

From the blogs

## We backed Birthright. These are the next big ideas for the Jewish people

Post-October 7 peoplehood must evolve from sharing buses to creating political networks, advocating for minority rights in Israel and embedding Israeli culture more deeply in diaspora life

By [Charles Bronfman](#) and [Jeffrey R. Solomon](#) 15 February 2026



Birthright participants volunteer in an agricultural community in Israel following the October 7, 2023, Hamas onslaught. (courtesy)

JTA — For more than two decades, we have sat across the same tables – in Jerusalem conference rooms, Montreal board meetings, New York offices and plenty of late-night conversations – asking the same question: How do Jews feel more connected to one another? Through the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies (ACBP), we helped launch Birthright Israel and more than a dozen other initiatives, driven by the belief that if you bring Jews together – on buses, in classrooms, around Shabbat tables – a sense of shared peoplehood can take root.

From the beginning, our work has been guided by a simple idea: “the unity of the Jewish people, whose soul is in Jerusalem.” We have sought to cultivate a sense of Jewish Peoplehood – a global family bound not only by heritage, but by shared values and mutual responsibility.

Today, that unity feels more fragile than ever. In this post-October 7 world, we believe it is urgent to take action to sustain Jewish Peoplehood, so that it can withstand rising antisemitism, political polarization, and threats to democracy both in Israel and across the diaspora.

For decades, our philanthropy focused on connecting Jews through familiar avenues – Birthright trips, summer camps and cultural exchange programs that nurtured identity and community. Now, we believe it is time to go further: creating political networks, advocating for minority rights within Israel, and embedding Israeli culture more deeply in diaspora life. Our new agenda shifts from cultivating bonds to shaping policy, redefining responsibility and tackling the hard questions of Jewish Peoplehood in a time of global uncertainty.

It wasn’t long ago that we believed we were in the golden age of the Jewish people. A set of unique circumstances allowed Jews to constantly say “shehechyanu” for gratitude for what they did. In the United States, the very lesson as documented by de Tocqueville in the 1830s was the concept of creating voluntary associations to achieve important purposes. Combining that ethos with the richness of Jewish values and the concept of Jewish community permitted us to build an unprecedented diaspora, perhaps the greatest since the times of Maimonides.

Metaphorically, we believed that the creation and building of the State of Israel was our generation’s Third Temple. As Jonathan Woocher pointed out, this became our civil religion and organizational life became the new synagogue. Together, we created an unprecedented relationship between those in the family who are citizens of Israel and those of us choosing to remain in the rest of the world. In addition to the economic and quality of life measures, we shared values. The American Declaration of Independence and the Israeli Proclamation of Independence have far more in common than in difference. Both countries were aspirational societies, born in war, that could see beyond the immediate grievances to a time of justice and peace.

We also learned how to use our respective places to fulfill Jewish and Zionist visions of freedom and fairness. Israel alone could not have freed Soviet or Ethiopian or Syrian Jewry. It took the combined resources of the American Jewish community and Israel to achieve these miracles of our time.

However, democracy is under attack in Israel, the United States and many countries throughout the world. We know too well that when democracy is under attack, antisemitism is a woeful byproduct. Society became hyperpolitical; everything is seen in political terms, often right versus left. Sadly, the unifying vision is distorted by these political lenses, which, to us, often feel irrelevant to the core issues of Jewish Peoplehood. We love the Jewish people more than we dislike our political Others. Our intra-family debates require stepping back and looking at what unites us and what divides us.

More specifically, we believe that in this post-October 7 world, when democracy itself is being stress-tested and debated, we need to take a number of actions that ensure a dynamic Jewish people, whether in Beersheba, Berlin, Beijing or Boston.

These actions include:

**More engagement:** The secret sauce of Birthright Israel is the engagement of the young adult participants with their Israeli peers without curation. They discover for themselves how much they have in common and, indeed, how much they share in respect and love. We should be doubling down on these “mifgashim” (encounters), arranging for Israeli participants to visit the communities that are the home of their new diaspora friends. We should expand the campus fellows’ programs so that young Israelis can serve as concierges on campuses throughout the world. Israeli counselors should be the norm at summer camps throughout the globe. For example, [ENTER](#), a relatively new organization, is responsible for over 30,000 digital engagements between Israeli and Diaspora teens. It identifies and upgrades elementary schools in Israel to teach and engage educationally and emotionally with the Diaspora. It has recently been expanded to connect mothers through [Mother2Mother](#), a joint initiative with Momentum.

**Creation:** It is time for those of us in the Diaspora to create DIPAC: The Diaspora-Israel Political Action Committee. Modeled after AIPAC, this organization, led and staffed by like-minded Israelis, would represent the Diaspora’s interests in Jerusalem vis-à-vis the Israeli government and the Knesset. Never again would there be an incompetent Diaspora Affairs Minister who does damage to local Jewish communities throughout the globe. No government would unilaterally withdraw from an agreement such as that taken in 2018 regarding the Western Wall, which impacts only the Diaspora. The teaching of Diaspora Jewish history and sociology would be no less prevalent in Israeli schools than the teaching of Israel is in Jewish schools throughout the world.

**Redefinition:** We would also advocate for a redefinition of “Kol Yisrael arevim zeh l’ zeh (All Israel is responsible, one for another).” Let us redefine Israel beyond its traditional definition– “the Jewish people” – to include, almost 80 years after the creation of the State,

all Israel. We should care about the quality of life of Druze, Bedouin and Palestinian Israelis in Daliyat al-Karmel, Rahat or Sakhnin, no less than we care for the quality of life of Israeli Jews in Tel Aviv or Haifa.

**Culture as Community:** For those of us in the Diaspora, bringing Israeli culture to our communities should continue and be increased. Every Jewish film festival should include a range of Israeli films. Music, literature and dance opportunities must be expanded to allow Israel to be seen not only as the Sparta depicted on news channels, but the Athens that enriches quality of life. Let us appreciate as well the value of effective contemporary education in the age of screens: edutainment that enriches our and the world's understanding of Israel and the Jewish people.

**Take a Stand:** We must use our voices to challenge clear and obvious violations of the very principles of the Israeli state. Non-residency is not an excuse to avoid speaking out against settlers who destroy olive groves and do so with no fear of governmental intervention. If we are partners in Zionism, we need to stand with the overwhelming, but endangered, Israeli majority.

**Welcome Zionist Thought:** We must go backward in order to move forward. How many of our children and grandchildren have read "Altneuland" and the other writings of Herzl and the early Zionist thinkers, in order that they might connect to the founders' aspirational vision of fairness and justice? There is buried in Jewish thought throughout the ages and in Zionist thought throughout the last century and a half revolutionary passion that speaks to the values of our times. We can't let our enemies define Zionism. It is an enriching component of Jewish thought and needs to be re-embraced.

**Create Networks:** Finally, we must create more networks, like The London Initiative, which is a network of 360 individuals, half from Israel, and half from the rest of the world, that believes in Israel as a liberal democracy, built on and for fairness and equality and seeking secure peace. How many of us who look to the political right or the political left cannot agree with those principles?

These action steps are just a beginning of redefining what can drive the Jewish people at a moment when everything has to change. Like those who had to pick up the pieces after the destruction of the First and Second Temples, who overcame their fears of change, we need to think beyond tactical differences while retaining long-term principles and values.

The past five years brought us a global pandemic, an existential threat to democracy in Israel, the scourge of a brutal terrorist invasion and worldwide condemnation of the very idea of a Jewish state. Our challenge/opportunity is to re-double our efforts and to overcome these challenges on behalf of our timeless beliefs and an amazing global family.

*Charles Bronfman is co-founder of Birthright Israel and chair of the Charles Bronfman Family Foundation in the United States and the CRB Foundation in Canada. Jeffrey R. Solomon is senior advisor to Chasbro Investments and past CEO of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies.*