institutions. She sees in her generation an increasing sense of Jewish identity, but not a natural trajectory of Jewish practice leading to Jewish Peoplehood. She questioned both orthodoxy and life cycle as being indicators of greater connectedness. She cited two counter examples. First, in New York especially synagogue membership is up, but ties to Israel are down. Second, to make a general characterization, the Russian-speaking Jewish community tends to feel connected to the Jewish people without having a strong Jewish identity or any Jewish practice. She concluded that you do not need to know Jewish texts to feel Jewish Peoplehood. Ms. Hedwat agrees about the necessity of Jewish Peoplehood, but thinks the challenge is articulating why it is so important in an age when most Jews are not in terrible danger, something that Dr. Ukeles

and others disagreed with, citing growing insecurity in Israel, Europe and the United States.

On the question of Israel, Ms. Hedwat argued that for her generation connection and commitment to Israel are more voluntary and contingent rather than a given as in the past. They are now based on if Israel is seen as being in line with a person's sense of what is right and just. This is related to what she views as a major misconception of the Jewish enterprise, which is that if you identify as a Jew then you necessarily care about the human race less, being Jewish somehow conflicts with identifying as universalist.

In response to Dr. Ukeles' policy suggestion to tell the Jewish narrative, Ms. Hedwat argued that her problem with text or narrative as the springboard to Jewish Peoplehood is that it presupposes a form of collective identity that does not exist today. What she finds compelling about the Jewish community is the many different ideas and expressions of what it means to be Jewish circulating throughout it. Her preferred model are the four modes with which UJA approaches Peoplehood: fostering global Jewish connections; building on Israel as a Jewish enterprise; investment in creating leadership sensitive to a changing Jewish Peoplehood; and fostering cultural uniqueness and diversity within the Jewish people.

Much of the discussion centered on Dr. Ukeles' narrative idea, the positive and negative aspects of it, and about how to decide on a single narrative for a diverse Jewish people. One argument was that young American Jews have a good narrative they are happy and comfortable with, the American narrative, why would they need or want another? This is a shift from past Jewish generations, when the narrative from where they came could never have been theirs. A related comment was that multiple narratives must be allowed to coexist within the same individual or group. It is not just about Jewish Peoplehood versus universalism, as Ms. Hedwat said, but about accepting a single individual being part of multiple Peoplehoods. A number of participants were concerned about how the Jewish narrative would be identified, or that many Jews might not feel any connection to it, or that pressure to conform to a single narrative would be alienating to supporters of Jewish Peoplehood. After all, there are Jewish narratives out there that are repugnant to other Jews. In addition, the Haggadah, or any other text, is interpreted differently by each individual. Dr. Ukeles' response was that it is fine for each to have their interpretation, what matters is that the Haggadah is always the same, single narrative. It is a great story and the normative Jewish narrative is a great story of life, death, rebirth. It is a story that many Jews, who would not agree on much else, would agree on. He further argued that narrative is a way to expose people to the value Jewish Peoplehood holds for them because no coercive strategy could expose them to its potential value. He would rather see people try to find common elements in major descriptions of the Jewish narrative, than continue to go silent. His concern is the tremendous silence there has been about the Jewish narrative, especially in the political arena. Other participants agreed that this could be a good starting point at least, as there is a lot of ignorance about the Jewish narrative, even among the moderately affiliated, for example. The concern remained that the Jewish Peoplehood space should be expanding, not narrowing, and how can a single narrative be

expansive? Along the same lines, the comment was made that the word “listen” had yet to come up, which, to continue to Haggadah analogy, can be seen as reminiscent of the wicked son. He asks a very good question but is given a terrible answer, which essentially is, we will be happy to take the journey without you. We should begin by listening to people with Jewish identities who are not part of the normative narrative, at least make them feel that they are being heard.

While there was general agreement, including between Dr. Ukeles and Ms. Hedwat, that a strong sense of Jewish Peoplehood is important and that it is partly defined by feeling some sense of connection to and caring for other Jews, the question and the point of disagreement remained, how to invest in and expand it, particularly among young people who have been raised with infinite options and identities and opportunities, and who do not have the connection to Jewish Peoplehood or commitment to Israel that was almost inherent in previous generations. Compared with building Jewish identity or community, Dr. Ukeles believes that building Jewish Peoplehood is the most difficult because it is the most abstract. In defense of his proposal of the single policy prescription to tell the Jewish narrative to the broadest possible audience, he argued that the idea to clone the Haggadah in a much bigger way is one strategy to open up the option for people who have not thought about it and do not know about it.