



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון  
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן

## Difficult Discussions in Tumultuous Times: Conversations with our Jewish Children

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Congregation Beth El Windsor

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1. Chovat HaTalmidim – Introduction	1
2. Joshua Ladon, <i>Five Jewish Commitments to Live By in Response to Evil and Hate</i> , (October 27, 2023)	2
3. Isaiah 62:1–3 – Public Advocacy	3
4. Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 75a – Sharing the Burden	4
5. Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 40b – Informed Action	4
6. Tosefta Gittin 3:11–12 – Building Bridges	4
7. Resources from the Hartman Institute	5

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As a lifelong Ramahnik, Rebecca pioneered the role of program director for the Ramah fellows program in Detroit for the National Ramah Commission, and spent many summers working with campers and staff at Camp Ramah in Canada. Raised on a sheep farm in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Rebecca is a proud product of the University of Michigan where she earned undergraduate degrees in education and Judaic studies as well as a master's degree in social work and a certificate in Jewish communal service.

Rebecca is married to Rabbi Aaron Starr, a graduate of Hartman's Rabbinic Leadership Initiative (RLI), and they are the proud parents of two sons.

**The Shalom Hartman Institute** is a leading center of Jewish thought and education, serving Israel and North America. Our mission is to strengthen Jewish peoplehood, identity, and pluralism; to enhance the Jewish and democratic character of Israel; and to ensure that Judaism is a compelling force for good in the 21st century.

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## 1. Chovat HaTalmidim – Introduction

שלמה המלך אמר במשלי (כ"ב, ו'): "חנוך לנער על פי דרכו גם כי יזקין לא יסור ממנה". זה הוא עיקר החנוך שלא בלבד בשעה שהנער נער, ויד אביו עודה תקיפה עליו ישמע לו ויעשה כמצותיו, רק גם כשיגדל והוא ברשותו, אף כי יזקין לא יסור ממנה. כי החנוך לא צווי לבד הוא, שמצוה את בנו או תלמידו עשה כך וכך, גם לא הרגל בלבד הוא, שמרגילו לעשות מעשים טובים, יותר גדול ויותר פועל מן הצווי ומן ההרגל הוא החנוך, ושני אלה הצווי וההרגל רק כלי תשמישו הם, שהחנוך מוכרח להשתמש בהם, לצוותו ולהרגילו, כדי לחנכו בדרך ד'.

King Solomon said in Proverbs (22, 6): "Teach the lad according to his way, so that also in his old age he will not turn from it." This is the core of education: that not only at the time the child is young and in the domain of his father that he will listen and do according to the commandments, rather also when he grows up and is in his own domain, even when he becomes elderly he will not turn from it. Because education is not only commands, that one should command his son or student "Do such and such," so too is it not just habit, that one accustoms his son or student to good deeds. Education is far, far beyond commands or habit, and these two things, commands and habit, are simply tools used in its implementation which the educator is forced to use, to command or to habituate, in order to educate on the path of the LORD.

Note: Chovat HaTalmidim (lit. 'Students' Obligation') is an ethical work and self-development guide for young students, authored by the Piaseczno rebbe. It is the only work that was published during his lifetime and has become a standard textbook in contemporary yeshivot. Warsaw 1928-1932.

**2. Joshua Ladon, *Five Jewish Commitments to Live By in Response to Evil and Hate*, (October 27, 2023)**

Even in the face of adversaries and even when we are in pain, we must also embrace, affirm, and live Judaism: its values, its practices, and its people.

**1. In times of peace and in times of war, Judaism is rooted in Torah, Israel, and the Jewish People.**

Torah reflects the moral aspirations and the collective creativity that the Jewish people have brought forth to this world in partnership with the Divine. The Jewish people are the family that I have inherited, the people with whom I get to make the Torah great. Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people, where the Jews have an awesome responsibility to create a public square that enacts Torah's moral aspirations. These are my three loves, and I want to be clear that in this case, love is not the same as like. There is Torah that punches me in the gut. There are Jews I find disgraceful. The State of Israel and in particular the military sometimes act in ways I consider immoral. Torah, the Jewish people, and Israel do not always get along, and in fact, they often disagree. But even in their disagreement, they represent what it means to bring the Divine into this world and manifest a thick Jewish existence.

**2. Love of Torah, Israel, and the Jewish People is an activity.**

We demonstrate love through our actions. We show up with meals when people are sick; we gladden the hearts of brides and grooms; we give blood when our people are bleeding. We create networks of care and support all the time so that when we need them, our muscles are limber and ready to go. When we support one another, our love overflows to all humanity, and we make manifest the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.

**3. The world can be made better.**

In the Talmud (bShabbat 31a), the rabbis list six questions they imagine we will be asked upon reaching heaven. One will be, "Did you anticipate redemption?" We must assume the world can change for the better, and we must act as though we can aid in that transformation. We inherit a world that requires us to work for the possibility of that renewal. For too many years, the Israeli-Palestinian reality has been a product of human inertia. We Jews must believe that our dignity is tied up with the dignity of our Palestinian neighbors, even in the face of evidence to the contrary, and we must act on that belief. In working to make the world better, we make manifest what our liturgy describes as God's daily renewal of creation.

**4. Jews are simultaneously powerful and vulnerable, and so we must act with responsibility.**

As I write this, Israel continues to be hit by a barrage of rockets sent by terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, the President of the United States has expressed full backing of Israel's efforts to defend itself. Jews can be hurt even when Israel possesses one of the strongest armies in the world, even when the Jewish state has nuclear capabilities. There is real evil in the world and some of it targets Jews. We should be able to lock our doors at night and keep intruders out. Sovereignty requires making difficult decisions that affect the lives of others and make it impossible to be morally pure. Nevertheless, we cannot not let our vulnerability drive the use of our power.

**5. We must refuse to equate Hamas with all Palestinians.**

I lived in Israel from 2003, when I was 22 years old, until 2011, when I was 30. For much of that time, I volunteered with an organization bringing Jews to the West Bank to learn from Palestinians about their experience. This was not a popular project during the Second Intifada or after it ended in 2005. I learned that the only way to break down division is to reject monolithic thinking about the "other." There are too many Jews I disagree with for me to believe that all Palestinians could possibly all think the same thing.

These five commitments are imperfect, even contradictory at times. Alone, they are each somewhat blasé, and together they can sound cacophonous. But this is our world. It requires context, nuance, and also commitment. We need these and our children need them too. They are our shared Jewish moral compass.

**3. Isaiah 62:1–3 – Public Advocacy**

א לְמַעַן צִיּוֹן לֹא אֶחְשָׁה, וּלְמַעַן יְרוּשָׁלַם לֹא אֶשְׁקוּט, עַד-יֵצֵא כְּנֹגַהּ צְדָקָה, וַיְשׁוּעַתָּהּ כָּל־פֶּיַד יִבְעָר.  
ב וְרָאוּ גוֹיִם צְדָקָה, וְכָל-מְלָכִים כְּבוֹדָהּ; וְקָרָא לָהּ שֵׁם חֲדָשׁ, אֲשֶׁר פִּי יְהוָה יִקְבְּנוּ.  
ג וְהָיִיתָ עֲטֹרַת תְּהַפְאֵרַת, בְּיַד-יְהוָה; וְצַנּוּף (וְצִנְיָף) מְלוּכָה, בְּכַף-אֶלְהֵיךָ.

For the sake of Zion I will not be silent, For the sake of Jerusalem I will not be still,  
Till its victory emerge resplendent And its triumph like a flaming torch.  
Nations shall see your victory,  
And every king your majesty;  
And you shall be called by a new name That GOD shall bestow.  
You shall be a glorious crown In the hand of GOD,  
And a royal diadem In the palm of your God.

#### 4. Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 75a – Sharing the Burden

(משלי יב, כה) דאגה בלב איש ישחנה רבי אמי ורבי אסי חד אמר ישחנה מדעתו וחד אמר ישחנה לאחרים

"If there is anxiety in one's mind, one should quash it [yashḥena]" (Proverbs 12:25). Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi dispute the verse's meaning. One said: a person should forcefully push it [yashḥena] out of their mind. And one said: It means a person should talk [yesihena] to others about their concerns.

#### 5. Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 40b – Informed Action

היה רבי טרפון וזקנים מסובין בעלית בית נתזה בלוד נשאלה שאילה זו בפניהם תלמוד גדול או מעשה גדול נענה רבי טרפון ואמר מעשה גדול נענה ר"ע ואמר תלמוד גדול נענו כולם ואמר תלמוד גדול שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה

Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were once reclining in the upper story of Nithza's house, in Lydda, when this question was raised before them: Is study greater, or practice? Rabbi Tarfon answered, saying: "Practice is greater." Rabbi Akiva answered saying: "Study is great, for it leads to practice." Then they all answered and said: "Study is greater, for it leads to action."

#### 6. Tosefta Gittin 3:11–12 – Building Bridges

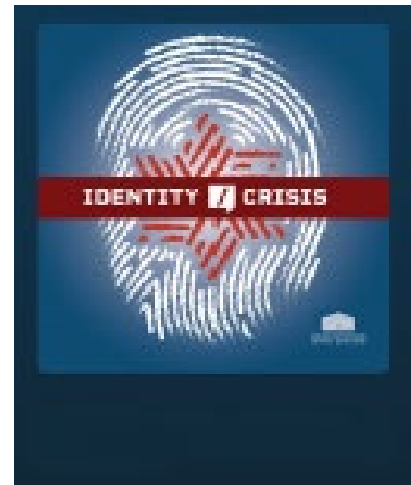
עיר שיש בה ישראל וגוים, הפרנסין גובין מישראל ומגוים, מפני דרכי שלום. מפרנסין עניי גוים עם עניי ישראל, מפני דרכי שלום. מספידין וקוברין מיתתי גוים, מפני דרכי שלום. מנחמין אבילי גוים, מפני דרכי שלום.

If a city contains both Jews and gentiles: the leaders collect from both Jews and gentiles for the sake of the ways of peace; they support poor gentiles alongside poor Jews for the sake of the ways of peace; They eulogize and bury gentiles who die for the sake of the ways of peace; they comfort gentile mourners for the sake of the ways of peace.

7. Resources from the Hartman Institute



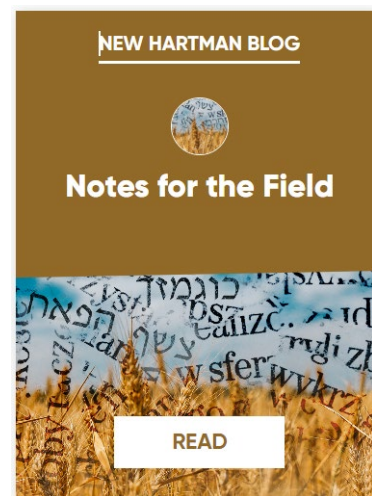
<https://www.hartman.org.il/israel-at-war-moral-red-lines/>



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<https://www.hartman.org.il/program/notes-for-the-field/>

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