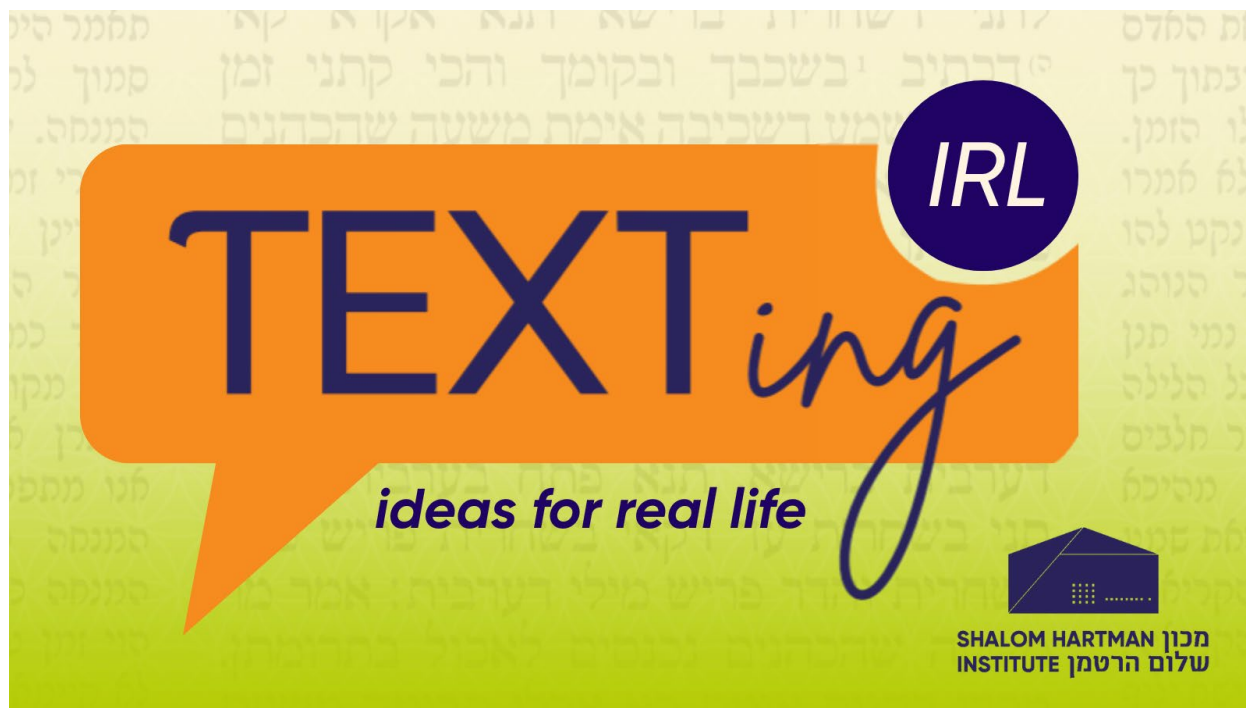




Can You Hear My Story?

Elana Stein Hain & Yoni Appelbaum

October 13, 2025

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Two years after October 7, Jews around the world mark Simchat Torah, finishing and beginning again the reading of the Torah, and thinking about our stories, both ancient and present. How do we tell our stories in a world and to a world that doesn't seem to want to hear them? On this episode of TEXTing IRL, **Elana Stein Hain** and **Yoni Appelbaum**, deputy executive editor at *The Atlantic*, study the writings of Rav Soloveitchik, uncovering how the ability to be heard when telling one's story makes one free, and how listening with empathy and humility allows one to tell the truest and most compelling stories.

*This source sheet is part of the **October 13, 2025** episode of the podcast **TEXTing IRL - Ideas for Real Life**. Host **Elana Stein Hain** sits down with guests who are accomplished practitioners in their fields to explore how classic and modern Jewish texts can help us wrestle with and act with integrity in the face of the big dilemmas of our time.*

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 hosts [TEXTing IRL](#), a bi-weekly podcast that considers issues relevant to Jewish life through the lens of classical and modern Torah texts; she also 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.

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1. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah," *Tradition* 17, no. 2 (1978), pp. 55–56

<https://traditiononline.org/redemption-prayer-talmud-torah/>

What is redemption? Redemption involves a movement by an individual or a community from the periphery of history to its center. . . . A history-making people is one that leads a speaking, story-telling, communing free existence. . . . Free man who is eager to tell his story, is always surrounded by an audience willing to listen to his story. The slave has neither a story nor a curious audience.

2. Exodus (Shemot) 4:10

...I am not a man of words. . .

...לא איש דְּבָרִים אֲנֹכִי...

3. Exodus (Shemot) 6:12

...how will Pharaoh hear me?

I am of uncircumcised lips.

...וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמָעֵנִי פֶרְעָה

וְאֲנִי עֵרֶל שְׁפָתַיִם :

4. Exodus (Shemot) 20:1

God spoke all these words, saying:

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר :

5. Zohar, *Raya Mehemana*, Parshat Vaera, cited in Soloveitchik, p. 58

תָּא חֲזִי, כְּתִיב (שמות ו': י"ב) הוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמָעֵנִי פֶרְעָה וְאֲנִי עֵרֶל שְׁפָתַיִם, מֵאִי וְאֲנִי עֵרֶל שְׁפָתַיִם. וְהָא בְּקִדְמִיתָא כְּתִיב (שמות ד': י') לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אֲנֹכִי וְגו', כִּי כְּבֹד פָּה וְכְּבֹד לְשׁוֹן אֲנֹכִי, וְקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא הָהוּ אֹתִיב לִיה, (שמות ד': י') מִי שֶׁם פָּה לֹאֲדָם וְגו', וְהוּא אָמַר (שמות ד': י"ב) וְאֲנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה עִם פִּיךָ, סִלְקָא דְּעִתְּךָ דְּלֹא הָהוּ כֹּן, וְהִשְׁתָּא אָמַר וְאֲנִי עֵרֶל שְׁפָתַיִם, אִי הָכִי, אֵן הוּא מֶלֶךְ דְּאַבְטָח לִיה קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא בְּקִדְמִיתָא. אֶלָּא רְזָא אִיהוּ, מִשָּׁה קָלָא, וְדַבּוּר דְּאִיהוּ מֶלֶךְ דִּילִיה, הָהוּ בְּגִלּוּתָא, וְהָהוּ אִיהוּ אֲטִים לְפָרְשָׁא מִלִּין, וּבְגִין דָּא אָמַר, וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמָעֵנִי פֶרְעָה, בְּעוּד דְּמֶלֶךְ דִּילִי אִיהוּ בְּגִלּוּתָא דִּילִיה, דְּהָא לִית לִי מֶלֶךְ. הָא אֲנָא קָלָא מֶלֶךְ גִּרָע, דְּאִיהוּ בְּגִלּוּתָא, וְעַל דָּא, שְׁתַּף קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא לְאַהֲרֹן בְּהִדְיָה. תָּא חֲזִי, כֹּל זְמָנָא דְּדַבּוּר הָהוּ בְּגִלּוּתָא, קָלָא אֲסִתְּלַק מִנִּיה, וּמֶלֶךְ הָהוּ אֲטִים בְּלֹא קוֹל, כֹּד אֲתָא מִשָּׁה, אֲתָא קוֹל. וּמִשָּׁה הָהוּ קוֹל בְּלֹא מֶלֶךְ, בְּגִין דְּהָהוּ בְּגִלּוּתָא, וְכֹל זְמָנָא דְּדַבּוּר הָהוּ בְּגִלּוּתָא, מִשָּׁה אֲזִיל קָלָא בְּלֹא דַבּוּר, וְהָכִי אֲזִיל עַד דְּקָרִיבו לְטוּרָא דְּסִינִי, וְאַתְּיָהִיבֵת אֲוִרִיָּתָא, וּבִהֲהוּא זְמָנָא, אֲתַחֲבַר קָלָא בְּדַבּוּר, וּכְדִין מֶלֶךְ מִלִּיל, הָדָא הוּא דְּכְתִיב, (שמות כ': א') וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה. וּכְדִין, מִשָּׁה אֲשַׁתְּכַח שְׁלִים בְּמֶלֶךְ כְּדָקָא יֵאוֹת, קוֹל וְדַבּוּר כְּחֻדָּא בְּשְׁלִימוֹ. וְעַל דָּא מִשָּׁה אֲתַרְעִים, דְּמֶלֶךְ גִּרָע מִנִּיה, בֵּר הָהוּא זְמָנָא דְּמִלִּילָת לְאַתְרָעְמָא עֲלוּי, בְּזְמָנָא דְּכְתִיב, (שמות ו') וּמֵאֲז בְּאַתִּי אֶל פֶּרְעָה לְדַבֵּר בְּשִׁמְךָ, מִיָּד (שמות ו': ב') וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה.

And Moses spake before the Lord, saying: "Behold, the children of Israel have not harkened unto me, how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?" How did Moses dare say this? Had not the Holy One already promised him, when he said that he was not eloquent, that He "will be with his mouth" (Exodus 4, 10-12)? Or did the Holy One not keep His promise? However, there is here an inner meaning. Moses was then in the grade of "Voice," and the grade of "Utterance" was then in exile. Hence he said, "How shall Pharaoh hear me, seeing that my 'utterance' is in bondage to him, I being only 'voice,' and lacking 'utterance.'" Therefore God joined with him Aaron, who was "utterance" without "voice." When Moses came, the Voice appeared, but it was "a voice without speech." This lasted until Israel approached Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. Then the Voice was united with the Utterance, and the word was spoken, as it says, "and the Lord spake all these words" (Exodus 20, 1). Then Moses was in full possession of the Word, Voice and Word being united. That was the cause of Moses' complaint (v. 23), that he lacked the word save at the time when it broke forth in complaint and "God spake to Moses."

6. Soloveitchik, p. 65

Whoever permits his legitimate needs to go unsatisfied will never be sympathetic to the crying needs of others. A human morality based on love and friendship, on sharing in the travail of others, cannot be practiced if the person's own need-awareness is dull, and he does not know what suffering is. Hence Judaism rejected models of existence which deny human need, such as the angelic or the monastic.