



מכון שאלום הרטמן
SHALOM HARTMAN
INSTITUTE

The Judaism of Being: Unit Two

with Rabbi Lauren Berkun

I. Judaism as Family/Nation: Covenant of “Being” – Judaism is “Who You Are”

1. Genesis 12:1-3

The Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.

²I will make of you a great nation,

And I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

And you shall be a blessing.

³I will bless those who bless you

And curse him that curses you;

And all the families of the earth

Shall bless themselves by you.”

וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל

2. Passover Haggadah, Four Sons

The **wicked one**, what does he say? “What is this service to you?” He says “to you” but not to him! By thus excluding himself from the community he has committed heresy [“rebelled against the essence”].

רָשָׁע מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם? לָכֶם - וְלֹא לוֹ.
וּלְפִי שֶׁהוֹצִיא אֶת עַצְמוֹ מִן הַכָּלל כָּפַר בְּעַקְרָו.

3. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 44a

Israel hath sinned. R. Abba b. Zavda said: Even though [the people] have sinned, they are still [called] ‘Israel’. R. Abba said: Thus people say, A myrtle, though it stands among reeds, is still a myrtle, and it is so called.

אֵע״פ שֶׁחָטָא יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא

4. Tzitz Eliezer 13:93

The case came before me regarding a woman, the daughter of Jewish parents who submitted a request to the courts to allow her to return to the fold of Judaism. In front of the court she explained that she had converted to Christianity in the Anglican Church, as a result of wanting to marry someone who belonged to the Anglican religion. Now she expresses complete remorse over her actions... It is obvious and simple that according to Jewish law, a Jew is in no way capable of freeing him or herself from the bonds of the Torah and severing the ties and the roots of his connection to his people. A Jew's fundamental connection to the Jewish people is founded on the fact that he was born to Jewish parents, or more accurately to a Jewish mother...

It is, therefore, a central principle of our religion and our holy Torah that no one of the offspring of Jacob can escape from it, whether voluntarily or non-voluntarily. Against his will, a Jew remains a Jew, connected to the religion of Moshe, with no recourse to free himself from it. It is therefore, simple and clear that the conversion to a different religion of this woman who wants to return to Judaism is something that never happened. She never left the framework of Judaism, neither religiously or nationally, and her return to Judaism is like the return of a daughter to her mother.

5. Exodus 32:1-10

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him." ²Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." ³And all the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf...

⁷The LORD spoke to Moses, "Hurry down, for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely. ⁸They have been quick to turn aside from the way that I enjoined upon them. They have made themselves a molten calf and bowed low to it and sacrificed to it, saying: 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!' "

⁹The LORD further said to Moses, "I see that this is a stiffnecked people. ¹⁰Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation." ¹¹But Moses implored the LORD his God, saying, "Let not Your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand. ¹²Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth.' Turn from Your blazing anger, and renounce the plan to punish Your people.

6. Avot d'Rabbi Natan, Chp. 2

Moses, the righteous, made an inference of his own accord. He said: "How shall I give these tablets to Israel? I shall be obligating them to major commandments and make them liable to the penalty of death, for thus is it written in the tablets, *Whoever sacrifices to a god other than the Lord alone shall be utterly destroyed* (Ex. 22:19). Rather, I shall take hold of them and break them, and bring Israel back to good conduct.

7. Moshe Halbertal, "On Modern Jewish Identities," *Jewish Peoplehood: Change and Challenge*

I will contend that in our own day, the traditional concept of Jewish identity has been replaced by a plurality of incommensurable notions which render the attempt to subordinate the definition of Jewish nationalism to the halachic framework both problematic and mistaken. Instead, I will argue, we must affirm and embrace the modern Jewish condition as pluralistic, and revise our understanding of Jewish identity and Peoplehood accordingly...

The plurality of modern Jewish identity is thus deep and radical, and its basic structure provides three different orientations of what it is to be a Jew ... Yet, many modern Jews do not reside in purity in either of these alternatives. For these Jews, the condition of pluralism is not merely a description of the radical diversity of Jewish modern identity in its modern historical form. The plurality resides in their own soul. They, as Jews, are a complex hybrid of identities. They carry in their own soul the fractures of modern Jewish identity and its burdens.

8. Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock*

Why couldn't the Jews be one people? Why must Jews be in conflict with one another? Why must they be in conflict with themselves? Because divisiveness is not just between Jew and Jew – it is within the individual Jew. Is there a more manifold personality in all the world? I don't say divided. Divided is nothing... But inside every Jew there is a mob of Jews. The good Jew, the bad Jew. The new Jew, the old Jew. The lover of Jews, the hater of Jews. The friend of the goy, the enemy of the goy. The arrogant Jew, the wounded Jew. The pious Jew, the rascal Jew. The coarse Jew, the gentle Jew. The defiant Jew, the appeasing Jew. The Jewish Jew, the de-Jewed Jew. Shall I go on? So I have to expound upon the Jew as the three-thousand-year amassment of mirrored fragments... Is it any wonder that a Jew is always disputing? He is a dispute, incarnate.