



## Study Guide

### Topic 2: Peoplehood

*Created in Partnership with the Shalom Hartman Institute*



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### Introduction

#### Jews and Peoplehood

Genesis 17:1-16; Exodus 19:3-6; Passover Haggadah; Amos 9:7;  
Proclamation of Independence of the State of Israel: Prologue

#### Christians and Peoplehood

1 Peter 2:9; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Philippians 3:20; Epistle to Diognetus 5

#### Palestinians and Peoplehood

Rashid Khalidi  
Elias Chacour

### Reflections

#### Appendix

The Amidah  
“All Are Welcome”

# Introduction

The idea of peoplehood as a cultural bond that distinguishes social groups is familiar from the ancient and medieval world, but lost much of its saliency with the rise of individualism and national citizenship in the modern era. Jewish peoplehood has a strong grounding in biblical and rabbinic texts and was underscored by Judaism's status as the paradigmatic minority in Western Christendom. Peoplehood has not been central to Christian self-understanding, despite having strong support in both New Testament and early theological texts. In the national struggles that have sought to overcome a legacy of colonialism over the last century, ideas of peoplehood have again emerged as an alternative to more arbitrary, politically-imposed identities. In these contexts, the questions of peoplehood for Jews, Christians, and Palestinians, albeit not entirely equivalent, bear significantly on our engagement with Israel and the Palestinian people.

As we explore these ideas, it can be tempting to try to identify one or another understanding of peoplehood as exemplary, or to compare notions of peoplehood in ways that might align two against a third as inferior or otherwise idiosyncratic. The best studies in pluralism help us recall that differing values such as peoplehood are not chess pieces to be located on a large grid in appropriate configurations based on their characteristics. Rather they are living elements of culture and identity. Intrinsicly, they deserve respect and invite us to explore the skills, dispositions, and virtues of other communities than our own.

# Jews and Peoplehood

Some of the things you might discuss as you read together include:

- ✚ What elements characterize God’s covenant with the people of Israel according to Genesis 17 and Exodus 19? Who is involved? What, if anything, is expected of them? What are the benefits? How does the covenant create a people?
- ✚ How does Amos 9:7 complicate our understanding of God’s covenant with Israel?
- ✚ Why is the question of the “wicked child” in the Haggadah perceived as so dangerous?
- ✚ What story of Jewish peoplehood is told in Israel’s Proclamation of Independence? What did it contribute to the task of state-building? What challenges does it present?
- ✚ What dimensions of the covenant seem particularly significant to you?
- ✚ How do you understand covenant in relation to contemporary religious and societal life?

## Text Study

### Genesis 17:1-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.’ Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ‘As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.’

### Exodus 19:3-6

Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.’

### Passover Haggadah

What does the wicked child say?

“What is this worship to you?” (Exodus 12:26). To “you” and not to him/her.

Since s/he excludes him/herself from the community, s/he has denied a basic principle of Judaism. You should blunt his/her teeth by saying: “It is for the sake of this that God did for me when I left Egypt. For me and not for you. If you were there you would not have been redeemed.”

## **Amos 9:7**

Are you not like the Ethiopians to me,  
O people of Israel? says the Lord.  
Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt,  
and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?

## **Proclamation of Independence of the State of Israel (May 14, 1948), Prologue**

ERETZ-ISRAEL was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance, and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom. [*See appendix for an example of traditional daily prayers.*]

Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland. In recent decades they returned in their masses. Pioneers, *ma'pelim* [(Hebrew)—immigrants coming to Eretz-Israel in defiance of restrictive legislation] and defenders, they made deserts bloom, revived the Hebrew language, built villages and towns, and created a thriving community controlling its own economy and culture, loving peace but knowing how to defend itself, bringing the blessings of progress to all the country's inhabitants, and aspiring towards independent nationhood.

# Christians and Peoplehood

Some of the things you might want to discuss as you read together include:

- ✚ The texts from the First Letter of Peter and from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians both address the collective or corporate character of the early Christian community. What images do they use to convey their messages? Where do those images locate the Christian community?
- ✚ What do the authors of Philippians and the Letter to Diognetus understand about where Christians live their lives?
- ✚ In your experience, in what ways do Christians today understand themselves as a people with a homeland? What is the nature of that peoplehood? Where is the homeland? Do Christians differ among themselves in this regard? (*See the appendix for one example of a hymn text that addresses these issues.*)

## Text Study

### 1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. [*See Exodus 19:6 and Hosea 1:9, 2:23 for these terms regarding Israel.*]

### 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body.... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

### Philippians 3:20

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Epistle to Diognetus 5

For Christians are no different from other people in terms of their country, language, or customs.... They live in their respective countries, but only as resident aliens; they participate in all things as citizens, and they endure all things as foreigners. Every foreign territory is a homeland for them, every homeland foreign territory. They marry like everyone else and have children, but they do not expose them once they are born. They share their meals but not their sexual partners. They are found in the flesh but do not live according to the flesh. They live on earth but participate in the life of heaven.

# Palestinians and Peoplehood

In this segment of the text study, you will read excerpts from a historian and a memoirist as they discuss Palestinian perspectives on homeland and rootedness. In very different ways, they introduce us to the story of Palestinian identification with the land, a story that reaches back many generations. Rashid Khalidi roots Palestinian self-awareness in a cluster of internal and external factors near the end of the Ottoman era, while Chacour recounts the family lore of a connection to the land stretching back to the early days of Christianity. Khalidi says of his analysis that it shows “the attachment of the population of the country to it...was strong long before the arrival of modern political Zionism on the scene in the last years of the nineteenth century,” while Chacour’s father emphasizes the shared history of Palestinians and Jews in the land over the centuries.

Some of the things you might want to discuss as you read together include:

- ✧ What do the modern analysis and the community legends each contribute to your understanding of Palestinian identity?
- ✧ How is Palestinian identity framed differently by Khalidi’s effort to distinguish Palestinian identity from the Zionist arrival and by Chacour’s focus on shared suffering and experience over centuries?

## Rashid Khalidi

Among the elements that caused the Arab population of the country to identify with Palestine before World War I, several stand out. First among them was a religious attachment to Palestine as a holy land on the part of Muslims and Christians. This attachment was felt by followers of both faiths everywhere, but was particularly strong for those who lived in Palestine. Although Muslims and Christians had somewhat different conceptions of what made Palestine a holy land, and of its boundaries and extent, they shared a similar general idea of the country as a unit and as being special.... Ottoman administrative boundaries, and European ambitions and aspirations in Palestine, helped to shape the local inhabitants’ conception of the country.... This resulting local consciousness of Palestine as a discrete entity, based on religious tradition and long-standing administrative practice, was only enhanced by the fact that foreigners also saw it as such.

It was natural that the covetousness of the European powers regarding Palestine, and in particular their constant efforts to expand their influence and standing there throughout the nineteenth century, would affect the self-view of the inhabitants of the country....

As was the case in other Islamic cities, there was a strong tradition of what might be called urban patriotism in the cities of Palestine.... Outside the cities there was also a deep attachment to place, including pride in the village as special and better than others, and a related pride in family and lineage....

It can therefore be understood why, although other foci of loyalty were still more powerful for most of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine before World War I, the idea of Palestine as a source of identity and as a community with shared interests had already taken root. It competed with and complemented loyalty to the Ottoman state and to the Muslim and Christian religious communities, the growing sense of Arabism fostered by the spread of education and the expansion of the influence of the press, and other more local loyalties– to regions, cities, villages, and families.

“The Formation of Palestinian Identity: The Critical Years, 1917-1923,” in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, eds. (NY: Columbia University Press, 1997) pp. 173-177.

## **Elias Chacour**

Night after night, Father would gather all of us under the open stars or around a low fire as the winter wind beat at our door. For the thousandth time he would carry us back through the dim ages with his brilliant histories. I loved every delightful word.

After Jesus’ crucifixion, we learned, the flame of His Spirit continued to burn brightly in our villages—though our ancestors were forced to meet in secret for fear of the religious leaders. James, the brother of our Lord, became the spiritual overseer of the believers in Jerusalem.

Not very long after James and the other apostles died, the Church was split.... Just when it seemed these false teachers would scatter the flock like wolves, the King of Byzantium, newly a Christian, took a strong stand on the side of the early apostles, asserting that Jesus was the God-Man; He had bridged the chasm between God and mankind, bringing peace when He took on our frail human nature. My family, among many others, sided with the king. Their angry detractors dubbed them with the derogatory name, “Melkites”—or “king’s men”—“melech” being the Arabic word for “king.” It was these early Melkites who united the splintered churches.

Our Melkite family belonged to a spunky group, it seemed. Many centuries later, after the Crusaders fought bloody wars to implant the influence of Rome in our soil, the Melkites stood firmly against such foreign authority. They remained a separate group of believers, holding to the simple, orthodox teachings of the early church, which angered several popes. Several centuries later, the Melkites built bridges of reconciliation with Rome. This ability to reconcile opposing powers seemed to be an historic hallmark of our church fathers.

Should Father stray from the familiar trail, all of us would clamor for the whole story. One part we loved, with that strange, gruesome tendency of children, was about the horrifying fate of a certain Chacour generations back.

In the 1700s, a cruel Turkish sultan named Jezzar Pasha spread his rule over our land all the way to the Mediterranean. When he took the city of Akko on the seacoast, he decided to raise a fortified wall against foreign warships. Its design called for secret labyrinthine escape routes through the enormous stones. One Chacour was among those forced to work on these sea-walls. While the last bit of mortar was still drying, Jezzar Pasha rewarded them for their backbreaking labors: every one of the builders was buried alive beneath the wall. And so the sultan’s defense secrets were guarded forever.

This was Father’s most effective way of teaching us two things. First, we should love and respect our Galilean soil, for our people had long struggled to survive here. We were rooted like the poppies and the wild, blue irises that thrust up among the rocks. Our family had tilled this land, had worshiped here longer than anyone could remember. And second, our lives were bound together with the other people who inhabited Palestine—the Jews. We had suffered together under the Romans, Persians, Crusaders and Turks, and had learned to share the simple elements of human existence—faith, reverence for life, hospitality. These, Father said, were the things that caused people to live happily together.

*Blood Brothers* (1984, 2003) p. 39-41.

# Reflections

- ✧ How does the study of peoplehood help you understand the different perspectives that we bring to our conversations about Israel and the Palestinian people?
- ✧ What else has emerged for you in the course of this study that is important for representing fully your understanding of peoplehood and relations among different peoples and communities?
- ✧ The foundational imagery and texts for peoplehood that you have studied are broadly shared across each of the three communities they represent. Other formative images and stories are present in Jewish, Christian, and Palestinian communities that may compete with these and shape the idea of peoplehood in particular ways. What are the images and stories you know from another community that you would want to explore and understand more fully?

## Appendix

### The Amidah (excerpt)

*The Amidah (also called HaTefillah, “The” prayer) comprises the core of Jewish daily prayer in the rabbinic tradition. Four of its nineteen traditional blessings express hope for restoration of Jewish life in the land of Israel.*

Sound the great shofar to herald our freedom, raise high the banner to gather our exiles. Gather us together from the ends of the earth. Praised are You, Lord who gathers the dispersed of His people Israel.

Restore our judges as in days of old, restore our counsellors as in former times. Remove from us sorrow and anguish. Reign alone over us with lovingkindness, with justice and mercy sustain our cause. Praised are you, Lord, King who loves justice.

Have mercy, Lord, and return to Jerusalem, Your city. May Your Presence dwell there as You have promised. Build it now, in our days and for all time. Reestablish there the majesty of David, Your servant. Praised are You, Lord who builds Jerusalem....

Grant peace to the world, with happiness, and blessing, grace, love, and mercy for us and for all the people Israel. Bless us, our Father, one and all, with Your light; for by that light did you teach us Torah and life, love and tenderness, justice, mercy, and peace.... Praised are You, Lord, who blesses His people Israel with peace.

(Harlow, Jules, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom: A Prayerbook for Shabbat, Festivals, and Weekdays*. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly and The United Synagogue of America, 1989. The weekday Amidah is printed on pages 106-121.)

## **All Are Welcome, hymn text by Marty Haugen (1994)**

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,  
a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.  
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;  
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:  
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true,  
where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew.  
Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God's grace;  
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:  
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine, and wheat:  
a banquet hall on holy ground where peace and justice meet.  
Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space;  
as we share in Christ the feast that free us:  
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone  
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known.  
Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face;  
let us bring an end to fear and danger:  
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:  
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

# Evaluation

## Interfaith Partners for Peace Study Guide Topic 2: Peoplehood

Please respond to this form via **SurveyMonkey**® at the following URL: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6VMXCRV>.  
You may also send replies via email at: [info@interfaithpartnersforpeace.org](mailto:info@interfaithpartnersforpeace.org).

1. What principal insights do you take away from this study session?
2. What was the most difficult thing for you to deal with in this study?
3. What additional texts or other resources did you turn to as helpful in this study?
4. How much did each of the following components contribute to your learning?

	Very much			Hardly at all		
Text studies:						
Jews and Peoplehood	6	5	4	3	2	1
Christians and Peoplehood	6	5	4	3	2	1
Palestinians and Peoplehood	6	5	4	3	2	1
Appendix texts	6	5	4	3	2	1
Questions for discussion of texts	6	5	4	3	2	1
Questions for reflection	6	5	4	3	2	1
“What came up between us”	6	5	4	3	2	1

5. What other feedback do you have?



**Co-Chairs:**

**Rabbi Leonard Gordon**

**Rev. Dr. Peter Pettit**

**For further information, please visit:**

**[www.interfaithpartnersforpeace.org](http://www.interfaithpartnersforpeace.org)**

**[www.shalomhartman.org](http://www.shalomhartman.org)**