

Introduction: Recurring Themes of the Peoplehood Fellows

Every generation of Jews inherits the language of peoplehood. We speak naturally of *Klal Yisrael*, of mutual responsibility, shared memory, and shared destiny. Yet, every generation must also ask itself anew what these words mean to it, what they require, how they are transmitted, and whether they are equal or relevant to the circumstances in which Jews find themselves. These questions are never settled. They return whenever the conditions of Jewish life change.

The attacks of October 7, 2023 and the war that followed have produced an extraordinary outpouring of reflection about the condition of the Jewish people. Across the Jewish world, educators, rabbis, communal leaders, and writers have asked whether this moment will permanently reshape Jewish identity or prove to be another episode of temporary solidarity. Others have worried about widening divisions within Jewish communities, particularly around Israel. Still others have wondered whether a renewed sense of belonging, however genuine, can be sustained without institutions capable of giving it lasting form. Running beneath all of these concerns is a more fundamental question: what does Jewish peoplehood actually ask of us now? And what does it eternally ask of us?

These questions have occupied Jewish thinkers for generations. What is new is the context in which they are being asked. The events of October 7 did not create the challenges facing Jewish peoplehood. They exposed them. Questions that had often remained implicit became unavoidable.

The essays collected in this volume do not set out to answer these questions directly. Most do not mention October 7 at all. Nor are they principally concerned with constructing new definitions of Jewish peoplehood. Their contribution lies elsewhere. Taken together, they represent a significant shift in the conversation, from describing peoplehood as an idea to examining the educational conditions under which it is cultivated.

This is, perhaps, the most striking characteristic of the two cohorts of Peoplehood Fellows. Their attention is directed less toward theory than toward the formation of programs, educators, and structures. Rather than asking what Jewish peoplehood is, they ask how it comes to exist in the life of an individual or a community. They approach the subject not primarily as philosophers or sociologists but as educators. That shift in emphasis has important consequences.

One recurring concern is how to approach memory. Is it sustained simply by transmitting information about the past or is it an active participation in it? How do you inhabit rather than merely observe the dilemmas of earlier generations. Is memory about family migration or is it about local Jewish context? The pieces about memory read together, suggest that memory becomes durable when individuals recognize themselves as participants in an unfolding story rather than spectators looking backward at a completed one.

A second concern is the challenge of sustaining relationship amid difference. This question has acquired particular urgency in contemporary Jewish life, where disagreements over Israel, politics, and religious identity often threaten communal cohesion. These pieces suggest that it isn't about consensus, rather, they ask what kinds of practices enable disagreement to remain within the bounds of relationship. Structured dialogue, *chevruta*, interpretive generosity, and habits of intellectual humility are treated not simply as pedagogical techniques but as capacities upon which Jewish peoplehood itself depends. Their work suggests that the durability of a people rests less upon uniformity of opinion than upon the ability to sustain covenantal relationships despite enduring disagreement.

Other essays challenge inherited assumptions about how Jewish identity is formed. Contemporary Jewish education often measures success by exposure: exposure to texts, to Israel, to history, to ritual, or to community. The fellows consistently move beyond this model. How can art, text study and alternative ways of engaging with text expand the possibilities of interpretation through visual art, demonstrating that serious Jewish learning is not confined to written commentary. And yet, how can Tanakh be as a source of identity formation rather than information alone. Finally, what is role of awe in cultivating commitments that exceed the merely cognitive. Across these essays runs a shared conviction that participation, rather than exposure, is the more reliable path toward enduring attachment.

Read individually, these essays offer thoughtful contributions to particular educational questions. Read together, they reveal something larger about the present state of Jewish peoplehood education.

First, they suggest that peoplehood is more fragile than Jewish communities have often assumed. Shared crisis may produce moments of extraordinary solidarity, but solidarity alone does not secure continuity. Continuity depends upon institutions, educational practices, and communities capable of shaping durable habits of belonging.

Second, they suggest that disagreement is not, in itself, the principal threat to Jewish peoplehood. Jewish history offers ample evidence that disagreement has long been one of the defining characteristics of Jewish civilization. The greater danger lies in losing the habits that allow disagreement to remain within a shared moral and communal framework. Several of the fellows make the cultivation of those habits the central task of their educational work.

Third, these essays consistently understand learners not merely as heirs to a tradition but as future participants in its development. This represents a subtle but significant shift. The transmission of Jewish life has always required preservation. These essays remind us

that it also requires creation. A people survives not only by remembering its inheritance but by producing new interpreters, new teachers, new artists, and new contributors who understand themselves as responsible for extending that inheritance into circumstances their predecessors could not have anticipated.

Finally, this collection reminds us that Jewish peoplehood is ultimately built in places that rarely command public attention. It is built in classrooms, around *chevruta* tables, through works of art, in conversations between teachers and students, on educational journeys, and in communities of learning. Those settings may appear modest when measured against the scale of the challenges confronting contemporary Jewish life. Yet history suggests that people are rarely renewed through declarations alone. They are renewed through institutions that cultivate memory, responsibility, judgment, and affection across generations.

That, in the end, is the contribution of this volume. It offers something more practical than a new theory of peoplehood and, perhaps for that reason, I view it as more enduring: a series of thoughtful experiments in the work of forming Jews who are capable of sustaining a Jewish people. If the questions surrounding peoplehood have become more urgent in recent years, these essays remind us that the answers will be found in the patient work of Jewish education itself.



To access all the Peoplehood Pedagogies developed by the fellows, scan the QR code or [click here](#).



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