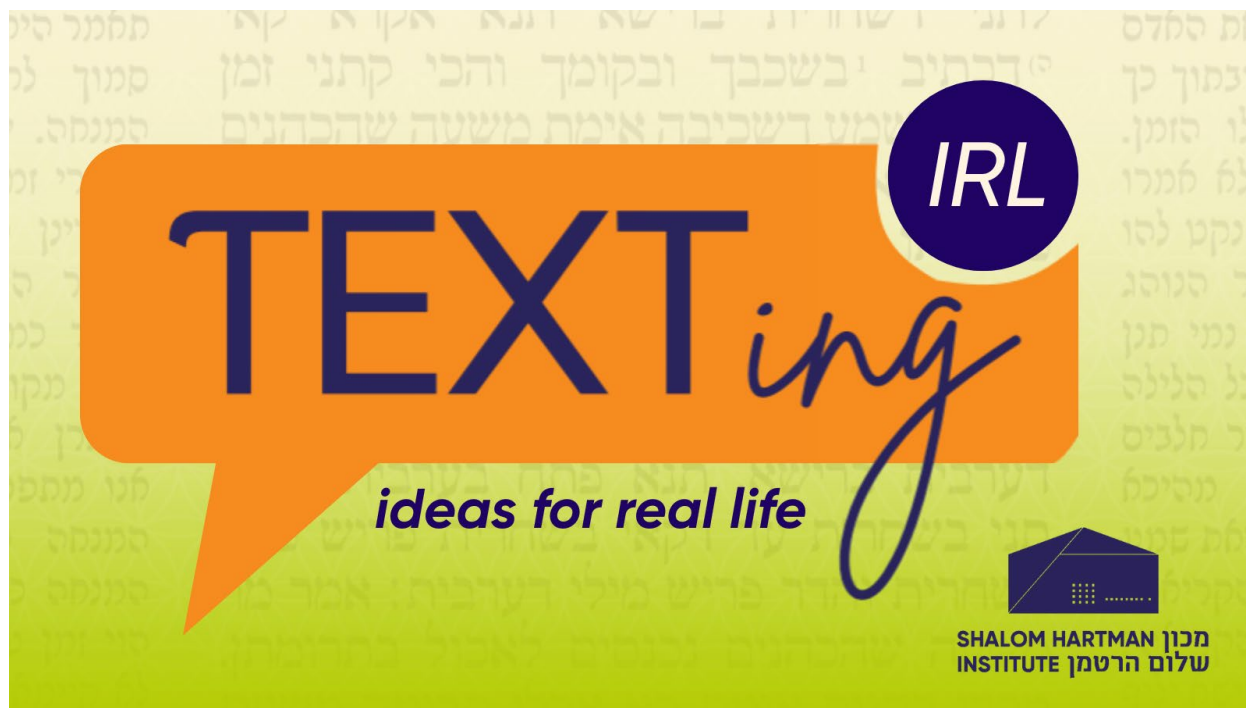




Guilt by Identification: Jewish Pride in a Hostile Environment

Elana Stein Hain & Daniel Held

July 25, 2025

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 1. | Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 7a-b | 1 |
| 2. | Yitz Greenberg, <i>The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays</i> , 1988, p. 18 | 2 |

Faced with rising antisemitism and anti-Zionism, many Jews are confronting difficult choices when they find themselves outside of Jewish spaces: conceal their identity, or risk harassment, and in some cases, violence.

In this episode, **Elana Stein Hain** and **Daniel Held**, Chief Program Officer at UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, turn to the Talmud to grapple with Jewish identity and Jewish pride in a hostile environment. How can we engage with moral complexity as proud Jews, and how do we model this for our children?

We are grateful to the Walder Charitable Fund and Micah Philanthropies for their generous support of TEXTing.

*This source sheet is part of the **July 25, 2025** episode of the podcast **TEXTing IRL - Ideas for Real Life** with **Elana Stein Hain**, which explores how classic and modern Jewish texts can help us wrestle with the big dilemmas of our time.*

Sitting down with guests who are accomplished practitioners in their fields, Elana explores how Jewish wisdom can guide us to act with integrity in the face of complex questions about allyship, gratitude toward flawed leaders, and navigating political relationships.

Elana Stein Hain is the Rosh Beit Midrash and a senior research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, where she serves as lead faculty and consults on the content of lay and professional programs.

A widely well-regarded thinker and teacher, Elana is passionate about bringing rabbinic thought into conversation with contemporary life. To this end, she teaches [Talmud from the Balcony](#), an occasional learning seminar exposing the big ideas, questions, and issues motivating rabbinic discussions. Elana is the author of [Circumventing the Law: Rabbinic Perspectives on Legal Loopholes and Integrity](#) (Penn Press, 2024) which uses loopholes as a lens for understanding rabbinic views on law and ethics.

She earned her doctorate in Religion at Columbia University and is an alumna of the Yeshiva University Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies (GPATS) as well as the Consortium in Jewish Studies and Legal Theory Graduate Fellowship at Cardozo School of Law. She also served for eight years as a clergy member on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, at both Lincoln Square Synagogue and the Jewish Center, has taught at the Wagner School at NYU, and sits on the board of Sefaria: A Living Library of Jewish Texts.

Daniel Held is the Chief Program Officer at UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, responsible for the organization's strategy to strengthen the vibrancy and vitality of Jewish Toronto.

Daniel previously served as the Executive Director of UJA's Julia and Henry Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Education, overseeing UJA's work in Jewish education and engagement. A passionate educator, Daniel was a teacher and educator in a wide range of settings. Daniel holds a doctorate in Jewish education and is an alumnus of the Wexner Fellow/Davidson Scholar Program and the Mandel Executive Leadership Institute.

The Shalom Hartman Institute is a leading research and educational center serving Israel and world Jewry. We work to enrich the moral and spiritual life of Israel and the Jewish people, deepen the commitment to pluralism and Israel's Jewish and democratic character, and rebuild the covenant between Israel and the Jewish world. Through our community of outstanding scholars and educators, the Institute develops innovative responses to the challenges of our time, cultivates a new generation of leaders and change agents, and builds transformational educational projects that help inspire a better Judaism and a better Israel for the 21st century.

Shalom Hartman Institute of North America
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1800
New York, NY 10115
212-268-0300
info@shalomhartman.org | www.shalomhartman.org

1. Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 7a-b

וְאָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינָא בַּר אִידִי: לָמָּה נִמְשָׁלוּ דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה לַמַּיִם, דְּכֹתִיב: "הוּא כֹל צָמָא לְכוּ לַמַּיִם", לוֹמַר לָךְ: מָה מַיִם מְנִיחִין מְקוֹם גְּבוּהָ וְהוֹלְכִין לְמְקוֹם נָמוּד, אַף דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה אֵין מִתְקַיְימִין אֲלָא בְּמִי שֶׁדַּעְתּוֹ שְׁפֵלָה.

And Rabbi Hanina bar Idi said: Why are matters of Torah likened to water, as it is written: "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come for water" (Isaiah 55:1)? This verse comes to tell you: Just as water leaves a high place and flows to a low place, so too, Torah matters are retained only by one whose spirit is lowly, i.e., a humble person.

וְאָמַר רַבִּי אוֹשְׁעָא: לָמָּה נִמְשָׁלוּ דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה לְשִׁלְשָׁה מִשְׁקִין הֶלְלוּ: בְּמַיִם, וּבַיִין, וּבַחֶלֶב. דְּכֹתִיב: "הוּא כֹל צָמָא לְכוּ לַמַּיִם", וְכֹתִיב: "לְכוּ שִׁבְרוּ וְאָכְלוּ וּלְכוּ שִׁבְרוּ בְּלוּא כֶסֶף וּבְלוּא מַחִיר יַיִן וְחֶלֶב", לוֹמַר לָךְ: מָה שְׁלִשָּׁה מִשְׁקִין הֶלְלוּ אֵין מִתְקַיְימִין אֲלָא בְּפָחוּת שְׁבַעֲכֵלִים — אַף דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה אֵין מִתְקַיְימִין אֲלָא בְּמִי שֶׁדַּעְתּוֹ שְׁפֵלָה.

And Rabbi Oshaya said: Why are matters of Torah likened to these three liquids: To water, wine and milk? As it is written with regard to water: "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come for water," and it is written in the same verse: "Come, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." This verse comes to tell you: Just as these three liquids can be retained only in the least of vessels, e.g., clay pots, but not vessels of silver and gold, as they will spoil, so too, matters of Torah are retained only by one whose spirit is lowly.

כְּדַאמְרָה לִיה בְּרַתִּיה דְּקִיסָר לְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן חֲנַנְיָה: אֵי חֲכָמָה מְפּוֹאֶרָה בְּכָלִי מְכוּעָר! אָמַר לָהּ: אֲבִידָךְ רַמִּי חֲמָרָא בְּמִנִּי דְּפַחְרָא? אָמְרָה לִיה: אֲלָא בְּמַאי נִירַמִּי? אָמַר לָהּ: אַתּוֹן דְּחִשְׁבִּיתוּ, רְמוֹ בְּמַאי דְּהִבָּא וְכִסְפָּא.

The Gemara cites a related incident: This is as the daughter of the Roman emperor said to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya, who was an ugly man: Woe to glorious wisdom such as yours, which is contained in an ugly vessel. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya said to her, in a seemingly unrelated response: Does your father keep his wine in simple clay vessels? The emperor's daughter said to him: Rather, in what, then, should he keep it? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya said to her: You, who are so important, should put it in vessels of gold and silver.

אֲזָלָה וְאָמְרָה לִיה לְאַבוּהָ רַמִּיָּיה לְחֲמָרָא בְּמִנִּי דְּהִבָּא וְכִסְפָּא, וּתְקִיף. אַתּוֹ וְאָמְרוּ לִיה: אָמַר לָהּ לְבְרַתִּיה: מַאֵן אָמַר לָךְ הָכִי? אָמְרָה לִיה: רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן חֲנַנְיָה. קָרִיוְהוּ. אָמַר לִיה: אֲמַאי אָמַרְתְּ לָהּ הָכִי? אָמַר לִיה: כִּי הִכִּי דַאמְרָה לִי, אָמַרִי לָהּ. וְהָא אִיכָּא שְׁפִירִי דְּגַמְיָרִי!

The emperor's daughter went and said this to her father. He put the wine in vessels of gold and silver and it turned sour. When his advisors came and told the emperor that the wine had turned sour, he said to his daughter: Who told you to do this? His daughter responded: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Ḥanania. The emperor summoned him and said to him: Why did you say this to her? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Ḥanania said to him: Just as she said to me, so I said to her, to demonstrate to her that fine material is best preserved in the least of vessels. The emperor said to him: But there are handsome people who are learned.

אי הוּוּ סָנוּ — טָפִי הוּוּ גְמִירִי. דָּבָר אַחֵר: מָה שְׁלֹשָׁה מְשָׁקִין הִלְלוּ אֵין נִפְסָלִין אֶלָּא בְּהִיסָח הַדַּעַת — אִף דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה אֵין מְשַׁתְּכָחִין אֶלָּא בְּהִיסָח הַדַּעַת.

Rabbi Yehoshua replied: Had they been ugly, they would have been even more learned. Alternatively, the Torah is likened to water, wine, and milk because just as these three liquids are spoiled only by diversion of attention, so too, are Torah matters forgotten only through diversion of attention. If water, wine and milk are guarded, they will not spoil or have dirty objects fall into them.

2. Yitz Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*, 1988, p. 18

The Jewish religion is founded on the divine assurance and human belief that the world *will* be perfected.