



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן

Together & Apart: The Future of Jewish Peoplehood

Unit Three: Judaism of Becoming

with Rabbi Lauren Berkun

I. Judaism of Becoming: Judaism is What you DO

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."

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵדָבָר מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ: וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאַבְרָכְךָ וְאַגְדָּלְךָ שְׁמֹךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה: וְאַבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֶאֱרָא וְנִבְרָכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפָּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה:

2. Exodus 19:4-6

⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. ⁵Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, ⁶but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel."

וַעֲתָה אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֹגְלָה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ: וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מְמַלְכֶת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ:

3. Leviticus 19:1-2

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: **2** Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God, am holy.

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. **ב** דַּבֵּר אֶל-כָּל-עַדְת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם--קְדוֹשִׁים תְּהִיוּ: כִּי קְדוֹשׁ, אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

4. Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶For I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His laws, and His rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess... I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—²⁰by loving the Lord your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the Lord swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.

רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת-הַחַיִּים וְאֶת-הַטּוֹב וְאֶת-הַמָּוֶת וְאֶת-הָרָע: אֲשֶׁר אֲנִכִּי מִצְוֶיךָ הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכָּיו וּלְשַׁמֵּר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְחַיִּיתָ וּרְבִיתָ וּבִרְכָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה בָאֲשָׁמָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: ... הַעֵידֹתִי בְכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמָּוֶת נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבַחֲרֹתָ בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תַּחַיֶּה אֶתָּה וְזָרַעְךָ: לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׂמְעָה בְּקוֹלוֹ וּלְדַבְּקָה-בּוֹ כִּי הוּא חַיִּיךָ וְאֶרֶץ יְמִיךָ לְשִׁבְתָּ עַל-הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לָתֵת לָהֶם: (פ)

5. Exodus 23:9

⁹You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

וְגַר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתָּם יַדְעֹתֶם אֶת-נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי-גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

II. “Chosenness of Being”

6. Deuteronomy 7:7-8

⁶For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God: of all the peoples on earth the Lord your God chose you to be His treasured people. ⁷It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that the Lord set His heart on you and chose you—indeed, you are the smallest of peoples; ⁸but it was because the Lord favored you and kept the oath He made to your fathers that the Lord freed you with a mighty hand and rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אֵתָהּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּחָר | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סְגֻלָּה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר
עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה : לֹא מֵרַבְּבָכֶם מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים חָשַׁק יְהוָה בָּכֶם וַיִּבְחַר בָּכֶם כִּי־אֵתָם הִמְעֵט מִכָּל־
הָעַמִּים : כִּי מֵאַהֲבַת יְהוָה אֵתְכֶם וּמִשְׁמֵרוֹ אֶת־הַשְּׂבִיעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם
בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וַיִּפְדֶּךָ מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים מִיַּד פְּרַעֲה מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרָיִם :

7. Leviticus 26:41-44

⁴¹When I, in turn, have been hostile to them and have removed them into the land of their enemies, then at last shall their obdurate heart humble itself, and they shall atone for their iniquity. ⁴²Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob; I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham; and I will remember the land.

⁴³For the land shall be forsaken of them, making up for its sabbath years by being desolate of them, while they atone for their iniquity; for the abundant reason that they rejected My rules and spurned My laws. ⁴⁴Yet, even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling My covenant with them: for I the Lord am their God. ⁴⁵I will remember in their favor the covenant with the ancients, whom I freed from the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God: I, the Lord.

III. Chosenness of Becoming

8. Isaiah 49:6

⁶For God has said:

“It is too little that you should be My servant

In that I raise up the tribes of Jacob

And restore the survivors of Israel:

I will also make you a light of nations,

That My salvation may reach the ends of the earth.”

וַיֹּאמֶר נְקַל מִהְיוֹתִי לְעֶבֶד לְהַקִּים אֶת־שְׁבִטִי יַעֲקֹב וּנְצִירִי [וּנְצוּרָי] יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַשְׁיב וּנְתִיתִי לְאֹר
גוֹלָם לְהַיּוֹת יְשׁוּעָתִי עַד־קֵצֵה הָאָרֶץ: (ס)

9. Isaiah 42:6-7

⁶I the Lord, in My grace, have summoned you,

And I have grasped you by the hand.

I created you, and appointed you

A covenant people, a light of nations—

⁷Opening eyes deprived of light

אֲנִי יְהוָה קָרָאתִיךָ בְּצַדִּיק וְאֶחְזַק בְּיָדֶךָ וְאֶצְרֶךָ וְאֶתְנַחֵם לְבַרְיִת עָם לְאֹר גּוֹיִם: לְפָקַח עֵינַיִם עִוְרוֹת

10. Amos 3:2

²You alone have I singled out

Of all the families of the earth—

That is why I will call you to account

For all your iniquities.

רַק אֶתְכֶם יִדְעֵתִי מִכָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה עַל־כֵּן אֶפְקֹד עֲלֵיכֶם אֵת כָּל־עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם:

IV. Conversion of Being/Conversion of Becoming

Michael Walzer, “The Anomalies of Jewish Political Identity,” *Jewish Peoplehood: Change and Challenge*

We all know how anomalous Jewish identity is, and we all know the reasons. The Jews are a people as well as a nation (albeit for a long time a stateless one), and as such, they are a

collective of a familiar kind. There are many nations, and we are one among them. At the same time, the Jews are a religious community, a community of faith, as we say in the United States – which is another collective of a familiar kind. There are many religions, and ours is one among them. The anomaly is that these two collectives are not of the same kind, and, except in the Jewish case, they don't ordinarily coincide.

In the United States, it was Jewish advocates of cultural pluralism, most notably Horace Kallen, who invented the idea of hyphenated Americans, thereby enabling us to add "American" to our identity, without giving up "Jewish." Thanks to Kallen, we are not Americans who happen to be of the Jewish religion; we are both American Jews (religiously) and Jewish-Americans (nationally). We pretend that we are like American Catholics, on the one hand, and like Italian-Americans on the other. But the analogy doesn't work in either case. Many American Catholics, for example, are not Italian, and some Italian-Americans are not Catholic, while our religious and national identities continue, anomalously, to coincide. Even those of us who aren't personally religious, are Jewish in both these senses.

Being anomalous isn't popular. People find us hard to understand. Because neither our national nor our religious community is inclusive in the standard way, we are accused of being parochial, hostile to outsiders, exclusionary, chauvinist, and, in any group except our own, disloyal and subversive...

It really isn't all that hard for our neighbors to live with our anomalies, if they are minded to do so, and they should be so minded. In a world where there are many ways of being different, and an extraordinary diversity of customs and beliefs, what justice requires (from us, in the Diaspora and in Israel, and from everyone else too) is respect for difference – and our own differences are among those that demand respect.

Of course, we should insist that the world allow us to be what we are... but first we must accept ourselves as we are – anomalies and all.