



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן

iEngage Together & Apart

Session Six
Antisemitism

Antisemitism and Collective Jewish Identity

- ❖ Shared suffering and the shared fight against antisemitism always served as a unifying force for Jewish people.
- ❖ Today, however, there is an internal debate among Jews on the political left and the political right about how to identify and fight against antisemitism.



Boundaries of Judaism

<u>PLURALISM</u>	<u>TOLERANCE</u>	<u>DEVIANCE</u>
Equally valid Mutual respect <i>Multiple options</i>	Wrong and inferior <i>but tolerable:</i> doesn't destroy collective life	Intolerable, Harmful, Unacceptable, Deviant • Red Lines • Sanctions • Exclusions



Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 13b

R. Abba stated in the name of Samuel: For three years there was a dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, the former asserting, 'The halachah is in agreement with our views' and the latter contending, 'The halachah is in agreement with our views.' Then a *bat kol* was pronounced: 'These *and* those are the words of the living God; and the law is according to Beit Hillel.' Since, however, both 'these and those are the words of the living God,' what was it that entitled Beit Hillel to have the halachah fixed in agreement with their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings *and* those of Beth Shammai. Moreover, they placed Beit Shammai's words before their own.

אמר רבי אבא אמר שמואל: שלש שנים נחלקו בית שמאי ובית הלל, הללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו והללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו. יצאה בת קול ואמרה: אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן, והלכה כבית הלל. וכי מאחר שאלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים מפני מה זכו בית הלל לקבוע הלכה כמותן - מפני שנוחין ועלובין היו, ושונין דבריהן ודברי בית שמאי. ולא עוד אלא שמקדימין דברי בית שמאי לדבריהן.



Debate over “Antisemitism” Claim

1. THREAT ASSESSMENT

2. MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

3. PARTISANSHIP AND POLITICAL POLARIZATION



Orientations to Antisemitism

Global: Antisemitism
as an eternal,
transnational
phenomenon

Local: Antisemitism
as a contextual
phenomenon



Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבה...

These are the first words of the Jewish exorcists' prayer, "Magnified and sanctified be Your name," as he recited tonight on the first Sabbath since the tragedy at Tree of Life.



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Summary

- There are three categories for dealing with difference in a community: pluralism, tolerance and deviance.
 - **Pluralism** is for a difference we view as an equally legitimate and valuable choice.
 - **Tolerance** is for a difference we view as wrong and inferior, but it is a difference that we can tolerate because we respect the freedom of choice for the other and/or the difference poses no real threat.
 - **Deviance** is for a difference which is unacceptable and intolerable, because it is harmful and dangerous.
- Most religious differences are approached through the categories of pluralism or tolerance. However, in our polarized partisan environment, political differences on North American policy and on Israel are more often approached through the category of deviance.



- Throughout history, antisemitism was a force of unity for Jewish peoplehood in opposition to external enemies. Fighting antisemitism was understood to be every Jew's most foundational obligation.
- Antisemitism no longer functions as a shared boundary because we disagree over when to apply the category of antisemitism.
- Three factors have led to the challenge in maintaining a shared application of the category of "antisemitism" in the Jewish community today: 1) differences in the assessment of existential threats; 2) complex multiple identities; 3) partisan politics.
- The steps necessary to address the divisive nature of antisemitism include: 1) greater care in applying the category of antisemitism and refraining from wielding the category as a political weapon; 2) creating consensus on a minimal definition of anti-Semitism as vilification of Jews qua Jews.

