



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן



TALKING ABOUT ISRAEL: Missteps and Opportunities

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He is married to Adina and is the father of three children and three grandchildren.



**SHALOM HARTMAN מכון
INSTITUTE הרטמן שלום**

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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Table of Contents

1.	Benjamin Netanyahu, speech to the UN General Assembly delivered September 19, 2017, excerpt	1
2.	Benjamin Netanyahu, address to AIPAC Policy Conference, March 6, 2018, excerpt	2
3.	Maimonides, <i>Mishneh Torah</i> , Hilkhhot Deot 6:6–7	2
4.	Sharon Brous, “Op-Ed: My daughter loves the miracle of Israel. It was time for her to see the other side,” <i>Los Angeles Times</i> , August 26, 2018	3
5.	Photo, IKAR Los Angeles Facebook page, July 20, 2018	3
6.	Daniel Gordis, “Israel is neither Bibi nor the United States,” <i>The Times of Israel</i> , August 21, 2019	4
7.	Daniel Gordis, “When balance becomes betrayal,” <i>The Times of Israel</i> , November 18, 2012, excerpt	4
8.	Isaiah 2:1–4	5

1. Benjamin Netanyahu, speech to the UN General Assembly delivered September 19, 2017, excerpt

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahus-full-remarks-at-un-general-assembly/>

I am hopeful about what Israel can accomplish because I’ve seen what Israel has accomplished. In 1948, the year of Israel’s independence, our population was 800,000. Our main export was oranges. People said then we were too small, too weak, too isolated, too demographically outnumbered to survive, let alone thrive. The skeptics were wrong about Israel then; the skeptics are wrong about Israel now.

Israel’s population has grown tenfold, our economy fortyfold. Today our biggest export is technology – Israeli technology, which powers the world’s computers, cellphones, cars and so much more...

The future belongs to those who innovate and this is why the future belongs to countries like Israel. Israel wants to be your partner in seizing that future, so I call on all of you: Cooperate with Israel, embrace Israel, dream with Israel. Dream of the future that we can build together, a future of breathtaking progress, a future of security, prosperity and peace, a future of hope for all humanity, a future where even at the UN, even in this hall, Israel will finally, inevitably, take its rightful place among the nations.

2. Benjamin Netanyahu, address to AIPAC Policy Conference, March 6, 2018, excerpt

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-netanyahus-2018-address-to-aipac/>

So today I want to ask you. You remember that great Clint Eastwood movie, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly? Well, I want to talk about the good, the bad and beautiful.

The good are all the good things that we are doing in Israel that are helping make the world a better place. The bad are all the bad things that malevolent forces are trying to do to Israel and to the world – and specifically, I'm talking about Iran.

And the beautiful – well, that I'll leave to the last.

So first the good news: Israel has never been stronger militarily. Tremendously strong... the good news doesn't stop merely with Israel's strong military. It continues with Israel's strong economy...

And I was just recently in India... And one farmer after the other gets up and says: Because of Israeli technology, I've increased my crop yields and my income three times, four times, five times. Israel is changing the world in India, in Asia, in Africa, in Latin America, everywhere. These are the old industries. Now, there are new industries. Israel is literally, how can I say this: Israel is literally driving the world...

And one last industry – there are many more – but one more that you're all familiar with... cybersecurity... We're one-tenth of one percent of the world's population, and we get a whopping 20% of global, private investment in cyber. We're punching 200 times above our weight. Not two times, not ten times, not a hundred times – 200 times above our weight. That's very strong...

Many countries are coming to Israel because they want to share with us these benefits. And that creates the third great change, which is a flourishing of Israel's diplomatic relations around the world...

Pretty soon, the countries that don't have relations with us, they're going to be isolated. There are those who talk about boycotting Israel? We'll boycott them.

3. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Deot 6:6–7

6 If one man commit a sin against another man, the one sinned against shall not remain in silent hate against the sinner, as it is said of the wicked: "And Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon" (II Samuel 13.22); but, on the contrary, it is obligatory upon him to make known to him and say unto him: "Why have you done to me thus and such, and wherefore have you sinned against me in that particular matter?"; for, it is said: "And you shall indeed rebuke your neighbor" (Lev. 19.17). And, if the sinner did repent and begged to be forgiven by him, he must forgive him; and in doing so he should not be cruel, for it is said: "And Abraham prayed to God" (Gen. 20.17).

7 He who beholds his fellow stooping to sin or following an unrighteous path, is obliged to return him toward the good, and to let him know that he is actually sinning against himself in pursuing wicked deeds for, it is said: "And you shall indeed rebuke your neighbor" (Lev. 19.17). He who rebukes his fellow, whether it be regarding a sin committed between man and man, or whether it be regarding matters between man and God, it is essential that the rebuke be administered only between them both; and he shall speak to him calmly, employing soft language, telling him that he does not speak of it to him, save for his own good, to bring him to a life in the world to come. If he receive it attentively from him, it is well; if not, he should rebuke him a second, even a third time. So is the constant duty of a man to continue to rebuke his fellow, even until the sinner strike him, and say unto him: "I will not listen". He in whose power it is to prevent sin and does not take the means to prevent it, he himself is ultimately overtaken by their sin, since it was possible for him to prevent them.

4. Sharon Brous, "Op-Ed: My daughter loves the miracle of Israel. It was time for her to see the other side," *Los Angeles Times*, August 26, 2018

As an American rabbi, I can't ignore the message the Israeli government is sending to diaspora Jews: Stick to the playbook. Send Israel your money, your youth, your tourists and your unquestioning loyalty. Don't talk about the occupation (now in its 51st year) or the millions of Palestinians denied equal protection, freedom of movement, the right to vote for the government that dictates their daily lives. Don't visit Bethlehem or Ramallah, where you might hear a Palestinian narrative. Pay no attention to Breaking the Silence, Parents Circle or any other group where Israelis and Palestinians speak frankly about the challenges and the possibilities for a shared future. And don't dare judge our willingness to cozy up to the scandal-ridden American president you overwhelmingly rejected. Stick to Fantasy Israel, b'vakasha.

5. Photo, IKAR Los Angeles Facebook page, July 20, 2018

<https://www.facebook.com/IKARLosAngeles/photos/rabbi-sharon-brous-you-love-israel-so-fight-for-it-fight-for-democracy-and-civil/10155327547756504/>



6. Daniel Gordis, “Israel is neither Bibi nor the United States,” *The Times of Israel*, August 21, 2019

We have lost sight of purpose, of our *raison d'être*. We look at Israel through a narrow political lens, evaluating it by the same standard to which we hold America — and that is now destroying the relationship between us. In the days after Congress-gate, I watched with interest the fury that erupted on social media... an “independent Jewish educator, Talmud addict, halakhah geek” [self-definition] wrote “I’m now done with Israel” and “I see nothing in the Israel of today that represents me.”

Israel’s prime minister made a terrible, foolish and short-sighted decision last week. But, I asked myself, a person who so loves Jewish learning and is so deeply committed to the Jewish people “sees nothing in the Israel of today”? ... The revitalization of the Jewish people’s language? The largest and still fastest-growing Jewish community in the world? The explosion of Jewish literary and cultural creativity? The emergence of new religious modes of expression that are in many cases linking religious and secular, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, in ways unmatched anywhere in the world? The fact that the Jewish people have founded a state in which every citizen, regardless of ethnicity, has full access to health care? None of this speaks to us, even when we’re angry? Israel’s extraordinary accomplishments vanish the moment we’re embarrassed? ...

Zionism, and then Israel, set out to do one thing: to save the Jewish people. With all its warts and all its flaws, with all the humiliating mistakes its leaders too often make, Israel has done just that. Could we perhaps first acknowledge that, so that even when we are appalled, we remain deeply committed, even reverent, of all that Zionism has wrought? We need to learn to do that, for the alternative is a rupture in our people from which we might never recover.

7. Daniel Gordis, “When balance becomes betrayal,” *The Times of Israel*, November 18, 2012, excerpt

It’s become clear that this universalized Judaism has rendered not only platitudinous Jews, but something worse. It bequeaths us a new Jew utterly incapable of feeling loyalty. The need for balance is so pervasive that even an expression of gut-level love for Israelis more than for their enemies is impossible. Balance has now bequeathed betrayal...

[Rabbi Sharon Brous wrote,] “We are deeply entrenched in our narratives of good and evil, victim and perpetrator — and we are scared.”

Yes, we are all deeply entrenched in our narratives of good and evil. But why does Rabbi Brous not feel that it’s her place as a rabbi to tell her community (I know that I sound like a dinosaur to her community in saying this) which side is good and which side is evil?

Of course Israel is far from perfect, and yes, much of life in Gaza is miserable. Yet why can we not actually say what we know to be true?...

The “we’re all entrenched in our narratives of good and evil” worldview leaves no space for calling evil what it is. Why can we not simply say that at this moment, Israel’s enemies are evil? That they’re wrong? Why cannot someone as insightful and soulful as Rabbi Brous just say, without obfuscation, that whatever fault one finds with Israel, it is the Jewish State that for seventy years has sued for peace and the Arabs/Palestinians who have always refused. Does anyone bother pointing out to her community that whatever you think of Israel’s presence on the West Bank (or Judea/Samaria), that when Israel left Gaza, the Palestinians elected Hamas, and that when Mubarak fell, the Egyptians elected the Muslim Brotherhood? Why are these obvious facts utterly unmentionable?...

If people as wise and as deeply Jewishly knowledgeable as Rabbi Brous (whom I told that this response was forthcoming) cannot come out and say that at least at this moment, we care about Israel more than we care about its enemies because we care about the future of the Jews more than almost anything else in the world, then her Jewish world and mine simply no longer inhabit overlapping universes.

8. Isaiah 2:1–4

1 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz prophesied concerning Judah and Jerusalem. **2** In the days to come, The Mount of the Lord’s House Shall stand firm above the mountains And tower above the hills; And all the nations Shall gaze on it with joy. **3** And the many peoples shall go and 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. **4** Thus He will judge among the nations And arbitrate for the many peoples, 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.