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Together & Apart: The Future of Jewish Peoplehood

Unit Four: Universalism and Particularism

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1. Genesis 1:27

And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם.

2. Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5

For this reason was humanity created singly (one at a time), to teach you that whoever destroys a single soul, Scripture imputes [guilt] to that person as though he or she had destroyed a complete world; and whoever preserves a single soul, Scripture ascribes [merit] to that person as though he or she had preserved a complete world. Furthermore, [humanity was created singly] for the sake of peace among people, that one might not say another, my ancestor was greater than yours, and that the *minim* might not say, there are many ruling powers in heaven; And, to proclaim the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed Be God: for if a human strikes many coins from one mold they all resemble one another, but the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, fashioned every person in the mold of the first human, and yet not one of them resembles another. Therefore, every single person is obliged to say: The world was created for my sake.

לְפִיכָּךְ נִבְרָא אָדָם יְחִידִי, לְלַמְדֵּךְ, שְׁכָל הַמַּאֲבֵד נֹפֵשׁ אַחַת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב
כְּאִלוֹ אֲבֵד עוֹלָם מְלֵא. וְכָל הַמְּקַיֵּם נֹפֵשׁ אַחַת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב כְּאִלוֹ קַיֵּם
עוֹלָם מְלֵא. וּמִפְּנֵי שְׁלוֹם הַבְּרִיּוֹת, שֶׁלֹּא יֵאמַר אָדָם לַחֲבֵרוֹ אָבָא גְדוֹל מֵאָבִיךָ. וְשֶׁלֹּא יְהוּ
מִיָּנִין אוֹמְרִים, הֲרֵבָה רְשָׁיוֹת בְּשָׂמַיִם. וְלִהְיִיד גְּדֻלַּתוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁאָדָם טוֹבֵעַ
כְּמָה מִטְּבָעוֹת בְּחוֹתֶם אֶחָד וְכֵלֶן דּוֹמִין זֶה לָזֶה, וּמִלְּךָ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא
טֵבַע כָּל אָדָם בְּחוֹתְמוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם הָרֵאשׁוֹן וְאִין אֶחָד מֵהֶן דּוֹמֵה לַחֲבֵרוֹ. לְפִיכָּךְ כָּל אֶחָד
וְאֶחָד חַיֵּב לוֹמַר, בְּשִׁבְלֵי נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם.

3. Genesis 11: 1-9

Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. ²And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard.” —Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar.—⁴And they said, “Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world.” ⁵The LORD came down to look at the city and tower that man had built, ⁶and the LORD said, “If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach. ⁷Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another’s speech.” ⁸Thus the LORD scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. ⁹That is why it was called Babel, because there the LORD confounded the speech of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

4. 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 לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמְוֹלַדְתֶּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
אֲרָאָךְ: וְאָעֲשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאֲבָרְכֶךָ וְאֲגַדְלֶה שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה: וְאֲבָרְכָה מִבְּרַכְיֶךָ
וּמִקְלֶכָּה אֲאָר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה:

5. Micah 4:1-5

In the days to come, the Mount of the Lord's House shall stand firm above the mountains;
And it shall tower above the hills. The peoples shall gaze on it with joy,
²And the many nations shall go and shall say: "Come, let us go up to the Mount of the Lord,
To the House of the God of Jacob;
That He may instruct us in His ways,
And that we may walk in His paths."
For instruction shall come forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
³Thus He will judge among the many peoples, and arbitrate for the multitude of nations,
However distant; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares
And their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation shall not take up sword against nation; They shall never again know war;
⁴But every man shall sit under his grapevine or fig tree with no one to disturb him.
For it was the Lord of Hosts who spoke.
⁵Though all the peoples walk each in the names of its gods,
We will walk in the name of the Lord our God
Forever and ever.

6. Deuteronomy 10:12-19

¹²And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Lord
your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your
heart and soul, ¹³keeping the Lord's commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today,
for your good. ¹⁴Mark, the heavens to their uttermost reaches belong to the Lord your God, the
earth and all that is on it! ¹⁵Yet it was to your fathers that the Lord was drawn in His love for
them, so that He chose you, their lineal descendants, from among all peoples—as is now the
case. ¹⁶Cut away, therefore, the thickening about your hearts and stiffen your necks no more.
¹⁷For the Lord your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the
awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, ¹⁸but upholds the cause of the
fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. —
¹⁹You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

7. Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹²Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. ¹⁵Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

שְׁמֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה | ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעֵשְׂתָּ יוֹם־שַׁבָּת
מְלֵאכְתָּךְ: וְיוֹם הַשַּׁבְּעִי שַׁבָּת | לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל־מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ
וְאִמְתְּךָ וְשׂוֹרְךָ וְחֲמֹרְךָ וְכָל־בְּהֵמַתְּךָ וְגַרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ כָּמוֹךָ:
וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי־עַבְדְּ הָיִיתָ | בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּצִיאֲךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּלָה עַל־כֵּן
צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת: (ס)

8. Baba Metzia 71a

Rav Yosef taught: The verse states: “If you lend money to any of My people, even to the poor person who is with you” (Exodus 22:24). The term “My people” teaches that if one of ‘my people,’ i.e., a Jew, and a gentile both come to borrow money from you, ‘my people’ take precedence. The term “the poor person” teaches that if a poor person and a rich person come to borrow money, the poor person takes precedence. And from the term: “Who is with you,” it is derived: If your poor person, meaning one of your relatives, and one of the poor of your city come to borrow money, your poor person takes precedence. If it is between one of the poor of your city and one of the poor of another city, the one of the poor of your city takes precedence.

איכא דמתני לה להא דרב הונא אהא דתני רב יוסף אם כסף תלוה את עמי את העני
עמד עמי ונכרי עמי קודם עמי ועשיר עמי קודם ענייך ועניי עירך ענייך קודמין עניי עירך
ועניי עיר אחרת עניי עירך קודמין

9. Sissela Bok, "From Part to Whole" in *For Love of Country* edited by Martha C. Nussbaum (2002) 42-3

...But here a new question arises: If both perspectives are important in education [i.e., the cosmopolitan and the particularistic], which one should be given priority, at least from the point of view of when it is first introduced? Or, to use the metaphor from the concentric circles, in which direction might children's learning about inner and outer circles and the respective allegiances best develop? Is it better for parents and teachers to begin at the outer edges and move inward, to move back and forth between the two, or to begin with the inner circles and move outwards?

Alexander Pope offers one answer, in "An Essay on Man":

**God loves from Whole to Parts: but human soul
Must rise from Individual to the Whole.**

Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre mov'd, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads,
Friend, parent, neighbor, first it will embrace,
His country next, and next all human race,
/.../

Pope's interpretation of how we learn to reach beyond the innermost circles is persuasive and worth taking into account in teaching. If children begin learning about the world "from part to whole," even as they are made familiar with the larger framework early on, they will have a basis from which to explore all they can learn about the world, and, in turn, ways of shifting back and forth between the concentric circles. They will then be better equipped to work out their stance with respect to interlocking identities, loyalties, and obligations, and to debate these with others. By contrast, children deprived of a culturally rooted education too often find it difficult to experience any allegiances whatsoever, whether to the world or to their community or family. Instead, they risk developing a debilitating sense of being exiled everywhere with responsibilities to none save themselves.

10. Theodore Herzl, "The Jewish State" (*Der Judenstadt*), 1896

We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted us. In vain are we loyal patriots, sometimes super-loyal; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens; in vain do we strive to enhance the fame of our native lands in the arts and sciences, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In our native lands where we have lived for centuries we are still decried as aliens, often by men whose ancestors had not yet come at a time when Jewish sighs had long been heard in the country...

Let me repeat once more my opening words: The Jews who will it shall achieve their State. We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and in our own homes peacefully die. The world will be liberated by our freedom, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt there for our own benefit will redound mightily and beneficially to the good of all mankind.