

Jewish Peoplehood: Who's In, Who's Out?

You are a member of the board of the Ohio State University chapter of Gamma Delta Epsilon, the largest Jewish fraternity in the country.

For the past few years, Kim Yong Siu, a Christian Korean-American engineering student has hung out with you and many of your friends. He came to programs, cheered at football games and was generally part of the life of the community.



In January of this year, the 110 members of your local fraternity unanimously approved him for admission. However, just a few months later, you received a letter from the national organization informing you that if you insisted on admitting a non-Jew, your chapter could face a membership review, which could result in the chapter's officers or even most of the rank-and-file brothers stripped of membership.

Chapters at [Tufts](#) and [Brown](#) have already disaffiliated from the national organization on account of these issues. How do you propose that your chapter respond?

Rabbi Brent Chaim Spodek

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The Uniqueness of the Jewish People

A people is not a *natural* entity. It is a *being of the mind*. A nation exists insofar as there is a consciousness of its existence -- the awareness of particular human beings that their communal existence has a framework which is “the nation,” *their* nation...

The Jewish people, as it existed in history, is definable only by reference to its Judaism - a Judaism that was not mere idea in the mind but the realization of a program of living set forth in the Torah and delineated by its Mitzvot. This way of life constituted by the specific national content of Jewishness or, in other words, the *uniqueness*, of the Jewish people. The Jew practiced a way of living - [eating, sexual practices, Shabbat] - that was exclusively his. Unlike the identities of the peoples that are characterized by race, language, territory, or state, the national identity of the Jewish people is *Judaism*, the actuality of which is life according to the Torah.

Accordingly, **the uniqueness of the Jewish people - also called the “holiness” of Israel - is not something that was given to the people as an abiding and enduring possession, but is rather a demand, an assignment and a task which they are charged - a goal toward which they are to strive eternally, without any guarantee of ever attaining it...**

Yeshayahu Leibowitz, (1975)

- According to Leibowitz, Judaism is defined by Jewish practice.
 - What are the implications of this definition for Kim Yong Siu?
 - What are the implications of this definition for the other members of Gamma Delta Epsilon?

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[DNA tests would strengthen their claims to Judaism](#)

Israel's rabbinate has been performing genetic testing on Israelis from the former Soviet Union, to check if they are “genetically Jewish” as a condition for marriage registration, an investigation by Ynet has revealed.

Although the existence of such tests was [initially denied](#) by Interior Minister Aryeh Deri, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi David Lau [from 2013-2024] admitted to having requested that some couples prove their Jewish status. Lau claimed those were isolated incidents and there was no coercion.

"Unfortunately, there are immigrants who, despite their eligibility under the Law of Return, are not defined as Jews according to Halacha," said Lau in response, referring to the Israeli law that allowed anyone with a Jewish grandparent to live in Israel. "In a few cases, there are those who claim to be Jews, but don't possess the necessary documents to confirm it ... or we find contradictions between their statements and what we would uncover about them."

"In these cases we suggest undergoing DNA tests that would strengthen their claims," he said. "It's never forced upon anyone and only used to assist applicants in the research process."

[yNet News, March 2019](#)

According to Lau, Judaism can be defined by genetics.

- What are the implications of this definition for Kim Yong Siu?
- What are the implications of this definition for the other members of Gamma Delta Epsilon?

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The Un-Jews

The anti-Zionists know exactly what they are doing, and what they are undoing. They are trying to disentangle Judaism from Jewish nationalism, the sense of Jewish peoplehood, while undoing decades of identity-building. In repudiating Israel and Zionism, hundreds of Jewish Google employees rejected what they call “the conflation of Israel with the Jewish people.” The voices of inflamed Jewish opponents of Israel and Zionism are in turn amplified by a militant progressive superstructure that now has an ideological lock on the discourse in American academia, publishing, media, and the professions that formerly respected American Jewry’s Zionism-accented, peoplehood-centered constructions of Jewish identity.

We call these critics “un-Jews” because they believe the only way to fulfill the Jewish mission of saving the world with Jewish values is to undo the ways most actual Jews do Jewishness...Today’s un-Jews remain as engaged with parts of their Jewish heritage, as appalled by other parts, and as anxious for acceptance, as their predecessors. Their undoing project doesn’t involve conquering the Temple in the name of civilization or converting the Jews to Christianity. Instead, they are divorcing the democratic State of Israel in the name of democracy and social justice. Today’s social justice warriors make war on Israel the same way that the Soviet communists made war on Jewish peoplehood and its institutions.

Natan Sharansky and Gil Troy
Tablet Magazine, June 2021

- According to Sharansky and Troy, Jews who “divorce the democratic State of Israel in the name of democracy and social justice” are “un-Jews.”
 - We don’t know Kim Yong Siu’s stance with regard to Zionism or the State of Israel. Would knowing that impact our decision?
 - What are the implications of this definition for the other members of Gamma Delta Epsilon?

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In Israel, the Dangerous Concept of the Goy Lives On

...between the Bible and the Talmud... the "goy" was invented. In the world before the sages, a broad interim space existed between the Jew and the goy, which covered a whole spectrum: the stranger, the slave, the Samaritan, the joiners and the leavers. In contrast, the binary Talmudic model requires a decision about every such category as to whether one is referring to a "Jew" or a "goy."

The most salient interim case is that of the *ger*, the biblical resident alien, who lives with Israelites despite not being one of them. The Torah stipulates that the *ger* must be treated like a native member of the community: "There shall be one statute for you and for the resident who lives with you" (Numbers 15:15). When the binary system is established, the *ger*, who does not clearly belong to either of the dichotomous categories, constitutes a disruption...

In many ways, the goy is actually more important today than ever, as observance of halakha is the preserve of only a minority, and so differentiation from the goy is effectively one of the only stable elements that remain from their Jewish identity... More than the people of Israel safeguarded the goy, the goy safeguards Israel.

Ishay Rosen-Zvi and Adi Ophir, 2021

Haaretz

- According to Rosen-Zvi and Ophir, pre-Talmudic Judaism had a range of identities, whereas post-Talmudic Judaism has only two.
 - How might this framework inform the decision we have to make regarding Kim Yong Siu?
 - What are the implications of this definition for the other members of Gamma Delta Epsilon?

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