



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן

iEngage Together & Apart

Unit Four

Universalism and Particularism

TaNaKH: An Hourglass



Universalism → Particularism → Universalism



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**Particularism does not mean
self-interest and moral chauvinism**



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Three Paradigms for Universalism-Particularism “Dance”

1. **BALANCE APPROACH**
2. **CONDITIONAL APPROACH**
3. **SYNTHESIS APPROACH**



False Dichotomies and Stereotypes

Particularists = self-interested	Universalists = moral
Particularists = loyal; committed	Universalists = assimilated; unengaged



Yossi Klein Halevi, Unit 4 Interview

Built into the Jewish experience is the tension of maintaining the balance between particular and universal. Our greatest challenge today is finding that balance.

We have groups that are particularists to the point of xenophobic;
And groups that are universalists to the point of disappearing.



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Melila Hellner Eshed, Unit 4 Interview

When I look at Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook and Shlomo Goren – a great visionaries about what kind of nationalist with particularist future could be for Jewish people here, they were adamant about saying that what will differentiate the particularist experiment in Israel is that it won't sink into narrow, closed-minded particularism. But it will turn into "the people of humanity" and have imagination of serving the world, being with the world.

So I think very strongly that in a particularist society, it is important to know that it is easy to fall asleep to the wider perspective (especially if there is danger of survival). We close our eyes and ears. I feel strongly in the importance of being attentive to the North American Jewish community. I wish to take from you the importance of thinking about the world, the climate, animals, humanity. I must put that into my language, into my cultural and spiritual and religious language, and into my prayers! If I'm not open to that, I will shut down into something that can implode on itself.



Summary Points

1. The tension between universalism and particularism is an enduring feature of the Jewish people.
2. The Bible itself embodies the tension between the particularistic story of the Jewish family and its mission for universal morality.
3. Radical particularism and radical universalism are not consistent with Jewish traditional sources. Rather, we need to dance between both values.
4. There are three paradigms for engaging the tension between universalism and particularism:
 - **Balance Approach** in which we seek a middle ground to maintain both values simultaneously.
 - **Conditional Approach** in which we can strive for universalism only after safeguarding particularism.
 - **Synthesis Approach** in which both values are intertwined and inform one another.
5. We need to be careful about caricaturizing others as the extreme form of particularism or universalism to suit our political agenda in a communal debate. A healthy Jewish community can engage the tension between universalism and particularism as a platform for open discussion about priorities and responsibilities.

