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WORKING PAPER

# The Peoplehood Index Project

From a Jewish Peoplehood Index to Policy, Planning and Evaluation

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The views expressed in this six-year retrospective are those of Professor Louis René Beres, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of any other members of Project Daniel, or of any government.

## About the Project

The concepts and assumptions that have driven the relationship among Jewish communities worldwide since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century require updating. This is true in particular of Israel and the US Jewish community, the initial focus of the project. Traditional slogans ("we are one") and concepts (Holocaust, 1948, 1967) are losing their force. Strong ties and mutual support between the Jewish communities of the world, particularly with Israel, remain critical for the future of the Jewish people, but they must be based on a new contract. The old contract – financial, political and moral support in exchange for a new source of pride and a safe haven in case of future anti-Semitic violence – is fast approaching its expiration date.

In recent years, a number of innovative programs have been established to strengthen the relationship among the Jewish communities in the world. Birthright/Taglit, the Wexner Foundation programs, and JAFI's Partnership 2000 are some high-profile examples, but a myriad of other examples exist, from day-school twinning to Federations focusing on "connecting" efforts to many others.

Inspiring as these efforts are, they are largely standalone, and still touch a relatively small part of the Jewish people. What can Birthright and Wexner learn from each other about effectiveness? What can a small Jewish Day School with an Israel program learn from either one? Can 50% of the Birthright effect be achieved for 10% the cost? What is the next Birthright?

The Peoplehood Index Project tackles these questions in a two-pronged way. The first is the Peoplehood Index (PI). Based on surveys conducted simultaneously in the US and in Israel, the PI will measure – for the first time, and on an annual basis going forward – the degrees to which the two communities know, care about, and interact with each other. (The more general name reflects the intention to extend the project beyond these two communities.)

The PI is quantitative and nuanced (in particular, teasing apart the "know", "care" and "do" components), and thus serves a useful purpose in and of itself. Still, like any index or survey, it is limited in its ability to affect policy, planning and evaluation (PPE) practices associated with Jewish peoplehood unless an accompanying process is developed around it as well. The project includes such PPE process and involves partner organizations operating in the area. Its primary goal is to extract best practices from the organizations, to facilitate knowledge sharing among them, and to help synthesize concepts and language that will help direct future operations of any organizations devoted to bringing the Jewish people closer together. The PI and the PPE are mutually reinforcing: The PI is a tool for the PPE process, and the PPE process helps ensure relevance and awareness of the PI.

The PI will be launched publicly at the 2009 Herzliya Conference (February 2-4), and the PPE process shortly thereafter.

## People and Organizations Behind the PI Project

The project is lead by Professor Yoav Shoham of Stanford University, Nimrod Goor, and Professor Uzi Arad of the Interdisciplinary Center.

The principal designers of index are Professor Steven M. Cohen of the HUC-JIR in New York and Professor Ephraim Yaar of Tel Aviv University.

The index team is advised by a bi-national Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). From the US, the SAC includes Prof. Sam Abrams (New York University), Shula Bahat (AJC NY), Prof. Sylvia Barack Fishman (Brandeis University), Prof. Shaul Kelner (Vanderbilt University), Tahl Raz (Jewcy.com), and Prof. Chaim Waxman (Rutgers University and JPPPI). From Israel the SAC includes Prof. Sergio DellaPergola (Hebrew University and JPPPI), Dr. Eran Lerman (AJC Israel), Esti Moskovitz (Mandel Leadership Institute), Prof. Gabi Sheffer (Hebrew University), Prof. Yaacov Yadgar (Bar-Ilan University), and Dr. Shai Finger (JAFI).

The PPE team will operate with the Reut Institute in Tel Aviv. Headed by Mr. Gidi Grinstein, Reut is a leading Israeli policy group, which has specialized in such projects.

Initial partner operating organizations include Birthright/Taglit, JAFI's Partnership 2000, and the Wexner Foundation.

The project is in the process of forming a distinguished bi-national Strategic Advisory Board (SAB), which will be announced shortly.

## Results from the First Annual Survey

In December of 2008 the first bi-national surveys were conducted, and the initial analysis is being presented at the 2009 Herzliya Conference. A preliminary report is attached herein. One should be cautious about over-interpreting the preliminary results. First, the survey is sufficiently novel that from the outset it was clear that its first installment would require modifications and extensions, and indeed several such changes are already planned. Second, given the highly compressed timetable, there simply has not been sufficient time to completely analyze and reflect on the data collected. Finally, the extended value is in tracking these trends over time; a momentary snapshot contains just that much information (the first data point on the Dow Jones Industrial Average was not as useful as its trend over time). All that said, several surprising findings already suggest themselves. Some of the highlights are as follows:

1. Jews on both sides attach high value to their Jewish identity. In particular, Israelis attach a higher value to it than to their Israeli identity. This certainly contradicts some existing prejudices.
2. Overall, the two communities are remarkably alike on almost all scales, with some notable exceptions.
3. In particular, both Israeli and US Jews score highly on the affective (emotional) scale; they profess to a much higher attachment to Jewish Peoplehood than perhaps some might have expected. They score much lower on the cognitive (knowledge) and behavioral (action) scales.
4. The above holds true even when analyzed by certain cross-sections (including, perhaps surprisingly, age).
5. This suggests a challenge and an opportunity for policy planning. The opportunity is the substantial reservoir of good will, as manifested in the affective scales. The challenge is how to harness this potential. Since the communities know little about each other and have limited interaction (as evidenced by the cognitive and behavioral scales), these positive sentiments are for the most part directed towards an abstract concept. It is hard to feel attached to a community you know little about, or worse, of which you have an outdated image that clashes with reality. Much thought must be put into precisely which types of education and programs are the most effective way of converting the potential energy into knowledge and action.

The reader is referred to the attached preliminary report for more information on the results of the survey, and to the forthcoming full report the complete analysis and policy recommendations.

## Appendix A

# Closeness and Similarity between Israeli and American Jews: Preliminary Research Report

Prof. Steven M. Cohen and Prof. Eppie Yaar

January 21, 2008

## Introduction

The history of the relations between Jews living in Israel and in the US is rooted in the initial formation of those two communities at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when many of Europe's Jews began to emigrate to different countries throughout the world. A few arrived in Israel in the first immigration waves, while most of them sought their future elsewhere, mostly in the US. With the years the numerical ratio among the Jewish communities in Israel and the US evened out, and today they represent the two largest Jewish concentrations in the world – about 6 million in Israel, and a similar number in the US.

While the two communities maintained mutual ties throughout this period, there is no question that these ties became stronger and more important since the establishment of the State of Israel until this day, with each community meeting different needs of the other. Against this background, it is not surprising that there is an essential need for the two communities to track developing trends in the relations between them, to understand the factors influencing these trends – positively or negatively – and based on the findings, to examine ways in which the mutual ties and contributions can be strengthened.

The present report presents the primary findings of a pioneering research, based on two scientific public-opinion surveys taken simultaneously among representative samples of the Jewish communities in Israel and the US. The research was intended to examine different dimensions of closeness and distance between the two communities, with the goal of having it be a basis for examining developments in these relations and ways of influencing them in the coming years. As this is the first attempt to examine this issue on a scientific basis, it is to be expected that, based on the analysis of the data and the conclusions drawn in the report, this Peoplehood Index will be improved and extended so as to become a standard, essential and reliable tool for examining the state of relations between Israeli and American Jews over time.

The findings we will present relate to eight scales that represent central facets of closeness and distance, the distinction among which was aided by the statistical analysis of the respondents' answers in the two communities. Most of the questions in the two surveys were identical, for example "How important is Israel (or the US) as a spiritual center of the Jewish people." At the same time, some topics naturally did not admit identical questions. In such cases

we presented questions with similar significance, to the extent possible. For example, among the questions used to evaluate the level of knowledge by Israeli Jews of US Jews, was a question regarding the three primary streams of Judaism in the US. In parallel, the American Jews were asked about the primary political parties in Israel.

At the Herzliya Conference we will only be able to present partial findings, since, given the short time available, we were not able to analyze and summarize the entire material at our disposal. Still, a preliminary look suggests that the full picture, which will be presented separately, will be essentially similar to the one presented here. Our findings will be presented in two ways. First, we will present the average scores of US and Israeli Jews on the eight scales. Second, we will present the same comparisons according to three cross-sections that seemed to us particularly interesting: Age, level of religiosity, and frequency of visits to Israel or the US. The age factor, for example, was recently discussed extensively in various forums as a significant factor determining the relations between the two communities. The common argument is that the young generation among US Jews does not feel the same level of closeness with and sympathy for Israel as the older generation, especially those for whom the Holocaust, and lehavdil, the War of Independence and the establishment of the State of Israel are not only events studied in history books. It goes without saying that the full report will include other bases of comparison, including levels of education and income.

## List of scales and their components

1. Jewish identity
  - a. Proud to be Jewish
  - b. Being Jewish is important
2. Feelings of pan-Jewish camaraderie
  - a. Feel part of the worldwide Jewish people
  - b. Feel close to Israeli/US Jews
  - c. Feel close to Jews living elsewhere
  - d. Emotionally tied to Israeli/US Jews
  - e. Emotionally tied to Jews elsewhere
  - f. Care about US/Israeli Jewry
  - g. Care about Jewry elsewhere
3. Mutual appreciation
  - a. Proud of US/Israeli Jews
  - b. Disappointed in US/Israeli Jews
4. Importance of Israel and the US as a spiritual center
5. Feeling towards Jews married to non-Jews
6. Social network
  - a. Family ties
  - b. Friendship ties
  - c. Telephone and other ties
7. Support in strengthening the ties between the communities

For Israelis:

- a. Involvement in activities promoting the ties
- b. For or against bringing young Americans to visit Israel
- c. For or against encouraging Jewish Americans to make Aliya
- d. Support or opposition to ties between Israeli and US Jews

For Americans:

- a. Participation in a program or activity having to do with Israel
- b. Encouraging friends and relatives to visit Israel
- c. Writing to friends and others on matters concerning Israel

8. Knowledge about US/Israeli Jewry

- a. General subjective knowledge on American Jews / Israel
- b. Specific subjective knowledge

Israel: religious streams, and Jewish politicians, intellectuals and artists

US: political parties, and Israeli politicians, intellectuals and artists

- c. Objective knowledge: Jewish population size in US/Israel

## Survey structure

The Israeli survey took the form of telephone interviews using a computerized survey system (CATI) among 1000 interviewees, who constituted a representative sample of the general adult (18+) Jewish population in Israel. The survey was conducted by the Midgam research institute, from December 12, 2008 to December 17, 2008. The maximal sample error was  $\pm 3.2\%$ , at a 95% confidence level.

The US survey took place by physical mail or via the Internet. Surveys were filled out by 1161 respondents, who constitute a representative sample the adult Jewish population (21+) in the continental US. The survey was conducted by Synovate Inc. in December 2008 and January 2009, as a follow-up to a similarly-styled survey conducted earlier in September 2008.

In the US survey a Jewish respondent is determined by his/her response to a question in the screening questionnaire that reads, "Please mark whether you are (or your spouse is): Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Other/None." Thus, the Jewish respondents are primarily those who are Jewish by religion, and excludes about 20% of the Jewish population that identifies as Jewish but who think of their religion as "none" or a non-Jewish religion. The impact of this screening is to somewhat over-state levels of Jewish identity and attachment to Jewish Peoplehood and Israel in the US Jewish population. The advantage is that the method provides the only economical way to access a national sample of American Jews, and has been used in numerous studies conducted previously including the annual series sponsored since 1986 by the American Jewish Committee.

For this study, the Jewish sample was weighted by the number of adult Jews in the household, age, sex, region, and education to approximate the distributions found in the *2000-01 National Jewish Population Study*.

## Main findings

### 1. General comparison of Israeli and US Jews

We present the average results of the two communities Israeli and US Jews, in each of the eight scales described above. Two clarifying comments about the illustrations: Firstly, the columns under the title "Israel and USA" refer to data obtained from the interviewees from those communities; secondly, please note that the result under the title "Total Sum" expresses the average 'closeness measure' between the two communities. The higher the result, the closer the communities are. The results given in each scale for Israel and for the US reflect the similarity between the two communities in the specific area.

Generally speaking, the comparison between the two communities points to quite a complex picture in relation to both similarity and closeness, although the general pattern tends more towards similarity and closeness than to distance and difference. The highest scale of closeness is in connection with Jewish identity for both Israelis and US Jews, with an average score of 83. Moreover, as a result of the small gap between them (USA - 81, Israel - 85), it can be said that Jewish identity is a common base of closeness for both communities.

Quite a high level of closeness can be seen also in the estimation of the importance of the Israeli and the US communities as spiritual centers for the Jewish people (72.5), though there is a substantial gap between the two communities. Israel is seen by US Jews as a more important spiritual center (86), compared to the level of importance of the US community given by the Israeli public (63). However, we cannot ignore the fact that the majority of Jewish people in Israel recognize the importance of the US community as a spiritual center for the whole of the Jewish people. In this connection it is interesting to note that the US Jews appreciate the importance of their community as a spiritual center less (78) than they do Israel (82), while among the Israelis the pattern is reversed - they see Israel as a more important center (86) than the US (78).

In third place, with respect to closeness, is pan-Jewish 'peoplehood', with an average score of 68. Moreover, because of the score is identical in both communities, it can be said that the feeling of Jewish peoplehood is common to Israeli and US Jews. In this context it is important to emphasize that the peoplehood scale is the most complex of all the scales and includes seven different questions such as: the extent to which the interviewees feel part of the Jewish people, feel close to Jews in the sister-community and to other Jewish communities in the world in general, and how they personally feel about these communities. As for the first question, namely, "for you personally, to what extent is your being Jewish related to the feeling of being a part of the Jewish people around the world?" the high score (78) testifies that a majority in both communities share this feeling, though this majority is slightly higher in Israel (81) than among US Jews (75).

Trailing closely behind with respect to the closeness scale, with a score of 67, is the reciprocal-appreciation scale, which reflects the level of pride and disappointment of US Jews in Israel, and vice versa. In this area we see a small



gap between the two countries, with US Jews tending to appreciate Israel (70) more than the other way around (64). Notwithstanding, the appreciation of the Jewish community in the US by Israelis is mainly positive as well.

Slightly below the appreciation scale appear the answers to the question (pay attention to the original sentence in Hebrew) "To what extent should Jews around the world who are married to non-Jews be treated as a part of the Jewish people, in the same way as Jews who are married to Jews are". We believe that the answers to this question may have implications to the future of the Jewish people and that the answers express, at least in part, the level of openness and close-mindedness of Israeli and US Jews with respect to such an important question. In any event, the overall score of 64 shows that both communities clearly tend towards a more liberal attitude, although this tendency is more pronounced, for understandable reasons, among US Jews (69) than Israelis (59).

In sixth place on the closeness scale is a measure expressing the level of involvement and support in encouraging relations between the two communities. In this area the relatively low overall score of 48 results from the large gap between the two communities. In the USA it is very low (32) and in Israel it stands at 66. This finding stands out especially against the background of substantial emotional baggage that US Jews carry regarding Israel and the Jewish people in general. In other words, the emotional level does not find sufficient expression in the willingness to act in order to strengthen ties with Israel.

A similar picture emerges regarding the "Social Network" scale, which stands in seventh place. This scale includes the relations that each one of the communities has with its family, relatives, colleagues, friends and others in the sister-community. Thus, the total score of 42 is the product of scores of 30 and 57 among Israeli and US Jews respectively. Nevertheless, it should be noted that nowadays, in the US, there is a large community of Israeli expatriates, and naturally it is reasonable to assume a tight and stable relationship between them and their relatives in Israel. Since the question was not worded to differentiate between Israelis living in US from the rest of US Jews, it cannot be determined as to what extent this parameter has influenced the closeness scale, although it is reasonable to assume that this influence is not negligible.

In eighth and final place is the knowledge (or cognitive) scale with an average score of 39 and with no difference between Israelis and US Jews. In other words, both communities are similar in their ignorance about the sister-community. It is interesting to note that in response to one question, in which the interviewees were asked to assess their own knowledge in this area, the scores obtained were relatively high (67 in the US, 60 in Israel). That is, both communities estimate their knowledge to be greater than it actually is. Thus, for instance, the average score of the knowledge about the size of the Jewish population in the USA and in Israel is 39.

As an interim summary, it can be said that the relationship between the two communities are characterized by two separate points. On the one hand by the great importance they attach to Jewish identity and the reciprocal positive appreciation and emotional attachment they have regarding the sister-community and the Jewish people in general. On the other hand, by relatively low levels of willingness to harness energy towards strengthening the ties between the communities, of maintaining concrete mutual relationships, conducting joint activities, and of mutual knowledge. The natural conclusion is that the reasons for these gaps between different facets of similarity and closeness need to

be understood so that concrete policy and actions can be proposed to reduce these gaps, in order to lead to a stronger, more firmly rooted, and permanent relationship between the two communities. .

## 2. Comparison by cross-sections of the two populations

**Age:** Analysis of the data by age groups (18-34; 35-64; 65+) within each community shows that, in contrast with earlier expectations, with respect to most of the scales age has no substantial influence in one direction or another in Israel and the US. Furthermore, in relation to US Jews, in those specific situations in which age did have an influence, it transpires that the young group has a stronger linkage to Israel than the two adult groups. Thus, the "social network" score of the young group stands at 42, while in the other two groups it stands at 25 and 26 respectively. Similarly, young US Jews tend to support the strengthening of ties with Israel slightly more, with a score of 37, while in the middle group and the older groups the scores are 30 and 31 respectively. As mentioned above, the expectations regarding age before the study had been in the other direction, namely that among young US Jews we should expect to find lower levels of Jewish identity, of Jewish 'peoplehood', and of linkage to Israel than among the older ones. The fact that - according to the survey's results - those expectations were not confirmed, and in some respects were actually contradicted, calls for a thorough and systematic examination of the subject.

**Religion:** In order to examine the influences of this parameter, the interviewee populations in both communities were divided into four groups of religious observance: Orthodox (in Israel: Religious and Haredi), Conservative (in Israel: traditional, or Masorti), Reform (in Israel: Masorti-secular) and Secular. In support of religion-scale's validity, we present data regarding the connection between the scale and the scores of the Jewish identity index in both communities:

USA: Orthodox- 97, Conservative - 92, Reform- 87, Non religious- 72.

Israel: Haredi and Religious- 97, Traditional- 93, Traditional-Secular- 87, Secular- 76.

Such numbers speak for themselves. As for the other scales, the data shows that they usually have a positive correlation with the religion scale, so that the higher the scores on the scales, the higher the religious level of the population in both communities. One exception which proves the rule is the attitude toward intermarriage. On this matter we find, as expected, a negative correlation between the level of openness and the level of religion, so that among the more religious people there is a lower willingness to treat Jews who are married to non-Jews as a part of the Jewish people.

At the same time, it appears that the religious factor has stronger and more consistent effects among US Jews than in Israel. This stands out in particular in connection the importance of Israel as a spiritual center, the intensity of the social network between the two communities, and the support in strengthening the ties between them. For example, the scores for tightening the relationship with Israel among US Jews ranged from 67 for the Orthodox to 22 for the Secular, a gap of 45 points, while parallel numbers in Israel were 65 and 66.

**Mutual visits:** The data pattern shows that visits of US Jews to Israel have a positive and strong correlation with most of the scales. In Israel the correlation is weaker, though it still tends to be positive. For example: The score of Jewish 'Peoplehood' among those who have never visited in Israel is 60, for those who have visited Israel once it is 75, and for those who have visited Israel twice or more it is 88. Parallel scores for Israelis are 64, 71 and 74. Greater differences were found in other scales. For example: Scores among US Jews for 'tightening of the relations between the communities' stand at 19 for those who have never been to Israel, 41 for those who have visited Israel once, and 67 for those who have visited Israel twice or more. Visits of Israelis in the USA did not show actual differences. In discussing these findings one should bear in mind two considerations:

Firstly, one should be careful in interpreting the relationships which were found between visits and 'closeness and similarity' scales with regard to the direction of influence. On the one hand, it is most likely that visits to Israel have a positive influence on this issue, but there is also reasonable to assume that visits to Israel are influenced by the closeness level. In our humble opinion, the most reasonable assumption is that the influence is mutual, so that visits to Israel have a positive influence on the level of 'closeness and similarity' and these have a positive influence on the willingness to visit Israel.

Secondly, the visit parameter has a particular importance since, unlike the age and religion parameters, this parameter can be influenced in various ways. It applies to visits of Israelis to the US and to visits of US Jews to Israel.

We will conclude the finding with an anecdotal flavor. The comparison between the two communities shows that US Jews who visit Israel tend to be slightly more closed-minded regarding Jews married to non-Jews, that is, they are less willing to see them as part of the Jewish people. On the other hand, we find a reverse pattern with Israelis visiting the US, which means that there is a positive, albeit moderate, correlation between visits to the US and openness on this subject.