

The Family Story as an Entry Point to Deal with Jewish Peoplehood: "From My Story to Our Story"

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I was born in Haifa, Israel and have lived most of my life in a Kibbutz in the Negev. Yet, first and foremost, I am also a part of the Jewish People – daughter of Jews from Poland, part of a global Jewish family! Just like all of you, who are part of a certain Jewish community, but are also part of our global Jewish Family. We all have stories to tell about where in this world our families come from and how we came to settle where we are living today, what are our family's traditions and rituals and what does it mean to be a part of our local Jewish community. The mission of Beth Hatefutsoth is to encourage and nurture those narratives and enhance a sense of belonging.

I would like to emphasize three steps towards building Peoplehood Capital:

1. Sense of belonging:

For centuries the Jewish people, has been living in multiple locations around the world, under different citizenships, within different cultures, speaking different languages, and yet retained strong connection and a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish People. This sense of belonging was taken for granted!

The young generation today identifies with multiple circles of belonging, set by personal interests in a global world. We raise our kids today as citizens of the world, and each person creates his own space, using its personal narratives, hobbies and interest. The sense of belonging to a people is therefore something that needs to be asked and triggered.

We should seek to enhance the sense of belonging, by attracting the young generation, and by being pragmatic. Without the basic feeling of belonging – all the other debates are irrelevant. First you need to install a sense! To tickle! Only then you can cultivate the above ideologies and debates.

We don't deal with the Peoplehood in the philosophic and academic level but rather deal with Peoplehood Capital; we don't talk about it, but we deal with how to do it. How can we deliver Peoplehood in a pragmatic way, to a soldier visiting Beth Hatefutsoth, or to a teenager in a Jewish summer camp?

2. Language:

We first need the tools to tickle and stimulate our "kishke"; In Beth Hatefutsoth we use our exhibitions and archival resources to do so. We also use, like in other places, informal experience as well. Once you feel belong we should let you articulate your feeling, and create the cognitive frame. First feel then think!

We have to look for the basic, the infrastructure and build bottom – up, to develop a new language, of mutual identity. Instead of dealing with bridging between communities, let us build a common language. Let's create the glue that maintains a sense of belonging to a people. We need to help identify collective basic ingredients that make us one people, enable networking and seek answers to the question – what does it mean to be a part.

3. Connecting to the collective:

The search and discovery of our roots can act as an entry point to a place where everyone can find something to identify with.

We usually speak about the first circle as the personal circle, and then the circle grows to the circle of the immediate family and from there to the third circle of community. I suggest that in order to enhance the Jewish identity we should create another circle – the circle of the *Mishpucha / Chamula* – the extended family, the Peoplehood circle - connecting between the immediate family and the community circles. I feel that without this mediating circle, we move too fast to the community circle, a circle that represents establishment and commitment. The individual needs first to feel and understand that he belongs, only then can choose his commitment. When the family circle grows into the extended family circle, you create a space that enables personal growth and connection – from your own story to our story, the collective story of a people. In this space it is easier to create connections. Only when you identify yourself as part of the collective you are available to hear about and engage in commitment in a wider frame – the frame of an established community filled with Jewish narratives of contemporary Jewish life.

The Webster dictionary defines Peoplehood as: “the awareness of the underlying unity that makes the individual a part of a people”

The Random house dictionary defines as: "the consciousness of certain beliefs or characteristics that make one part of a people; sense of belonging to a people".

What are we talking about -

- Collective identity?
- Membership in a tribe?
- Combination of religion, nationality, and ethnicity?
- Core values, core concepts?
- Rich Jewish lifestyle which might be secular, humanist, religious, socialist, environmentalist, feminist, or most likely a mix of several paths.

I would claim that Peoplehood is about the ongoing Jewish experience and lifestyle and the global sense of togetherness and belonging. Peoplehood is only one dimension in the individual's identity; however it is the underlining one.

The answer to the question of how can we translate Peoplehood from the philosophic level to the pragmatic, is the job we need to do together.

Who we are, what are we, where have we been and where we are going? Bridging between present and past and providing a key to our future.

I would like to finish with a 5 minutes segment from an authentic home video that was filmed in 1931 in Novogrodek, Belarus, by Alexander Harkavi that was born and raised in Novogrodek and immigrated to NY in 1881. In his visit in 1931 to his hometown he hired a photographer from Warsaw to join him in his journey. The next 5 minutes will illustrate in snap shots the Jewish community of Novogrodek, a story of Jewish lifestyle.

Questions:

- How can we deliver Peoplehood to the next generation?

- How can we write and run a program about Peoplehood to teenagers, young adults, counselors and teachers?