ISRAEL

The Vision and Venture of the Jewish People
Introduction

Dr. Shlomi Ravid

The enduring understanding of the following narrative is that the State of Israel was envisioned and built by the Jewish People. Today, however, most young Jews, both in Israel and throughout the Jewish world, view Israel as the “State of the Israelis” and have difficulty grasping the notion of the “State of the Jewish People” altogether. Despite this reality, our belief is that Israel is still conceptually and essentially the State of the Jewish People and can regain that status in the hearts and mind of young Jews if it will return to be the vision and venture of the People.

Our main purpose in offering a current reinterpretation of the narrative of the State of Israel as “the vision and venture of the Jewish people” is to frame the conversation about the future of Israel from a Peoplehood perspective, by providing new answers to such questions as:

- What is my relationship, as a Jew, to the Jewish State and how can I enhance this relationship from a Peoplehood perspective?
- What should Israel do in order to continue being the State of the Jewish People in the future?
- What should the Jewish people do to keep Israel as a core concept of their Peoplehood?
- Does being the Jewish State place unique expectations and obligations on Israel?
- What are the core principles of Peoplehood that should be applied to Jewish sovereignty?
- What are the intersections of Peoplehood and Judaism and where do they interface with Israel as the State of the Jewish People?

In the following pages, we will advance and demonstrate the enduring understanding that Israel is indeed the vision and the venture of the Jewish People, showing that:
1. **The Vision:** For millennia the Jewish People has been inspired by the Divine promise to become a nation in the promised land of Israel, and at the turn of the 20th century collaborated to envision the notion of a sovereign Jewish State.

2. **The Endeavor:** The Jewish People mobilized people, resources and global support to turn this vision into a reality; and over the last sixty years the Jewish People joined forces in building and developing the State of the Jewish People.

3. **The Challenge of the Future:** The future of this collaborative venture calls for new thinking and re-visioning of the place and role of Israel in the life of the Jewish people in Israel and throughout the world.

We wrote this paper in order to challenge you and for that matter all of us to grapple with what we perceive to be crucial existential questions for our people. It is a call for a conversation about the role the Jewish State should play in the future of our People. The last section lists today’s challenges but also offers visions and ventures for the future. They will become relevant only if we address them together. The last page is therefore for you to write.

Dr. Shlomi Ravid is the Director of the International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies, Founded by the Nadav Fund, Beth Hatefutsoth, Israel.
Part I
The Vision

For millennia, the Jewish People has been inspired by the Divine promise to become a nation in the promised land of Israel and at the turn of the 20th century the Jewish People collaborated to envision the notion of a sovereign Jewish State.

“Then my nation too, will flourish once more, and in the Land a generation will arise” (Saul Tchernichovsky, “I Believe”)
The Origins of the Jewish People in the Land of Israel

The Jewish People has been inspired by the covenant between God and Abraham that includes the divine promise to become a nation in the promised land of Israel. This covenant echoes through time as the foundation of Jewish common heritage, binding Jews together as a People. Following the Jewish narrative to the period of the Exodus from Egypt, we can witness the process of becoming a People.

Since God first revealed God-self to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:4), God speaks about the Israelites as if they are already God’s special nation, referring to the Israelites as an am - a people - or ami - my people: “bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10). Moses too refers to the Israelite slaves as a people as he pleads to Pharaoh: “Let my people go” (Exodus 5:1). And the book of Deuteronomy states: “God took you and brought you out of Egypt, that iron furnace, to be God’s very own people as you are this day, you shall cross and take possession of this good land” (Deuteronomy 4:20, 22).

After the Exodus from Egypt in the early 12th century BCE, Moses’ successor, Joshua, led the Hebrew tribes back to the Promised Land in which the Canaanites were dwelling. This was the beginning of a significant period of Jewish existence in the Land of Israel that was characterized by the transition to a sovereign kingdom centered around the holy Temple in Jerusalem and by the unique spiritual leadership of the Prophets, whose visions are still relevant and inspiring.

The first millennium BCE saw the destruction of the northern Israelite kingdom in 722 BCE by the Assyrians and the exile of its population, the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem at 586 BCE by the Babylonians, the exile from Judea, the return to Zion, the construction of the second Temple and subsequently the failure of the Jewish revolts against the Roman Empire at 70 AD and 135 AD that put an end to Jewish aspirations regarding sovereign existence in Israel for many years to come. The massive destruction required adjustments on behalf of the Jewish people. Out of the ashes of the Temple, Jerusalem and Judea emerged the People of the Book. The Jews migrated eventually
Throughout the Middle East, Europe and North Africa. They lived in these communities for centuries, with various degrees of tolerance, often in restricted areas, with severe limitations on their livelihoods. Regardless of life conditions, at all times they cherished unremittingly the hope to be the ones who will return to Zion and renew the ancient sacred covenant. It was imprinted in their personal and collective memory and imagination. It was part of their daily prayers and practice, of the rhythm of the annual calendar and the pace of life’s circle, manifested in texts and art. However, few were able to fulfill the dream of reaching and settling in the Land of Israel.
The 19th Century - Significant Changes for the Jewish People

By the 19th century, modernity had spurred tremendous and significant developments and brought change mainly in Western and Central Europe. The transformation occurred in all walks of life - political, industrial, cultural, religious, social and scientific. Though this process took place mainly in Europe, its influence was felt worldwide, including in Jewish communities around the globe.

During the rise of the nation-states, Jews sought emancipation as full citizens in nations across Europe. In the United States, following the Declaration of Independence in 1776, 2,000 Jews were granted equal rights according to the principles of freedom and democracy in general and of religious freedom in particular. Jews were also granted full civil rights in France in 1791. In England, educational restrictions were lifted and Jews were admitted to universities and allowed to practice law.

Thus, for many European Jews, emancipation from discriminatory laws became a major goal during the 19th century. Emancipation
allowed Jews the opportunity to participate in the broader economic, intellectual and social environs of their surrounding communities and nations. Jews entered cities, enrolled in schools and universities, and through education were able to integrate rapidly in various professional, political and cultural circles, marking a new and revolutionary era of Jewish existence. Jewish identity had previously been rooted in a sense of enduring belonging to a Jewish civilization, scattered worldwide, and often imposed by outside forces. Emancipation, in contrast, pressured individual Jews to see themselves first as citizens of the polity and second as Jewish by religion. In response, Jewish leaders adapted approaches to maintain the spiritual and cultural distinctiveness of the Jewish people, while benefiting from the increasing freedoms of emancipation. One approach was Haskalah, the name of the Jewish movement which supported the adoption of enlightenment values. Another approach was Jewish autonomism that claimed that the future survival of the Jews as a nation depended on their spiritual and cultural strength, in developing “spiritual nationhood” and in the viability of Jewish communities around the world as long as they maintain self-rule and reject assimilation.
Autonomists, such as Simon Dubnow (born in 1860 and murdered in 1941), often stressed the vitality of modern Yiddish culture. Dubnow, one of the great modern Jewish historians, fought for the preservation of the national rights of all national minorities in Europe, writing, “the Jews in each land, actively taking part in its civil and political life, enjoy all the rights given to its citizens, not only as individuals, but also as members of their nation.” Despite the steady tide of emancipation in the 19th century in Central and Western Europe, a deep undercurrent of anti-Semitism raged. With the movements granting political freedom, there were subsequent pressures to restrict and oppress Jewish populations. The growth of nationalism gave rise to chauvinism; the Jew, as an alien, was already the object of age-old religious hate. Anti-Semitism in the 19th century was expressed through varied forms of attack: anti-Semitic political parties and organizations, anti-Semitic newspapers and books, and the development of racial theories, supposedly based on scientific research, which declared Jews inferior.

In Eastern Europe, where the Tsar implemented a firm anti-Jewish policy, geographic restrictions forced millions of Jews into a “Pale of Settlement” encompassing much of present-day Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Bessarabia, Ukraine and parts of western Russia. Beginning in the 1880’s, pogroms swept the area, marking the start of a huge wave of immigration to the ‘Free World’, mainly the United States. However, in the Islamic states, the civil and legal status of the Jews improved gradually. Jews residing in European colonies (of mainly Britain and France) enjoyed the removal of discriminating rules. The most outstanding example is Algeria, where Jews won full rights in 1870.

Emancipation pressured individual Jews to see themselves first as citizens of the polity and second as Jewish by religion.
The influence of Nationalism and unrelenting anti-Semitism amid the claims of emancipation inspired a radical new movement in Jewish history: the prophetic call for Jews to return to their ancient homeland and establish their own Nation-State. Zionism promised a refuge and security in times of danger for Jews around the world; a sovereign cultural, political and religious home where Jews could assert control over their own destiny; and a renewal of the ancient connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.
Strategic Possibilities for the Problem of the Jews

The historical processes mentioned above gave rise to a number of major Jewish endeavors which focused on the different challenges the Jewish people faced at the turn of the century. In effect, these endeavors can be divided into two main approaches:

1. National Endeavor
This was the major channel that expressed, on the one hand, the longing for Zion while proposing practical ideas for Jewish fulfillment in the Land of Israel and, on the other hand, a territorial-national solution not necessarily limited to the Land of Israel. The national endeavor thus included the following approaches: Zionism, The Bund - the Jewish Socialist Party, Autonomism of the Jewish Diaspora, Territorialism - an alternative to the Land of Israel and Agudat Yisrael - an ultra-Orthodox movement.

2. Individual Endeavor for Civil Rights and Integration
This included two different approaches that subsequently enabled Jews to fully assimilate into society at the cost of the loss of Jewish identity and connection with the Jewish people:
- The liberal aspiration for civil equality developed in Central and Western Europe. In order to fulfill true emancipation, various attempts were made to liberalize society and thereby enhance
civil, social and national integration. At the same time, it pressured individual Jews to see themselves first as a citizen of the polity and second as Jews by religion.

- Revolutionary aspirations, supported by many young Jews in the wake of the socialist and communist movements. These movements raised the banner of revolution and called to rectify the injustices of the world. Those who joined believed in the creation of a new, improved society, in which the difference between Jews and others would be eradicated.

In many respects, these visions offered by these schools of thought over 100 years ago shaped the fate of the Jewish people throughout the 20th century. Some of them are still influential and relevant for us as we grapple with core questions regarding the future of the Jewish people and the role and place of Israel within Peoplehood frameworks.

These visions offered over 100 years ago - National Endeavor and Individual Endeavor for Civil Rights and Integration - shaped the fate of the Jewish people throughout the 20th century.
Israel - the State of the Jewish People: Visions and Ventures

Zionism carried within it the prophetic call that echoed from the ancient covenant to modern settings - for Jews to establish their own Nation-State, where they will assert control over their destiny, renew the ancient bond between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, create a sovereign political system and offer a safe haven for Jews in danger.

Four Zionist perspectives - Political Zionism (Binyamin Zeev Herzl), Cultural Zionism (Ahad Ha-Am), Religious Zionism (HaRav Kook) and Socialist Zionism (Nahman Syrkin) - are highlighted below. In contrast, Simon Dubnow’s answer to the Jewish problem - global autonomism - is also presented. Each one of them focused on a different challenge the Jewish people faced at the turn of the 20th century and their visions for the Jewish State differ accordingly.

1. The political challenge
Binyamin Zeev (Theodore) Herzl (1860-1904)
- **The Challenge:** As a result of Anti-Semitism, Jews are hated and persecuted throughout the world. Their physical survival, wellbeing, social and civil rights are constantly under threat.
- **The Vision:** “A National Home for the Jewish people in Palestine, secured under public law.”
- **The Venture:** “A national home secured by public law, for the Jewish People. Then no foreign law will concern us; then there will be no hatred, no persecutions in anti-Semitic lands. We will then have a land upon which the Jew will be recognized as a human being, wishing to work and live in freedom.”

2. The spiritual-cultural challenge
Achad Ha-Am (Asher Ginsberg) (1856-1927)
- **The Challenge:** Emancipation caused a decline of the Jews’ national and cultural uniqueness.
- **The Vision:** “A spiritual and cultural center - the place for the creation of a modern, secular Hebrew culture.”
• **The Venture:** A modern, secular Hebrew culture in the Land of Israel would save Jewish life, with all its richness, from utter oblivion. Not all of the Jews should immigrate to Eretz Israel, and so Zionism must also inspire a revival of Jewish national life in the existing Jewish communities. Then and only then would the Jewish people be strong enough to assume the mantle of building a nation state. A sovereign Jewish state is only a vessel that could hold the spirit of the people.

3. **The challenge of building a just State**  
Nahman Syrkin (1868-1924)  
• **The Challenge:** Assimilation is a reaction of the Jewish bourgeoisie to emancipation.  
• **The Vision:** “The place in which a Jewish State will be established, which will promote the values of justice and equality.”  
• **The Venture:** A socialist solution to the Jewish problem: establishing an egalitarian, socialist state, characterized by social equality and justice, common ownership of property, a just division of resources and social and economic security for all.
4. The challenge of religious nationalism

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacohen Kook (1865-1935)

- **The Challenge:** A national culture that does not draw its inspiration from religion cannot survive. National characteristics, such as language and territory, are meant to strengthen the ability of Jews to observe the Torah that was revealed at Sinai.
- **The Vision:** “The Holy Land, which rebuilding heralds the beginnings of the Redemption.”
- **The Venture:** The State of Israel is the foundation for Divine revelation in the world. “Our national revival will ultimately grow to be a complete revival of our people to recognize the great deeds that God is doing for His people and through His people, and its return and rebirth on the Holy Land, for all of His creatures.”

5. The autonomous challenge

Simon Dubnow (1860-1941)

- **The Challenge:** States are denying national rights to national groups.
- **The Vision:** “Israel is one of the culturally autonomous communities that should be established.”
- **The Venture:** The Jews in each land, actively taking part in its civil and political life, enjoy all the rights given to its citizen, not only as citizens, but also as members of their nation. Not to accept the Zionist solution and see the solution of the Jewish problem in the establishment of autonomous status for national groups like them.

In many respects, the challenges framed by the above schools of thoughts to the problem of the Jews over 100 years ago are pertinent to us today. This is definitely the case for the role and place of Israel within the Jewish Peoplehood framework. We will return to examine them in the concluding part of this paper by addressing their current articulations.

Zionist thinkers focused on challenges the Jewish People faced at the turn of the 20th century and offered different visions for the Jewish State.
Part II
The Endeavor

The Jewish People mobilized people, resources and global support to turn this vision into a reality; and over the last sixty years the Jewish People joined forces in building and developing the State of the Jewish People.

“באו שכם אחיו לעזרת העם” (חיים נחמן ביאליק, “ברכת עם”)
“Lend a shoulder to help the People!”
(Hayim Nachman Bialik, “Blessing of the People”)

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declares Israel’s independence, May 1948
A Jewish State in the Land of Israel: The Beginning

Of all the solutions, the idea of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel was not the one most favored by the majority of Jews. As the 19th century saw the rise of Jewish philanthropy destined to strengthen the Jewish community in the Holy Land, Jewish emigrants preferred the countries of the New World, mainly the United States of America, as their destination. Between 1882 and 1914, approximately 2.5 million Jews arrived at the shores of the United States.

During the same period, Jews immigrated to Palestine too, then a province of the Ottoman Empire: 35,000 arrived between 1882 and 1903 (the First Aliyah) and 40,000 between 1904 and 1914 (the Second Aliyah). Following the British conquest of Palestine in 1917 and through well-coordinated political Jewish diplomacy, the British government was persuaded to assert the “Balfour Declaration,” a classified formal statement of policy stating that the British government “views with favor” the establishment in Palestine of “a national home for the Jewish people.”

As World War I ended, approximately 35,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine between 1919 and 1923 (the Third Aliyah), and 70,000 between 1924 and 1928 (the Fourth Aliyah).

Along with the increasing Jewish population and gradual economic growth of the Yishuv (Jewish settlements in Palestine), Jews worldwide intensified international political efforts to develop support for the Zionist cause. Despite the difficulties and the opposition to the Zionist enterprise among the international Jewish community, the World Zionist Organization (WZO) was founded by Theodore Herzl in 1897 and succeeded gradually in leading the way to national rebirth.

Although the British administration ostensibly supported the Jewish community in Palestine, its policies severely restricted immigration in the critical years before World War II. Nevertheless, 400,000 Jews lived in the framework of the Yishuv at the outbreak of World War II.

With the support and collaboration of the international Jewish community, the infrastructure for the future State was created. Towns and agricultural settlements were built, roads and streets
were paved, educational and academic institutions were founded and governance at all levels was established. The Jews brought with them from the “old countries” a strong sense of community, a passion for culture and education, and a drive to build an “Old-New Land.”

The Yishuv attracted some of the best and the brightest of the Jewish People. This could partly explain why, despite relatively small numbers, it assumed fairly quickly a leadership role for the whole Jewish People.

After World War II ended, the immensity of the Holocaust was revealed, as well as the fact that survivors, mainly from Eastern Europe, had nowhere to go. The Zionist leadership and international Jewry intensified their efforts for the establishment of the State of the Jews: overseas volunteers enlisted in the Haganah, the Palmach and other underground forces, serving as crew members on Aliyah-Bet ships attempting to run the British naval blockade and in heroic efforts to bring Holocaust survivors to the shores of Eretz Yisrael. They came with a high sense of purpose and a shared feeling of pride and privilege in knowing that they were helping to create and defend a Jewish homeland. Horrified by what had befallen their brethren in Europe, Jews all over the world fervently supported the Zionist cause, providing crucial financial, political and moral assistance.
Intensive diplomatic efforts to ensure the creation of a Jewish state was led by the Zionist leadership, Jewish organizations, key individuals and worldwide support, as the United Nations considered various proposals for Palestine. On November 29th, 1947, the UN General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into two states, a Jewish state and an Arab state, with Jerusalem under an international mandate. With the termination of the British Mandate on May 15th, 1948, Israel’s Independence was declared amidst great joy in Jewish communities worldwide. But the joy was short-lived. The next day, the new country was invaded by the armies of six Arab countries, and a bloody war ensued.

During the War of Independence, some 3,500 volunteers from all over the world joined the fighting forces. These young men and women, Jews as well as non-Jews, came from 37 different countries and were known as MACHAL, the Hebrew acronym for Overseas Volunteers. Most of them were veterans of World War II with military training and experience. At that crucial moment, their skills and expertise were of decisive importance to the newly formed Israel Defense Forces, on the ground, at sea and in the air. Combat-seasoned fliers and ground crew, mostly from English speaking countries such as Canada, Great Britain, South Africa and the United States, formed virtually every Air Force squadron, ferried newly acquired planes and ammunition and helped lay the foundation for the future Israeli Air Force.

Collaboration of worldwide Jewry was critical to the establishment of the State of Israel in countless individual acts of tremendous generosity and incredible heroism, as well as through extensive organized efforts to direct political influence and provide economic support.
The First Twenty Years of the Jewish People’s Partnership in Building the State

The first 20 years of the State can be framed as the founding years. World Jewry responded to the challenges of building the Jewish homeland in a fashion unprecedented in human history. First, by a massive wave of immigration (also known as the ‘Big Aliyah’) of Jews from all over the world who chose to settle the land of Israel.

In the three years between Israel’s independence in 1948 and 1951, the country doubled its population from 700,000 to 1,400,000. The campaign to mobilize Jews and help them settle was led by the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee as well as by the newly formed institutions of the State. The Jewish people voted “with its feet” in turning the vision of the State into a reality. World Jewry was not only involved in the Aliyah but also in the settlement of olim throughout the young State and the development of its infrastructure.

The financial contribution to Israel by world Jewry has been massive and in those years it was crucial. Through the channels of the United Jewish Appeal in the United States and the United Israel Appeal/Keren Hayesod in the rest of the world, billions of dollars were raised. That funding enabled the mass mobilization of the olim to Israel, and the building of the required infrastructure for development towns as well as kibbutzim and moshavim. It also gave the government flexibility in addressing its budgetary needs. In addition, millions of necessary dollars were raised through the sale of Israel Bonds, initiated by Prime Minister David Ben Gurion in order to obtain funding for immigrant absorption and construction of national infrastructure as well as in order to engage Diaspora Jewry in the building and development of the new Jewish

One should not underestimate the commitment and sense of partnership expressed through philanthropic giving to Israel.
state. It is hard to describe Israel’s industry, its security system and overall development without taking into account the participation of world Jewry.

One should not underestimate the commitment and sense of partnership expressed through philanthropic giving to Israel. It has become fully integrated into the Jewish home and life-style. The “blue box” of the Jewish National Fund, for example, virtually became a Jewish ritual object with a special place in many Jewish households, educational institutions and public settings. Bonds for Israel were given as Bar Mitzvah gifts. Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, founded in 1912 and destined to become the largest volunteer organization in America, made the commitment to build Israel’s health and educational systems a household agenda item for many Jewish families. Giving money to Israel became part of the popular Jewish culture and lifestyle.

Moreover, there were systematic efforts being undertaken by the American Jewish community to combat both Arab propaganda in the United States and the Arab economic boycott against Israel. Veteran organizations such as the American Jewish Committee and the newly founded (1950’s) American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations provided much needed political advocacy and behind-the-scenes lobbying.
Of course, notwithstanding this close collaboration, political and ideological tensions developed as well. Many controversial questions were raised: What is the desired nature of the relationship between world Jewry and Israel? What is the State of Israel’s place in the Jewish world? Should Jewish life be maintained outside of Israel after the establishment of a Jewish state? Does being a Zionist entail making Aliyah? Do Israel and the Diaspora complement or negate each other? The answers to these questions and others are varied and have fueled a debate that has gone on ever since the day the State of Israel was established.
Turning Point: Israel’s Relationship with the Jewish People After the Six Day War

The Six Day War of 1967 was a turning point in shaping the place of Israel in the Jewish world. The dramatic victory, preceded by the fears that reminded world Jewry of the fragility of the Jewish State, had a huge effect on the Jewish people. Not only did the enthusiasm for Israel reach new peaks but Jews became more public than ever about their support for Israel as well as their own Jewish identity.

In that sense, the process of the Jewish people’s embracing of the Jewish State coincided with the rise of Jewish communal self-confidence and self-assertion, especially in the largest Jewish community, that of the United States. The post-1967 era witnessed a sharp rise of interest and involvement in Israel by the larger masses of world Jewry, as well as by its institutional establishment. Donations reached new records and became more diversified; volunteers and olim arrived from the West, and Jewish pilgrimage to Israel grew in unprecedented dimensions. Supporting Israel became a pronounced and public goal of the Jewish community at large. One may say that in those years supporting Israel became a leading and unifying goal for world Jewry.

In practical terms, what happened in the decades following the Six Day War was a more focused involvement in Israel’s growth and maturity. The general support of world Jewry for the development of the basic infrastructure of the State turned into a significant contribution to the development of Israeli universities, medical and research centers and public institutions. Furthermore, the desire to have an impact on the quality of life in Israel was also expressed through ‘Project Renewal’, which focused on assisting the less privileged neighborhoods and development towns in Israel.

One of the formative struggles of the Jewish people as a collective in those years was the struggle to free Soviet Jewry, which ignited the whole Jewish world. The existence of the Jewish state and its victory in the Six Day War sparked the struggle of Soviet Jewry for their freedom and right to emigrate. It was a true landmark of Jewish Peoplehood coming into its own. In the years that followed, over a million Jews chose to immigrate to Israel, reaffirming the notion of its being “the vision and venture of the Jewish people.”
The post-1967 years also brought about a change in the role world Jewry played in the field of advocacy for Israel. The need to defend Israel’s image in the world and protect its interests provided a natural role for world Jewry in the partnership. The organized Jewish community around the world made Israel advocacy a central part of its public mission. The struggle for Israel’s survival transformed American Jewish public affairs and galvanized American Jewry as no issue before or since. Building U.S. support for Israel to counter Arab military, economic and political aggression became a major focus of attention. The perception of Israel’s vulnerability was reinforced by the Yom Kippur War of 1973. One of the lead expressions of this trend was the meteoric rise of AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) into one of the strongest lobbying organizations in the United States with a current membership of 100,000.
In Search of a New Partnership: The Past Two Decades

The past two decades of the relationship between Israel and the Jewish People can be best framed as a period of searching for a new kind of partnership. Many factors contributed to this shift in attitudes. If the post-1967 years presented a peak in the identification of world Jewry with Israel, the 1980’s - partly because of the Lebanon War and the Intifada and the way the media portrayed them - were the years of awakening from the Six Day War euphoria. The ethos of Israel as a “larger than life” State began eroding and normalcy settled in. Concerned Jews on both sides of the ocean began wondering what direction the partnership should take. Israel of the end of the 20th century moved beyond the status of a poor and developing country and began losing its dependency on Jewish philanthropy. Throughout the Jewish world, incoming leadership (also representing a generational change), many of whose members had been on educational programs in Israel, began seeking a relationship that would go beyond giving money. Both sides were expressing a need to redefine the partnership. Concepts like reciprocity, symmetry, cooperation and dialogue became the new building blocks for the required relationship. The relationship was maturing. It was no longer going to be World Jewry raising money and Israelis deciding unilaterally how it was to be spent. Although Israel still remained centric to the Jewish People, forging a true partnership of equals became the challenge of the day.

One significant expression of the change in the collaboration was investment in the actual interaction of the young generation with Israel through educational visits. What started as an “Israel experience” for teens has developed in the last decade into Taglit-Birthright Israel - an expression of the birthright of every young Jew to form a relationship with Israel. The program represents a unique partnership between the Israeli government, local Jewish communities (North American Jewish Federations through the United Jewish Communities, Keren Hayesod and the Jewish Agency for Israel), and the Birthright Israel Foundation, which is supported by individual Jewish philanthropic partners. The recent addition of MASA as a semester or year program in Israel, signifies
the desire to enhance connection, knowledge and involvement. This investment in the strengthening of the relationship reflects a paradigm change.

The change in philanthropy has also been significant. Alongside the mainstream of Jewish philanthropy in Israel, an array of new models emerged, expressing the current donors’ wishes to be involved in the decision-making processes and to closely monitor how the funding is being put to use. It was also a desire to offer know-how and impart knowledge. The creation of foundations like the New Israel Fund and, more recently, the Inter Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues signifies also the ability of world Jewry to face Israel’s shortcomings, to be critical and yet address them as a reflection of partnership and commitment.

The diversity of funding programs and involvement in their execution has changed dramatically as well. The current involvement of world Jewry in Israel’s development touches almost every aspect of life: from education to culture, through high-tech, social services, environment, civic rights and the development of Israeli civic leadership. It is nearly impossible to imagine the rise of the Third Sector (NGOs) in Israel without the involvement of World Jewry. In recent years, Jewish philanthropic entities have been increasingly involved in the Jewish renaissance taking place in Israel and the attempt to bring Jewish pluralism to Israel. A similar revolution has taken place in the high-tech field which gave Jews a chance to do business with Israel. All of the above have developed through a much more intense process of dialogue as well as a stronger representation of the Jewish communities and funders in Israel. It also led to the emergence of a new Israeli Philanthropy.

A most telling model for trying to define the new relationship between Israel and the Jewish People is ‘Partnership 2000’, although Israel still remained centric to the Jewish People, forging a true partnership of equals became the challenge of the day.
launched in 1994 by the Jewish Agency for Israel and its partners, the United Jewish Appeal and Keren Hayesod. ‘Partnership 2000’ is an attempt to develop a new paradigm of partnership characterized by a direct relationship between communities in Israel and the Diaspora, who connect on several parallel planes, in a real and comprehensive partnership.

It is important to note how far the relationship between the People and the State has come. The emphasis has shifted from results to process, and developing a genuine and lasting relationship has become the end goal. The decision what to do and how to do it has been taken away from the central institutions and turned over to the communities in a very democratic fashion. Furthermore, they make those decisions together as equals. As the ‘Partnership 2000’ website states: “more than a platform for effecting change or producing tangible results, our partnership gives shape to our Peoplehood and expression to our shared values.”

The last two decades can justly be summarized as a period of search for a new partnership. The need was created because the reality had significantly changed, but also because the question “How should Israel’s being the Jewish State be reflected and expressed in the partnership?” is being asked by both Israelis and Jews around the world. This is an existential question which the answers of the last two decades have not yet solved. However, the approach they have offered does seem to hold the key for finding the right answers in the future.
Part III
The Challenge of the Future

We challenge you and ourselves to confront the future of Israel as a collaborative venture, as we call for new thinking and a new vision in order to successfully act upon present challenges.

“אין החלום נבדל כל誠 מום המעשה... כל מעשה אדם היה לפני כן חלום ועתיד להיות חלום ועדיין לוהט החלום”

“The Dream is not so different than the activity. All the activity of mankind was a dream once - and will again be a dream” (Theodore Herzl, “Altneuland”)
Thinking Ahead Towards 2048

The first two parts of this paper tell the story of how the Jewish people envisioned the State, mobilized to establish it and framed its building as a partnership, now entering its seventh decade. The present situation, as we have already seen in the last part, points to the challenge of addressing some fundamental questions regarding the future of the partnership. It is time to turn to the future and grapple with the basic assumptions regarding the role and place of the Jewish State in the life of the Jewish People, and the role of the People in the life of the State.

Current research, both in Israel and throughout the Jewish world, points to a shift in the core positions Jews hold regarding their attitudes to being part of the people and to Israel as the Jewish State. The new generation of Jews growing up in today’s world sees the role of the homeland, and for that matter their relation to their people, very differently than their parents’ and grandparents’ generations. Young Israelis also face a challenge in connecting to the Israeli ethos of building a homeland for their people following 2,000 years of dispersion, culminating in the horrors of the Holocaust. Their world, self-perception and identity as Jews and Israelis are very different, and require us to re-visit the core values and assumptions upon which the partnership is built.

In world Jewry’s current situation, the decision to be Jewish, to feel a sense of belonging and responsibility to the People and to have a relationship with Israel cannot be taken for granted. In Israel, the push for normalcy has unsurprisingly engendered the sense that Israel is the State of the Israelis, leading to a lack of understanding about the place, connection and role of the Jewish People in the life of the State. These changes challenge the foundations of Israel’s status as a joint venture of the Jewish People.

As we have seen, some of the realignment vis-à-vis those challenges has begun taking place over the last two decades. Never before have the State of Israel, Jewish communities and major Jewish donors invested so much money and energy in creating platforms for connection, dialogue and joint deliberation. The focus of the partnership model has shifted so as to provide
a basis for dialogue, exploration and a sense of a partnership of equals, all meant to facilitate the future conversation of the Jewish People. All this though, against a reality of weakened connections that calls for more drastic changes.

We would like to conclude this paper by articulating what we view as the key challenges to the future of Israel as the State of the Jewish People and by offering directions for reinvigorating our sense of shared destiny and vision. It is only fitting that they will be current articulations of the challenges framed by our founding fathers over a hundred years ago (see Part I).
Israel - the State of the Jewish People: Visions and Ventures

1. The political challenge
The Challenge: World Jewry has a growing difficulty seeing Israel as the State of the Jewish People.
The Vision: Israel becomes the Vision and Venture of the Jewish People.
The Ventures:
- Infusing Jews with a sense of Peoplehood, i.e. a sense of belonging to a People who share a destiny and vision, on which the concept of the State of the People is based.
- Educating Israelis to view themselves as part of the Jewish People and see world Jews as full partners in Israel as a Jewish endeavor.
- Creating institutions through which the voice of world Jewry is heard when it comes to decisions that affect the Jewish collective.
- What else? ............................................................

2. The spiritual-cultural challenge
The Challenge: Israel is not perceived as a spiritual-cultural center of the Jewish People.
The Vision: Israel becomes a spiritual-cultural center of the Jewish People.
The Ventures:
- Joining efforts by Jews from all corners of the world to redefine the role Israel can play as a spiritual and cultural center for the Jewish People in the 21st century.
- Making special efforts and investing resources in developing the Jewish arts and creating a current, rich and modern Jewish cultural language to be shared by Jews throughout the world.
- Establishing a joint commission for Jewish culture.
- What else? ..............................................................
3. Making the Jewish State a just state

The Challenge: Making the Jewish State the embodiment of Jewish aspirations by placing the values of Social Justice and Tikun Olam at the top of its priorities.

The Vision: Israel becomes a state which pursues justice and Tikun Olam both internally and in the international context.

The Ventures:

• Placing at the center of our effort as a people the challenge of making Israel a State that pursues justice both internally and globally.

• Through partnership, collaboration and joint funding with world Jewry, making Israel a justice pursuing State.

• Creating a global Jewish commission for Tikun Olam.

• What else? .............................................................

The Vision: Israel contributes spirituality, culture and a sense of pride and identification to thriving Jewish communities around the globe.
4. The religious pluralism challenge
The Challenge: Turning Israel into an inclusive state for all Jewish religious practices and sustaining religious pluralism in the State of Israel, thus making it a source of inspiration and unity for the Jewish People.
The Vision: Israel becomes a pluralistic and creative Jewish religious center.
The Ventures:
- Developing Israel into a pluralistic and creative Jewish religious center by recognizing all streams of Judaism by the State.
- Supporting pluralistic Jewish education.
- Initiating conversation and dialogue and strengthening innovative Jewish religious institutions.
- Establishing an international center for Jewish pluralistic practices.
- What else? ..............................................................

5. The Jewish autonomous challenge
The Vision: Israel contributes spirituality, culture and a sense of pride and identification to thriving Jewish communities around the globe.
The Ventures:
- Enhancing the Jewish network in a way that will assure Jewish growth and renaissance throughout the Jewish world.
- Enhancing Israel’s role as the sovereign Jewish entity, as a source of spirituality, culture, sense of identification and joined purpose to Jewish communities around the globe.
- Developing a new paradigm for Israel-Jewish-world-community relations where Israel has a unique place in a partnership of equals.
- Strengthening Jewish communities throughout the world becomes a priority for Israel.
- What else? ..............................................................
A Call For Action

After the founding of the State, the poet Amir Gilboa wrote: “All of a sudden a man gets up in the morning and he feels he is a People, and he begins to walk.”

Gilboa captured what the event of the creation of the State meant for individual Jews - it made feeling like a People tangible, providing the unprecedented opportunity of taking their collective destiny into their own hands.

In this paper we have outlined the visions, endeavors and ventures undertaken by the Jewish People to build Israel as the Jewish State. However, the Jewish People today is facing a new reality that calls for a new vision that will redefine not only the place of the State in the life of the People but also the very nature of our partnership as Jews. What we need to figure out together, to paraphrase Gilboa, is what will make us get up in the morning, feel like a People and begin to walk? This is the challenge of our day and only together we can address it.

We invite you to engage in this conversation and action.”

Tel Aviv, Rosh HaShanah 5769/2008

Children celebrating Independence Day, 2008

"לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין לבטל ממנה" (אבות ב, טז)  
“It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it” (Avot 2:16)
Sponsoring Organizations  The NADAV Fund, United Jewish Communities
Editors  Dr. Shlomi Ravid, Shelley Kedar

This booklet is partially based on a curriculum developed by The School for Jewish
Peoplehood Studies of Beth Hatefutsoth and CET and co-sponsored by the NADAV Fund,
United Jewish Communities, Jewish Agency for Israel, The Israeli Ministry of Education,
UJA-Federation of New York, WCJCC and the Grand family.

Special thanks to  Varda Rafaeli, Sanford Antigonas, Nurit Chemo, Cecellia
Weisman and Serena Eisenberg who read, commented and contributed.

Haaretz-IHT Special Commercial Supplement  21 Schocken Street, Tel Aviv
Tel: +972-3-5121749, Fax +972-3-5121799.

Editor  Rebecca Kopans  Haaretz-IHT Managing Director  Aviva Bronstein
Graphic Designer  Sarit Malhi  Production Manager  Dana Roter.
The International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies of Beth Hatefutsoth, founded by the NADA V Fund, is the only institution in the world solely dedicated to Peoplehood Studies.

For additional information, please visit www.bh.org.il or contact The International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies, Beth Hatefutsoth, P.O.B 39359, Tel Aviv 61392, Israel, Tel: 972-3-745-7901, bhschool@post.tau.ac.il.

For additional educational resources on: Israel - the Vision and Venture of the Jewish People, please visit www.israventure.com.