

LBT's From Light to Liberation: *Peoplehood*

Week of March 7, 2021 / 23 Adar 5781

Framing: Peoplehood is a peculiar word. It is one of those Jewish ideas that does not translate seamlessly into English, yet it is a core Jewish concept for us to explore. While our mindfulness practice enhances our ability to be aware of what arises internally, we can understand peoplehood as the awareness of the underlying unity that makes the individual a part of a bigger group -- as part of a people. And while peoplehood is not a concept unique to Jews, it can deepen our sense of connections beyond ourselves -- be it love for another or a sense of unity with a "people."

The texts below highlight some of the places in which our tradition asks us to consider our role in the Jewish community and our responsibility for one another (of course, there are many places where our tradition urges us to love or care for the stranger beyond our tribe). Despite differences in nationality, ethnicity, ideas, and religious practice -- Jews inherently participate in a collective project making sure our individual actions are connected to a greater whole.

משנה אבות ב'ד'

(ד) הלל אומר, אל תפּרֹשׁ מן הַצְּבוּר, וְאַל תֵּאֱמִין בְּעַצְמְךָ עַד יוֹם מוֹתְךָ, וְאַל תִּדְּוִן אֶת חֲבֵרְךָ עַד שֶׁתִּגִּיעַ לְמְקוֹמוֹ.

Pirkei Avot 2:4

(4) Hillel said: do not separate yourself from the community, Do not trust in yourself until the day of your death, Do not judge your fellow human being until you have reached their place.

שבועות ל"ט א:כ"ב

כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה

Babylonian Talmud, Shevuot 39a:22

All Jews are responsible for one another.

תענית י"א א'ו'

תִּנְיָא אִידֵךְ בְּזַמַּן שֶׁהַצְּבוּר שְׂרוּי בְּצַעַר אֵל יֹאמֵר אָדָם אֵלֶיךָ לְבֵיתִי וְאוֹכֵל וְאַשְׁתָּה וְשָׁלוֹם עָלֶיךָ נִפְשִׁי

Babylonian Talmud, Taanit 11a:6

When the community is immersed in suffering, a person may not say: I will go to my home and I will eat and drink, and peace will be upon my soul.

Questions for Reflection:

1. When have you needed to separate yourself from a community? What did you learn from this experience?
2. In what ways do you see yourself as responsible for others, within and beyond the Jewish community? How do you balance the particularism of responsibility (e.g. to the Jewish community) versus a universal responsibility for our society?
3. While the tradition teaches that one has a responsibility to the Jewish people (and the larger world), there is also an inherent understanding that one must also be responsible for one's own well-being in order to take care of others. How does your mindfulness practice allow you to be responsible for yourself? How does that selfcare enhance your ability to connect with others?