

FOUNDATIONS



Foundations for a Thoughtful Judaism Peoplehood

SOURCES



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CLASS 4

WHAT MEMBERS OF A PEOPLE OWE EACH OTHER

Source 1



Leviticus (Vayikra) Rabbah 4:6

תְּנִי חֲזִקָה (ירמיה נ, יז) שֶׁהַ פְּזוּרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל, נִמְשְׁלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְשָׁה, מֵהַ שֶׁהַ הִזָּה לֹקֵה עַל
רֹאשׁוֹ אוֹ בְּאֶחָד מֵאַבְרָיו וְכָל אַבְרָיו מְרַגִּישִׁין, כִּדְ הֵן יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶחָד מֵהֵן חוֹטֵא וְכָל מְרַגִּישִׁין,
(במדבר טז, כב) הָאִישׁ אֶחָד יַחֲטֵא, תְּנִי רַבִּי שְׁמֵעוֹן בֵּר יוֹחֵאִי, מִשָּׁל לְבָנֵי אָדָם שֶׁהֵיוּ יוֹשְׁבֵין
בְּסַפִּינָה נֹטֵל אֶחָד מֵהֵן מְקַדֵּחַ וְהִתְחִיל קוֹדֵחַ תְּחִתּוֹ, אָמְרוּ לוֹ חֲבֵרָיו מֵהַ אֶתָּה יוֹשֵׁב וְעוֹשֶׂה,
אָמַר לָהֶם מָה אַכְפֵּת לָכֶם לֹא תַחֲתִי אֲנִי קוֹדֵחַ, אָמְרוּ לוֹ שֶׁהַמִּים עוֹלִין וּמְצִיפִין עָלֵינוּ אֶת
הַסַּפִּינָה

Hezekiah taught: It is said, Israel is a scattered sheep (JEREMIAH 50:17). Why are Israel likened to a sheep? Just as with a lamb, when it is hurt on the head or on any other limb, all its limbs feel it, even so is it with Israel: if [only one] of them sins, all of them feel it... R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: This may be compared to the case of men on a ship, one of whom took a borer and began boring beneath his own place. His fellow travelers said to him: 'What are you doing?' Said he to them: 'What does that matter to you, am I not boring under my own place?' Said they: 'Because the water will come up and flood the ship for us all!'

Source 2



Joseph Telushkin, "Introduction," in Erica Brown and Misha Galperin,
The Case for Jewish Peoplehood: Can We Be One? (2009), viii

One of the more unusual texts in Jewish religious literature concerns a case of an infant born with two heads. A Talmudic commentary to Menachot 37a raises the question of whether such a child is entitled to one or two shares of his father's inheritance and notes that a similar case had been raised before Solomon (long renowned as Israel's wisest king) who had ruled: "Let them pour boiling water on the head of one child and see if the other one screams. If he does, then it means that the children are not regarded as twins, but as one. However, if the second child does not feel the suffering of the first, then they are to be regarded as separate individuals."



One hopes that this case was hypothetical, certainly for the sake of the child destined to have boiling water poured on its head. Nonetheless, the late Rabbi Joseph Baer Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, argued that the implications of this case are not hypothetical at all. In his essay *Kol Dodi Dofek* (“My Beloved’s Voice Calls to Me”), he writes: “If boiling water is poured on the head of a Moroccan Jew, the prim and proper Jew in Paris and London must scream. And by feeling the pain, he is loyal to the nation.”

Source 3



Hannah Arendt, “A Letter to Gershom Scholem,” in *The Jewish Writings* (1963)

I found it puzzling that you should write “I regard you wholly as a daughter of our people, and in no other way.” The truth is I have never pretended to be anything else or to be in any way other than I am, and I have never even felt tempted in that direction. It would have been like saying that I was a man and not a woman—that is to say, kind of insane. I know, of course, that there is a “Jewish problem” even on this level, but it has never been my problem—not even in my childhood. To be a Jew belongs for me to the indisputable facts of my life, and I have never had the wish to change or disclaim facts of this kind. There is such a thing as a basic gratitude for everything that is as it is; for what has been given and not made; for what is *physei* and not *nomo*...

To come to the point: let me begin, going on from what I have just stated, with what you call “love of the Jewish people” or *Ahavath Israel*. (Incidentally, I would be very grateful if you could tell me since when this concept has played a role in Judaism, when it was first used in Hebrew language and literature, etc.) You are quite right—I am not moved by any “love” of this sort, and for two reasons: I have never in my life “loved” any people or collective—neither the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love “only” my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons. Secondly, this “love of the Jews” would appear to me, since I am myself Jewish, as something rather suspect. I cannot love myself or anything which I know is part and parcel of my own person. To clarify this, let me tell you of a conversation I had in Israel with a prominent political personality who was defending the—in my opinion disastrous—nonseparation of religion and state in Israel. What he said—I am not sure of the exact words anymore—ran something like this: “You will understand that, as a Socialist, I, of course, do not believe in God; I believe in the Jewish people.” I found this a shocking statement and, being too shocked, I did not reply at the time. But I could have answered: The greatness of this people



was once that it believed in God, and believed in Him in such a way that its trust and love toward Him was greater than its fear. And now this people believes only in itself? What good can come out of that? Well, in this sense I do not “love” the Jews, nor do I “believe” in them; I merely belong to them as a matter of course, beyond dispute or argument.

We could discuss the same issue in political terms; and we should then be driven to a consideration of patriotism. That there can be no patriotism without permanent opposition and criticism is no doubt common ground between us. But I can admit to you something beyond that, namely, that wrong done by my own people naturally grieves me more than wrong done by other peoples. This grief, however, in my opinion is not for display, even if it should be the innermost motive for certain actions or attitudes. Generally speaking, the role of the “heart” in politics seems to me altogether questionable.