



SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE מכון
OF NORTH AMERICA שלום הרטמן



TEMPLE
EMANUEL

THE MORAL, THE POLITICAL AND THE PARTISAN: JEWISH COMMUNITY AND JEWISH VALUES IN AN ERA OF POLARIZATION

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Dr. Yehuda Kurtzer is the President of the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America and a leading thinker and author on the meaning of Israel to American Jews, the value of the Jewish past to the Jewish present, and questions of leadership and change in American Jewish life.

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He lives in New York with his wife Stephanie Ives and their three children.

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 and ensure that Judaism is a compelling force for good in the 21st century.

Our work focuses on:

- **Judaism and Modernity:** Developing compelling Jewish ideas capable of competing in the modern marketplace of identities and thought
- **Religious Pluralism:** Building a Jewish people and a State of Israel that respect and celebrate diversity
- **Jewish and Democratic Israel:** Ensuring Israel's foundations as the democratic homeland of the Jewish people, committed to equal rights and religious freedom for all
- **Jewish Peoplehood:** Forming a strong mutual commitment between world Jewry and Israelis as equal partners in the future of Jewish life
- **Judaism and the World:** Serving as a gateway for leaders of other faiths to engage with Judaism and Israel and build new foundations of understanding and cooperation

Table of Contents

1. Esther 4	1
2. Esther 9:1-5	3
3. Ahad Ha'am, "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem" (1897)	3
4. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein on the Obligation to Vote	5
5. Pirkei Avot 4:13-14	5
6. Song of Songs Rabbah 2:5 (3)	5

1. Esther 4

א ומרדכי, ידע את-כל-אשר נעשה, ויקרע מרדכי את-בגדיו, וילבש שק ואפר; ויצא בתוך העיר, ויזעק זעקה גדולה ומרה. ב ויבוא, עד לפני שער-המלך: כי אין לבוא אל-שער המלך, בלבוש שק. ג ובכל-מדינה ומדינה, מקום אשר דבר-המלך ודתו מגיע--אבל גדול ליהודים, וצום ובכי ומספד; שק ואפר, יצע לרבים. ד ותבואינה (ותבואנה) נערות אסתר וסריסה, ויגידו לה, ותתחלחל המלכה, מאד; ותשלח בגדים להלביש את-מרדכי, ולהסיר שקו מעליו--ולא קבל. ה ותקרא אסתר להתך מסריסי המלך, אשר העמיד לפניה, ותצוהו, על-מרדכי--לדעת מה-זה, ועל-מה-זה. ו ויצא התך, אל-מרדכי--אל-רחוב העיר, אשר לפני שער-המלך. ז ויגד-לו מרדכי, את כל-אשר קרהו; ואת פרשת הכסף, אשר אמר המן לשקול על-גנזי המלך ביהודיים (ביהודים)--לאבדם. ח ואת-פתשגן כתב-הדת אשר-נתן בשושן להשמידם, נתן לו--להראות את-אסתר, ולהגיד לה; ולצוות עליה, לבוא אל-המלך להתחנן-לו ולבקש מלפניו--על-עמה. ט ויבוא, התך; ויגד לאסתר, את דברי מרדכי. י ותאמר אסתר להתך, ותצוהו אל-מרדכי. יא כל-עבדי המלך ועם-מדינות המלך ידעים, אשר כל-איש ואשה אשר יבוא-אל-המלך אל-החצר הפנימית אשר לא-יקרא אחת דתו להמית, לבד מאשר יושיט-לו המלך את-שרביט הזהב, וחי; ואני, לא נקראתי לבוא אל-המלך--זה, שלוש יום. יב ויגידו למרדכי, את דברי אסתר. יג ויאמר מרדכי, להשיב אל-אסתר: אל-תדמי בנפשך, להמלט בית-המלך מכל-היהודים. יד כי אם-החפש תחרישי, בעת הזאת--רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר, ואת ובית-אביך תאבדו; ומי יודע--אם-לעת כזאת, הגעת למלכות. טו ותאמר אסתר, להשיב אל-מרדכי. טז לך פנוס את-כל-היהודים הנמצאים בשושן, וצומו עלי ואל-תאכלו ואל-תשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום--גם-אני ונערתי, אצום כן; ובכן אבוא אל-המלך, אשר לא-כדת, וכאשר אבדתי, אבדתי. יז ויעבר, מרדכי; ויעש, ככל אשר-צויתה עליו אסתר.

(1) When Mordecai learned all that had happened, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went through the city, crying out loudly and bitterly, (2) until he came in front of the palace gate; for one could not enter the palace gate wearing sackcloth.— (3) Also, in every province that the king’s command and decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and everybody lay in sackcloth and ashes.— (4) When Esther’s maidens and eunuchs came and informed her, the queen was greatly agitated. She sent clothing for Mordecai to wear, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he refused. (5) Thereupon Esther summoned Hathach, one of the eunuchs whom the king had appointed to serve her, and sent him to Mordecai to learn the why and wherefore of it all. (6) Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square in front of the palace gate; (7) and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and all about the money that Haman had offered to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. (8) He also gave him the written text of the law that had been proclaimed in Shushan for their destruction. [He bade him] show it to Esther and inform her, and charge her to go to the king and to appeal to him and to plead with him for her people. (9) When Hathach came and delivered Mordecai’s message to Esther, (10) Esther told Hathach to take back to Mordecai the following reply: (11) “All the king’s courtiers and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any person, man or woman, enters the king’s presence in the inner court without having been summoned, there is but one law for him—that he be put to death. Only if the king extends the golden scepter to him may he live. Now I have not been summoned to visit the king for the last thirty days.” (12) When Mordecai was told what Esther had said, (13) Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther: “Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king’s palace. (14) On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis.” (15) Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordecai: (16) “Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast in my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!” (17) So Mordecai went about [the city] and did just as Esther had commanded him.

2. Esther 9:1-5

א ובשָׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ הוּא-חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר, בְּשָׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ, אֲשֶׁר הִגִּיעַ דְּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ, לְהַעֲשׂוֹת: בַּיּוֹם, אֲשֶׁר שָׁבְרוּ אֲיֵבֵי הַיְהוּדִים לְשִׁלוֹט בָּהֶם, וְנִהְפְּזוּ הוּא, אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלְטוּ הַיְהוּדִים הַמָּחָה בְּשָׁנְאֵיהֶם.
ב נִקְהְלוּ הַיְהוּדִים בְּעָרֵיהֶם, בְּכָל-מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֹׁרוֹשׁ, לְשַׁלַּח יָד, בְּמִבְקָשֵׁי רַעְתָּם; וְאִישׁ לֹא-עָמַד לִפְנֵיהֶם, כִּי-נִפְל פְּחָדָם עַל-כָּל-הָעַמִּים.
ג וְכָל-שָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת וְהָאֲחֻשְׁדָּרָפָנִים וְהַפְּחוֹת, וְעָשִׂי הַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר לְמֶלֶךְ--מְנַשְׂאִים, אֶת-הַיְהוּדִים: כִּי-נִפְל פְּחָד-מֶרְדֵּכִי, עֲלֵיהֶם.
ד כִּי-גָדוֹל מֶרְדֵּכִי בְּבֵית הַמֶּלֶךְ, וְשָׁמְעוּ הוֹלְךְ בְּכָל-הַמְּדִינֹת: כִּי-הָאִישׁ מֶרְדֵּכִי, הוֹלְךְ וְגָדוֹל.
ה וַיִּכּוּ הַיְהוּדִים בְּכָל-אֲיֵבֵיהֶם, מִכַּת-חֶרֶב וְהָרָג וְאֲבָדוֹן; וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְּשָׁנְאֵיהֶם, כְּרָצוֹנָם.

And so, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—that is, the month of Adar—when the king’s command and decree were to be executed, the very day on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to get them in their power, the opposite happened, and the Jews got their enemies in their power.

Throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the Jews mustered in their cities to attack those who sought their hurt; and no one could withstand them, for the fear of them had fallen upon all the peoples.

Indeed, all the officials of the provinces—the satraps, the governors, and the king’s stewards—showed deference to the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them.

For Mordecai was now powerful in the royal palace, and his fame was spreading through all the provinces; the man Mordecai was growing ever more powerful.

So the Jews struck at their enemies with the sword, slaying and destroying; they wreaked their will upon their enemies.

3. Ahad Ha’am, “The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem” (1897)

It is not only Jews who have come out of the Ghetto: Judaism has come out, too. For Jews the exodus is confined to certain countries, and is due to toleration; but Judaism has come out (or is coming out) of its own accord wherever it has come into contact with modern culture. This contact with modern culture overturns the defenses of Judaism from within, so that Judaism can no longer remain isolated and live a life apart. The spirit of our people strives for development: it wants to absorb those elements of general culture which reach it from outside, to digest them and to make them a part of itself, as it has done before at different periods of its history. But the conditions of its life in exile are not suitable. In our time culture wears in each country the garb of the national spirit, and the stranger who would woo her must sink his individuality and become absorbed in the dominant spirit. For this reason, Judaism in exile cannot develop its individuality in its own way. When it leaves the Ghetto walls it is in danger of losing its essential being or -- at best -- its national unity: it is in danger of being split up into as many kinds of Judaism, each with a different character and life, as there are countries of the Jewish dispersion...

The secret of our people's persistence is -- as I have tried to show elsewhere -- that at a very early period the Prophets taught it to respect only spiritual power, and not to worship material power. For this reason, the clash with enemies stronger than itself never brought the Jewish nation, as it did the other nations of antiquity, to the point of self-effacement. So long as we are faithful to this principle, our existence has a secure basis: for in spiritual power we are not inferior to other nations, and we have no reason to efface ourselves. But a political ideal which does not rest on the national culture is apt to seduce us from our loyalty to spiritual greatness, and to beget in us a tendency to find the path of glory in the attainment of material power and political dominion, thus breaking the thread that unites us with the past, and undermining our historical basis. Needless to say, if the political ideal is not attained, it will have disastrous consequences, because we shall have lost the old basis without finding a new one. But even if it is attained under present conditions, when we are a scattered people not only in the physical but also in the spiritual sense -- even then Judaism will be in great danger. Almost all our great men, those, that is, whose education and social position fit them to be at the head of a Jewish State, are spiritually far removed from Judaism, and have no true conception of its nature and its value. Such men, however loyal to their State and devoted to its interests, will necessarily regard those interests as bound up with the foreign culture which they themselves have imbibed and they will endeavour, by moral persuasion or even by force, to implant that culture in the Jewish State, so that in the end the Jewish State will be a State of Germans or Frenchmen of the Jewish race. We have even now a small example of this process in Palestine. And history teaches us that in the days of the Herodian house Palestine was indeed a Jewish State, but the national culture was despised and persecuted, and the ruling house did everything in its power to implant Roman culture in the country, and frittered away the national resources in the building of heathen temples and amphitheatres and so forth.

Such a Jewish State would spell death and utter degradation for our people. We should never achieve sufficient political power to deserve respect, while we should miss the living moral force within. The puny State, being "tossed about like a ball between its powerful neighbours, and maintaining its existence only by diplomatic shifts and continual truckling to the favoured of fortune," would not be able to give us a feeling of national glory; and the national culture, in which we might have sought and found our glory, would not have been implanted in our State and would not be the principle of its life. So we should really be then -- much more than we are now -- "a small and insignificant nation," enslaved in spirit to "the favoured of fortune," turning an envious and covetous eye on the armed force of our "powerful neighbours" and our existence as a sovereign State would not add a glorious chapter to our national history. Were it not better for "an ancient people which was once a beacon to the world" to disappear than to end by reaching such a goal as this?

4. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein on the Obligation to Vote

On reaching the shores of the United States, Jews found a safe haven. The rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights have allowed us the freedom to practice our religion without interference and to live in this republic in safety.

A fundamental principle of Judaism is hakaras hatov -- recognizing benefits afforded us and giving expression to our appreciation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each Jewish citizen to participate in the democratic system which safeguards the freedoms we enjoy. The most fundamental responsibility incumbent on each individual is to register and to vote.

Therefore, I urge all members of the Jewish community to fulfill their obligations by registering as soon as possible, and by voting. By this, we can express our appreciation and contribute to the continued security of our community.

5. Pirkei Avot 4:13-14

Rabbi Yehuda says: Be careful in study, for an error in study is considered an intentional transgression. Rabbi Shimon says: There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood and the crown of monarchy - but the crown of a good name outweighs them all.

Rabbi Nehorai says: Exile yourself to a place of Torah, and do not say that it will follow after you, that your colleagues will make it yours. Do not rely on your understanding.

6. Song of Songs Rabbah 2:5 (3)

בשלפי השמד נתכנסו רבותינו לאושא, ואלו הן: רבי יהודה ורבי נחמיה, רבי מאיר ורבי יוסי, ורבי שמעון בן יוחאי ורבי אליעזר בנו של רבי יוסי הגלילי ורבי אליעזר בן יעקב. שלחו אצל זקני הגליל ואמרו: כל מי שהוא למד יבוא וילמד, וכל מי שאינו למד יבוא וילמוד. נתכנסו ולמדו ועשו כל צרכיהון

At the end of the persecution our rabbis entered to Usha, and these were they: Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nehemia, Rabbi Meir, and Rabbi Yosi, and Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, and Rabbi Eliezer, sons of Yosi HaGalili, and Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov. They sent to the house of the Elders of the Galilee and said, "All who have already taught, let them come and teach, and all who have not yet studied, let them come and study. They entered and learned and met all their needs.

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Shabbat – November 17

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Shabbat Sermon, 9:30 am

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Sunday – November 18

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