

# JEWISH PEDAGOGIES OF PEOPLEHOOD

## CONCEPT PAPER

### 1

## BACKGROUND AND GOALS

It is the belief of M<sup>2</sup> that educators who think deeply about the art of Jewish education benefit not only themselves and their own craft, but also inspire and elevate the entire field of Jewish education.

M<sup>2</sup>'s Jewish Pedagogy Fellowships have been developed to give senior Jewish educators a forum in which to engage in a rigorous, research-based exploration resulting in the development of new Jewish pedagogies that are inspired by, grounded in, or an interpretation of a Jewish text, ritual, custom, or tradition and that address core issues of Jewish peoplehood.

There are multiple organizations and initiatives dedicated to addressing questions around Jewish peoplehood. In the US, the Z3 Project—a partner in this Fellowship—promotes a stronger relationship between Diaspora Jewry and Israel by modeling how Zionism can evolve and how our communities can come together for meaningful discussions about the Diaspora and Israel.

The Pedagogies of Jewish Peoplehood Research Fellowship will serve the field of Jewish education by aspiring towards the following goals:

1. To provide an enriching and stimulating cohort experience for senior educators that both supports and challenges their deeper thinking through research, peer review, and a writing process.
2. To elevate the level of conversation around Jewish education to go beyond the *content* of education toward Jewish peoplehood and to address *how the methods and practices of teaching* towards collective consciousness can be grounded in Jewish tradition.
3. To invite educators (in the Fellowship itself and beyond) into the “*beit midrash of pedagogies*” to be inspired and stimulated by the results of the Fellowship.
4. To begin to create a library of Jewish pedagogies that will propel the field of Jewish peoplehood education forward and allow other educators to use and adapt these resources to their particular circumstances.



M<sup>2</sup> is proud to partner with the Z3 Project of the Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto, California.



Jewish pedagogies emerge from seldom-articulated worldviews about compelling needs in the world, deeply held values that inform a vision of how those needs might be addressed, and the role of education as a strategy for moving toward that vision.

Let's define our terms:

- \* **A pedagogy** is a set of educational practices that is a manifestation of a certain educational worldview.
- \* An **educational worldview** is a set of beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality that ground and influence all one's perceiving, thinking, knowing, and doing about how humans learn, grow, and flourish.

From here we can ask, what is a Jewish pedagogy? We are suggesting that:

- \* **A Jewish Pedagogy** is a set of educational practices reflective of an educational worldview that is inspired by, grounded in, or an interpretation of a Jewish text, ritual, custom, or tradition.

We are all familiar with the educational phenomenon that takes a value or practice from another culture, whether it be secular humanism or spiritual traditions of the East, and slaps on a Hebrew word or Jewish phrase to present it as Jewish. Our aim here is different. We are seeking pedagogies that either emerge entirely from Jewish tradition or are significantly shaped and informed by it. For example, while a *mifgash*, or structured encounter between two groups, may resemble secular cross-cultural dialogue groups in some ways, a Jewish pedagogy of *mifgash* might emphasize sharing diverse responses to a central text as modeled by a page of Talmud, drawing in varied experiences across time and space into one unfolding story.

In order to develop a Jewish pedagogy, we must first explore our educational worldview, and for the sake of this fellowship, we focus on our worldview specifically in regard to Jewish Peoplehood. We can do this by considering a series of questions:

- What pains us when we contemplate the state of Jewish Peoplehood?
- What are the Jewish values and beliefs that inform how we prioritize those particular needs among all the other issues in the Jewish world?
- What might be possible to do to address those needs? And how can education be used as a tool to address them?



The need for a strong sense of Jewish collective belonging has never been greater. The urgency of helping young Jews develop their own sense of connection and commitment to the Jewish people, thus building a collective consciousness, is real.

In particular, the events engulfing the Jewish world - in both Israel and in the Diaspora - since October 7th have highlighted the deep inter-connectivity between Jews all over the world. This is an ongoing real-life moment of Jewish Peoplehood in action, foisted on all Jews, whether or not they understood themselves as active or committed members of the Jewish People or not. The need to address this reality with creative and effective pedagogies of Jewish Peoplehood has never been greater.

It is within this context, then, that M<sup>2</sup> and Z3 hope to contribute to this field by applying the methods and focus of our previous Research Fellowships to the field of Jewish Peoplehood education.

### The Field of Jewish Peoplehood Education

The field of Peoplehood education is still underdeveloped and under-discussed.<sup>1</sup> We believe that there is a need to expand the discourse, the ideas, and the pedagogies used in this field; to provide educators with the time and resources to discuss, investigate, create, experiment with, and ultimately contribute to the collective resources and ideas in the field.

### A Working Definition of Jewish Peoplehood

The term “Jewish Peoplehood” itself can be confusing and slippery and is used to mean multiple things in multiple contexts. While it is not our goal to produce a singular or authoritative definition, for this Fellowship it is necessary to provide a working definition as a starting point for discussion and investigation.

Thus, our working definition of “**Jewish Peoplehood**” is <sup>2</sup>

- \* *The consciousness that informs the Jewish People's collective being; evolving civilization; aspiration to improve the world; and sense of solidarity and mutual responsibility.*

Jewish Peoplehood education, then, is the intentional application of educational pedagogies and content designed to cultivate a collective identity and consciousness around belonging to the Jewish people.

<sup>1</sup> For more ideas related to the challenges of Jewish Peoplehood Education see the Peoplehood Papers, volume 30: Peoplehood Education: Goals, Pedagogies and Outcomes, <https://jpeoplehood.org/project/peoplehood-papers-30-peoplehood-education-goals-pedagogy-and-outcomes/>

<sup>2</sup> This definition is inspired by Dr. Shlomi Ravid, “Between Defining Peoplehood and Exploring its Meaning” in the Peoplehood Papers, volume 13, September 2014, p. 34 <https://secureservercdn.net/160.153.137.184/3hq.1d3.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/peoplehood13web.pdf>





Dr. Shlomi Ravid identifies six core themes of Jewish Peoplehood, which intersect as components of the broader concept. These core themes provide broad areas of focus.

We anticipate that Fellows in this Research Fellowship will likely develop pedagogies that align with or focus on one or more (though by no means all) of these categories. They are:

- Collective Belonging; the sense of connection to a group, a tribe, a people.
- Mutual Responsibility; the commitment to take responsibility for the wellbeing of others within the group.
- Universal and particular; the living tension between being drawn to a universal identification with all people, and the particularity of commitment to a specific group or sub-group in the Jewish people.
- Israel as the vision and venture of the Jewish people, and the site of national expression of peoplehood.
- Jewish civilization; the cultural inheritance of the Jewish people over time and place, including languages, literature, music, art, and more.
- Pluralism; the multiple and diverse expressions of Jewish life and civilization.



## 4 THE ROLE OF GENERAL PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE

The development of a Jewish pedagogy is inspired by, grounded on, or an interpretation of a Jewish text, ritual, custom, or tradition. To further articulate the educational implications of the Jewish pedagogy, general philosophy and cultural studies are helpful in exploring and developing some of the themes that emerge. This can help anchor the pedagogy in other disciplines, adding layers of expertise, theoretical and practical implications, and interfaces with the larger world.



For the purpose of this initiative and in keeping with the definition of a Jewish pedagogy articulated above, the following are examples of excellent Jewish pedagogies of Peoplehood. They were developed in the first iteration of this Fellowship, in 2023-24. They are offered only as examples, and should not limit future pedagogies to these topics or ideas. To see all the pedagogies developed in by the first cohort of the Fellowship, see [here](#).

\* **The Peoplehood Orientation:**  
**Nurturing Klal Yisrael Through Torah Study, by Laynie Soloman**

The Peoplehood Orientation understands rabbinic literature (defined broadly) as a tool for nurturing a sense of peoplehood, using methodologies that cultivate this sensibility. As R' Soloveitchik offers in his picture of bet midrash learning, studying rabbinic literature enables “a symposium of generations [to come] into existence.” A Peoplehood Orientation recognizes Torah – especially when taught with commentary – as a central tool through which peoplehood is constructed, and therefore rabbinic literature is taught using modalities that enable learners to connect with themselves more deeply as part of the broader collective of Jewish people through this Orientation. Learners are encouraged to develop personal relationships with commentators, sages, and figures found within ancient texts, and to understand texts as a portal to the worlds in which our ancestors lived.

\* **The Story of Israel Through Hasidic Storytelling: Bridging Reality and Hope,**  
**by Dr Yakir Englander**

Israel exists somewhere between hope and reality. Before 1948, Israel was an ideal place, a word that exemplified hope for a different and distinct reality from the thousands of years of Jewish exile and dispersion. In reality, Israel is a modern state that lives in an unbearable reality, swinging between a desire for peace, frustration, and trauma, choosing to live without peace. Telling the “true” story of Israel is impossible, yet many Israelis feel the need to have their own stories heard so that others understand their reality. Using the Hasidic storytelling tradition, one that seeks to preserve the tension rather than resolve it and one that concentrates on story rather than “historical truth”, the process becomes a way for both storyteller and listener to gain an understanding of and connection to one another.

\* **Zakhor: A Pedagogy of Memory** by Dr Samantha Vinokor-Meinrath

The pedagogy of zakhor centers on the sacredness of placing the personal into conversation with the collective, and embodies the notion coined by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel that more than the Jewish people need more textbooks, they need text people. It centers around the manifestations of nostalgia in the contemporary Jewish experience and the ways through which the Jewish people tell stories and take on practices that pass on memories of the past to present generations.

