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## E an Eh enfeld

In her 2017 book, *The Power of Meaning: Crafting a Life That Matters*, Emily Efsahani Smith observes that despite an increase in personal happiness over the past half-century, many negative factors, such as depression and suicide, have also increased. She argues that this is because, despite being happier, our lives lack something even more significant than happiness. We lack meaning.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks also contrasted happiness with m~~3~~<sup>4</sup>s

themselves as a single nation, a distinctive and persistent group, often more closely linked to other Jews throughout the world than to the people among whom they live...

What united them? Rav Saadiah Gaon in the tenth Century gave the answer: 'Our nation is only a nation in virtue of its religious laws.' Wherever Jews were, they kept the same commitment, study the same sacred text, observe the same Sabbath and fast days, and said essentially the same prayers in the same holy language. They even face the same spot while doing so: Jerusalem, where the Temple once stood and where the Divine presence was still held to have its Earthly habitation. These invisible strands of connection sustain them in a bond of collective belonging that had no parallel among any other National grouping. Some feared this, others respected it, but no one doubted that Jews were different...

That is the paradox. In their own land, the place where every other nation is to some degree United, Jews were split Beyond repair. In dispersion, where every other nation is assimilated and disappeared, they remain distinctive and, in essentials at least, united. There was something surprisingly strange about Jewish peoplehood.

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The Jewish people exist in all its bewildering complexity because it is both the religion and the nation, a faith and a fate. Remove either element and it will fall apart. That is what is wrong and focusing exclusively on fate - antisemitism, the Holocaust, the people that dwells Alone in the world, faith that keeps bringing us back to the idea that Jews are a people: it was as a people that our ancestors left Egypt, as a people that they made a covenant with God in the desert, as a people that they took up the challenge of life in the Holy Land, and as a people that they understood their destiny. Jewish life is quintessentially communal, a matter of believing and belonging. Maimonides rules: 'one who separates himself from the community even if he commits no sin but merely holds himself aloof from the congregation of Israel...and shows himself indifferent to their distress' has no share in the world to come.

Judaism is not a sect of the like-minded. The Jewish people is not a self-selecting community of saints. It is not, in other words, like most communities of Faith - Jewish identity with the exception of conversion, is something into which we are born, not something we choose. This mix of fate and faith, nationhood and religion, means that from the very beginning Jews have had to live with the tension of these two very different ideas, and it is that tension that has made you creative, unpredictable, diverse, conflict] community di hlik

What unites the Jew

### **3. Storytelling**

“To understand the Jewish people, one must listen to the way it tells its story.” - Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (Haggadah, pg. 119)

**“The Stories that Bind Us” by Bruce Feiler (New**

