



PEOPLEHOOD IN TIMES OF CRISIS

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Session Objective:

Through exploring the value of Jewish **peoplehood**, particularly what it means to experience both personal and collective pain in the aftermath of October 7th, learners will develop new insights that support their ability to identify small actions they can take to respond to, process, and grieve October 7th and the current crisis.

At-a-Glance:

This resource explores the value of peoplehood in times of crisis. It addresses the unique nature of Jewish peoplehood, as well as the challenge of how to show care and concern for others' suffering, while still carrying on with our individual lives. Through reflecting on quotes and articles, we will discuss whether peoplehood necessarily comes with a responsibility to act and what exercising this value might look like in practice. We end with asking participants to share how their view of peoplehood has changed as a result of this session.



Time Estimate:

45 minutes



Best Uses:

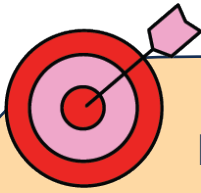
- Best for ages 16+
- Best in person but can be adapted to virtual



Materials Needed:

- Printed [handout](#) with the article, "That Pain You're Feeling is Peoplehood" by Mijal Bitton and questions
- Best led in a private, quiet space where it is possible to have an intimate conversation

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

Read the following quote:

“It was then [in 1967] that I knew that being Jewish was not something private and personal but something collective and historical. It meant being part of an extended family, many of whose members I did not know, but to whom I nonetheless felt connected by bonds of kinship and responsibility”

- Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, A Letter in the Scroll

Facilitator prompts the group:

- In your own words, what do you think Rabbi Sacks is saying?
- Have you ever felt connected to or responsible for people you do not know or have not met? What inspired those feelings of connection and responsibility?
- When, if ever, does being Jewish make you feel like being part of an extended family? When, if ever, does this analogy feel less true?

5 min





EXPLORE THE VALUE: PEOPLEHOOD

20 min



Peoplehood is often defined as an awareness of one's identity as a member of a particular group or tribe. Jewish peoplehood is a value that is usually brought up to explain the feelings of connection and responsibility that Jews have towards each other, even when living in different places around the globe. Jews in Israel and the diaspora may have lives that look quite different from one another and yet we are all part of the Jewish people - kind of like a really big extended family.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What if any responsibility do you feel we have to Jews that we have never met before, when they are in crisis? Would you have answered that question any differently before Oct 7th?



JEWISH WISDOM

Facilitator prompts the group:

Divide up into small groups. Together, read the following excerpts from the article, "[That Pain You're Feeling is Peoplehood](#)" by Dr. Mijal Bitton (Sapir Journal, November 2023). Then reflect using the questions below.

...Each of us will forever remember the moment when we first heard about the October 7 massacres. I had just arrived at the community I lead, the Downtown Minyan, my mind filled with plans for that night's Simchat Torah celebrations. I am shomeret Shabbat [she observes Shabbat laws, such as not using technology], so I was completely surprised when a congregant, frantic with worry, approached me before I had a chance to remove my jacket. He urgently informed me about a devastating attack on Israel. He spoke of Hamas breaching the border, civilian hostages, and reported atrocities.

I was in shock and gripped immediately by a visceral pain for my beloved Jewish people..

A teaching by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (known as the Rav) came to my mind that Shabbat, a piece of Torah that I have returned to every day since October 7. It is about Jewish peoplehood. The pain I felt in that moment was for the Jewish people, and I knew many others would be feeling the same, perhaps for the first time so acutely...



- What do you remember about where you were, what you thought, and how you felt on October 7, 2023?
- What, if anything, surprised you about your reaction or other people's reactions?

In a 1956 sermon, Rabbi Soloveitchik asks whether the dispersion of Jews across the world—and the ensuing diversity of Jewish customs, languages, and ways of life—has caused Jews to cease being one people: “Is the Jewish Diaspora one or not?” Are we still a “we”?



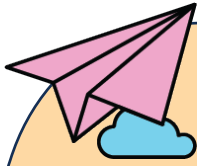
Facilitator prompts the group:

- Since Oct 7th, how if at all has your connection to other Jews around the world changed?

Note to Facilitator: You might ask learners, how connected did you feel to Jews around the world before Oct 7th? (hold up fingers from 1-10); how connected do you feel now? (1-10)?

- Mijal Bitton's article is called, “That Pain you Feel is Peoplehood.” One way that we might think about our connections as a Jewish people is that when something happens to Jews in Israel, it has ripple effects to Jews all around the world - in how we feel, what we experience, and more. What, if any, ripple effects have you seen or felt since Oct 7th?

5 min



PROMPT ACTION

For so many of us, our sense of connection to the Jewish people has taken on new meaning in a post-Oct 7th world. We might feel more connected to or more responsible for other Jews that we have not met before. And we might also feel like we are more affected by the actions of other Jews around the world. It can feel challenging to figure out what to do with this newfound connection and responsibility. We have an opportunity to think about this together.



Facilitator prompts the group:

- What action or actions do we want to take as it relates to our connection and responsibility toward the Jewish people - Jews in Israel and/or the diaspora?

Note to facilitator:

Invite learners to write down their response to this question.

If your community is planning programming or actions to mark the anniversary of Oct 7th, you might choose to focus this conversation on what we can do as we prepare to mark Oct 7th.

10 min



CLOSE WITH INTENTION

We are going to do a yarn pass activity. The first person who has the yarn will share their action that they want to take. Then, they will pass it to another person who will share, and we will continue until everyone has shared.

Facilitator reads to close:

What we have done today together can be considered our own exercise of peoplehood. We gathered together, shared our experiences, our goals, and our hopes. We are connected - physically right now (note the web of yarn). Imagine this yarn extended outside of this room to the rest of the Jewish people. We are part of a much, much larger story, and the actions that we each take, small as they might feel, are a crucial part of that story.