

Dear Friends,

I was invited to respond to the keynote address at our Rabbinical Association Convention last month. The speaker, Naom Pianko, Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Washington in Seattle, wrote a book entitled *Jewish Peoplehood* in which he questions the validity of the construct of Peoplehood in a post-national, global era. Using my perspective of more than forty years as a congregational rabbi, I bypassed the academic issue to speak about the increasing, and, in my opinion, glorious diversity and complexity of Jewish identity as evident in our community. I conflated the stories of three people in our synagogue who have come to live their lives as Jews in the context of their families. "We have chosen to sanctify these 'Jews by association' whom we have declared to be 'Jewish enough,'" I concluded.

And given our numbers, why not? Consider the following: there are 7.125 billion people in the world, about 15.5 million of whom are Jewish. We live mostly in Israel (6.4 million) and in the United States (5.425 million). About a million and a half of Jews living in America live in New York City and its boroughs. In descending concentrations, there are 465,000 Jews in France, 385,000 in Canada, 270,000 in the United Kingdom, 186,000 in Russia, 181,500 in Argentina and just under 100,000 in Germany.

Before World War II, Jews numbered approximately 16,000,000. The consequences resulting from the deaths of the six million continue to affect us. With our numbers at under 16 million seventy years after the war, we have yet to catch up to where we were seven decades ago. So if there are people who want to be counted among us, we should welcome them with open arms. I celebrate the evolution of Jewish identity in our age, which includes so many fellow travelers. May our People continue to grow.

With hope, I am, as always, warmly,
Lee