



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן

Models of Peoplehood: A Yom Ha'atzmaut iEngage Study Guide

Hartman@Home
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The Shalom Hartman Institute is a leading center of Jewish thought and education, serving Israel and North America. Our mission is to strengthen Jewish peoplehood, identity, and pluralism; to enhance the Jewish and democratic character of Israel; and to ensure that Judaism is a compelling force for good in the 21st century.

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I. Introduction

For North American Zionist Jews, Yom Ha'atzmaut is a time to celebrate the establishment of the State of Israel and, at the same time, to consider the past, present, and future of our relationship with Israel and its citizens. This guide is designed to help you examine this important relationship in terms of the following key questions:

- What frameworks and models have been used to characterize the relationship between North American and Israeli Jewry?
- What type of loyalty should Israel expect from North American Jews and what does that loyalty demand of us? What kind of voice should North American Jews have when it comes to Israeli policies?
- In what ways are North American and Israeli Jews dependent on one another?
- What is the model or combination of models necessary to (re)build a sense of Peoplehood?

This guide provides a framework for looking at these relationships through the metaphors we use to describe them (*section II*), a text study to probe the roots of these metaphors (*section III*), and a worksheet to explore the implications and effects of these metaphors (*section IV*).

We encourage you to use the guide on your own, with a study partner or with a group at a pace that feels comfortable. The questions are provided to facilitate reflection or conversation. Choose the ones that resonate. Chag sameach!

II. Metaphors and Models of Peoplehood

Our view of the world around us and our politics are filtered through the stories we tell about what the world is and what it should be. We use metaphors to describe and understand reality and to organize how we see and react to it.

If this is so, it is valuable to ask: what deep stories have the Jewish people told about our relationship to one another? What metaphors do each of us most naturally reach for in describing the nature of the relationship between Jews in North America and Israel?

Below are basic sketches of some of the most common metaphors used to describe this relationship in classical and contemporary Jewish thought.

1. Shalom Hartman Institute, “Israel and World Jewry: Definitions of Relationships,” in “Together and Apart: The Future of Jewish Peoplehood,” iEngage Vol. 5, 2020

Family: A group of people related by blood and having a shared sense of belonging and mutual obligation.

Shared Believers: A group of people who have a strong commitment to a shared religious belief or a belief that something is right or good.

Partners: A group of people who join in a common undertaking, with shared risks and profits.

Investor: Participant in a collective enterprise that expends money, capital, or resources with the expectation of achieving a profit or gaining an advantage.

Consumer: A person who purchases or benefits from the use of goods and services.

Questions for Reflection:

- Which of these metaphors best describes your understanding of the nature of Jewish peoplehood?
- What are the implications of these metaphors when applied to the relationship between Israeli and North American Jewry? What are the particular implications for questions of loyalty and obligation?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each metaphor? What other metaphors would you add to this list?

III. Text Study

Below are classical and contemporary Jewish texts which reflect some of these understandings of Jewish peoplehood. As you read each one, consider:

- How does this text add to, change, or complicate previous understandings of this metaphor?
- What is a contemporary example of this kind of deep story playing out in the relationship between North American Jews and Israeli Jews?

Family Model

2. Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*, 1983

The foundation of Judaism is the family identity of the Jewish people as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Whatever else is added to this must be seen as growing out of and related to the basic identity of the Jewish people as the seed of Abraham elected by God through descent from Abraham. This is the crux of the mystery of Israel's election. Seen through the eyes of man, a divine election of a group defined by some ideological criterion would be far more plausible. It would have been far more understandable had God elected all those who feed the hungry and clothe the naked or, if our sensibilities are more contemplative than active, all those who have grasped the absolute or achieved Nirvana. These are accomplishments of individuals and reflect unusual endowment or effort or both. But being born into a particular family is hardly an achievement for which anyone deserves either credit or blame...God chose the route of election, and of the election of a biological instead of ideological people, because this was his free choice...Rarely has any theology come to grips with the contingency that follows from God's freedom.

Questions for Reflection:

- How do you relate to Wyschogrod's concept of the Jewish people as family?
- How does the family metaphor change if Jews imagine themselves within different kinds of family relationships, such as siblings, cousins, parents and children, or spouses?

3. Exodus 19:1–6

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai. Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain, and Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ מִדְבַר סִינַי: וַיִּסְעוּ מֵרֶפְדִּים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנּוּ בְּמִדְבַר וַיַּחֲרֹשֻׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הַהָר: וּמִשָּׁה עָלָה אֱלֹהֵי־אֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה מִן־הַהָר לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יִעֲקֹב וְתִגִּיד לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרָיִם וְאֲשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל־כַּנְּפֵי נְשָׁרִים וְאָבָא אֶתְכֶם אֵלָי: וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהִיִּיתֶם לִי סֻגְלָה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ: וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מְמַלְכֶת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קִדּוּשׁ אֲלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבַּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Questions for Reflection:

- How did the Exodus and the giving of the Torah transform the nature of the Israelite people?
- What does it mean to be a community tied to each other on the basis of biology (as it is in Genesis) versus on the basis of ideas, beliefs, and values?
- What are some of the beliefs that bind the Jewish people today?

4. Leviticus Rabbah 4:6

Hezekiah taught: It is said, Israel is a scattered sheep (Jer. 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!'

תְּנִי חִזְקָה (ירמיה נ, יז): שֶׁהַפְּזוּרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל, נִמְשָׁלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְשֶׁה, מֵהַשֶּׁה הַזֶּה לֹקֵה עַל רֵאשׁוֹ אוֹ בְּאֶחָד מֵאֲבָרָיו וְכָל אֲבָרָיו מֵרְגִישׁוֹ, כִּי הוּא יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶחָד מֵהֶן חוֹטֵא וְכָל מֵרְגִישׁוֹ, (במדבר טז, כב): הָאִישׁ אֶחָד יִחְטֵא, תְּנִי רַבִּי שְׂמֵעוֹן בֶּר יוֹחָאי, מְשָׁל לְבָנֵי אָדָם שֶׁהֵיוּ יוֹשְׁבֵינָם בְּסִפִּינָה נֹטֵל אֶחָד מֵהֶן מְקַדְּחִים וְהִתְחִיל קוֹדֵחַ תַּחְתָּיו, אָמְרוּ לוֹ חֲבֵרָיו מֵה אַתָּה יוֹשֵׁב וְעוֹשֶׂה, אָמַר לָהֶם מָה אֲכַפֵּת לָכֶם לֹא תַחְתִּי אֲנִי קוֹדֵחַ, אָמְרוּ לוֹ שְׂהַמִּים עוֹלֵינוֹ וּמְצִיפֵינוֹ עָלֵינוֹ אֶת הַסִּפִּינָה. כִּי אָמַר אִיּוֹב (איוב יט, ד): וְאִף אֲמַנָּם שְׂגִיתִי אֶתִּי תֵלִין מְשׁוֹגְתִי, אָמְרוּ לוֹ חֲבֵרָיו (איוב לד, יז): כִּי יִסִּיף עַל חֲטָאתוֹ פֶּשַׁע בְּיַדְנוֹ יִשְׁפּוֹק, אַתָּה מְסַפֵּיק בְּיַדְנוֹ אֶת עוֹנוֹתֶיךָ.

Questions for Reflection:

- What are the different analogies offered by this rabbinic teaching about Peoplehood? What are the messages that underlie these analogies?
- What is the difference between comparing the Jewish people to parts of the body of the same sheep and comparing the Jewish people to passengers on the same boat?
- How might these approaches impact our thinking about North American Jewry and Israel?

IV. Worksheet

Use this worksheet to help you develop the different implications of each metaphor. You may also want to return to the discussion questions at the end of section II.

	What are the <u>Obligations</u> in this model?	What are the <u>Emotions</u> in this model?	How does one <u>Enter or Exit</u> the relationship in this model?	What are the <u>Strengths</u> of this model?	What are the <u>Challenges</u> of this model?
Family					
Shared Believers					
Partners					
Investors					
Consumers					



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