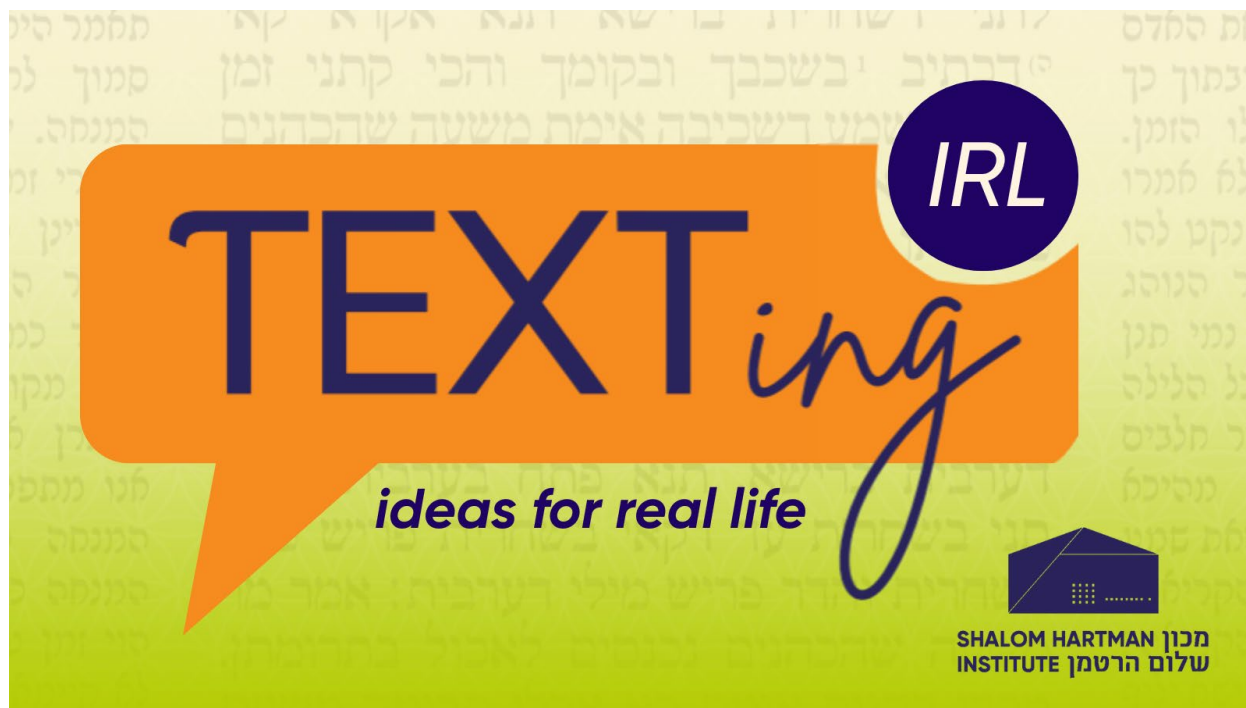




Rethinking How Jews Advocate

Elana Stein Hain & Stacy Burdett

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As the longstanding bipartisan consensus around issues important to Jewish needs seems to collapse in America, many feel that the deck is stacked against the Jewish community. How can Jews advocate for themselves, and what tools should they be using? **Elana Stein Hain** and community advocacy strategist **Stacy Burdett** dive into *Parashat Vayetze* to explore Jacob's fraught encounters with Lavan and what they reveal about the ethics of Jewish self-advocacy today.

*This source sheet is part of the **November 24, 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.

Elana is currently living in Jerusalem with her family.

Stacy Burdett works with policymakers, philanthropies, and other nonprofits on strategies to prevent and respond to antisemitism. She integrates those strategies to enhance corporate and university DEI programming to ensure a welcoming institutional culture for Jews and all communities. She has testified in Congress about antisemitism multiple times, including on the spike in antisemitism since the October 7, 2023 Hamas terror attacks.

As Vice President for Government Relations, Advocacy and Community Engagement at the Anti-Defamation League, Burdett directed national issue campaigns and coalition work and crafted policy recommendations and messaging on Jewish as well as civil and human rights issues. As Director of Government Relations at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in DC, she engaged Congress, administration officials and thought leaders in exploring America's response to Nazism and the Holocaust and its relevance to addressing societal and policy challenges today.

Stacy got her start in professional advocacy in the Soviet Jewry movement as a public affairs officer at the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews. She holds a B.A. in Middle East Studies from Barnard College, has studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and has lived and worked in Israel. Stacy has served on advisory boards for the William S. Cohen Institute for Leadership & Public Service at the University of Maine and the Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Project. She is on the board of directors of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), the Lillian & Albert Small Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, DC, and Tivnu: Building Justice, the nation's only Jewish gap year program.

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1. Babylonian Talmud Bava Batra 123a

”וַיֹּגֵד יַעֲקֹב לְרַחֵל כִּי אָחִי אֲבִיהָ הוּא, וְכִי בֶן רֵבֶקָה הוּא” – וְהָלַא בֶּן אָחוֹת אֲבִיהָ הוּא?!
אָלֹא אָמַר לָהּ: מִיִּנְסַבֶּת לִי. אָמְרָה לִיהָ: אֵין, מִיֵּהוּ אֲבֹא רַמְיָה הוּא, וְלֹא זָכַלְתְּ לִיהָ. . . .
אָמַר לָהּ: אָחִיו אֲנִי בְּרַמְאוֹת!

“And Jacob told Rachel that he was the brother of her father, and that he was the son of Rebecca” – But was he not Lavan’s nephew rather than his brother? Rather, he said to her: Marry me. She responded: Yes, but my father is a trickster, and you will not be able to beat him. He responded: I am his brother in trickery!

2. Tanhuma Vayetze 11

כָּל הַלַּיְלָה הִיָּתָה עוֹשָׂה עֲצָמָה כְּרַחֵל, כִּיּוֹן שֶׁעָמַד בַּבֹּקֶר ”וְהִנֵּה הוּא לֵאמֹר.”

The whole night she pretended to be Rachel, and when he got up in the morning, “and behold she was Leah” (Bereshit 29:25).

אָמַר לָהּ: בֵּית הַרְמָאִי, לָמָּה רַמִּית אוֹתִי?

He asked her: Daughter of a trickster, why did you trick me?

אָמְרָה לוֹ: וְאַתָּה לָמָּה רַמִּית אֶת אָבִיךָ, שֶׁכְּשֶׁאָמַר לָךְ ”הֲאֵתָה זֶה בְּנִי עֲשׂוּ”, וְאַמְרָתְ לֹא
”אֲנֹכִי עֲשׂוּ בְכֹרְךָ”, וְאַתָּה אוֹמֵר לָמָּה רַמִּיתִנִּי, וְאַבִּיךָ לֹא אָמַר ”בָּא אַחִיךָ בְּמִרְמָה”!!!

She responded: And why did you trick your father when he asked you “Are you my son Esav?” and you responded, “I am your firstborn son Esav”—and you are asking me “Why have you tricked me?!” Did your own father not say, “Your brother came with trickery (and took your blessing)” (Bereshit 27:35)?

3. Rashi, commentary to Bereshit (Genesis) 32:29

לֹא יַעֲקֹב - לֹא נֶאֱמַר עוֹד שֶׁהַבְּרָכוֹת בָּאוּ לָךְ בְּעֵקֶבָה וְרַמְיָה כִּי אִם בְּשִׁרְרָה וְגִלּוּי פָּנִים. . .

Not Jacob - It shouldn’t be said that the blessings came to you through trickery—but actually through nobility and transparency. . .

4. Rabbi Yaakov Zvi Mecklenburg, *Haketav ve-hakabbalah* (The Written [Torah] and the [Oral] Tradition), commentary to Bereshit (Genesis) 27:16

כבר אמר החכם "עת לכל חפץ" כי לכל הדברים בין החיוב בין הסותר יש זמן קבוע, שאם בא בזמנו הוא משובח, ושלא בזמנו הוא מגונה . . . וככה הוא בענין זה דרבקה ויעקב, ענין הרמיה היא מגונה מאד לכל אדם . . . אבל לפי העת והזמן פעולתם משובח, כי יצחק להיותו מוטעה מחלקת לשון עשו והיה מחוסר ידיעה מכל תועבותיו, לכן היה חשוב בעיניו להשפיע עליו ברכתו,

The sage (Solomon) has already said, "A time for every purpose," because for all things between the positive and the destructive there is a fixed time, that if it comes at the right time it is good, and if it does not come at the right time it is disgraceful. . . And so it is with Rebecca and Jacob in this matter, the matter of deceit is very disgraceful for any person . . . But according to the situation, their action is praiseworthy, because Isaac, being misled from the smoothness of Esau's tongue, was unaware of all his abominations, therefore it was important in his eyes to bestow his blessing on him,

ומה היה להם לרבקה וליעקב לעשות בידעם כל תועבותיו? . . . כי בתוספות טובות זמניות אליו יוסיף רשע על רשעתו . . . ואם היו שותקים היו מחייבים עצמם לעבור על "לפני עור לא תתן מכשול" כי יצחק מצד טעותו הוא כעור בדרך והמניחו ליפול ברשת פעולה לא טובה, הוא הוא הפורש רשת לרגליו להלכד במעשה רע . . . ולא היה דרך אחרת לפניו כי אם לעשות פעולה המדומה כשקר וכרמיה למי שלא ידע טוב הענין והוא אמת לאמתו למי שנודע תוכו הדבר ובירורו, והיא פעולה שהמרומה עצמו יודה וישבח את המרמה אותו על שהצילו מלהיות מצדיק את הרשע ומרשיע את הצדיק, וכמו שעשה יצחק באמת אחרי כן בשלחו את יעקב לחרן ברכו בנפש חפצה בברכת אברהם.

and what could Rebecca and Jacob have done knowing all his abominations? . . . Because with all temporary benefits to him, he would become more wicked. . . And if they were silent, they would be forcing themselves to transgress (the commandment) "before the blind you shall not put a stumbling block" because Isaac, by his mistake, was like a blind person walking on the way, and one who allows him to fall into the net of a bad action is actually the one who spreads a net for his feet to become ensnared in a bad deed. . . And there was no other way before them but to do an action that appears as a lie and deceit to someone who did not know the matter well, and it is true to the truth to someone who knows the inside of the matter and its clarification, and it is an action that the deceived himself will appreciate and praise the deceiver for saving him from validating the wicked and condemning the righteous, and just as Isaac did in truth afterwards, when he sent Jacob to Haran, he blessed him willingly with the blessing of Abraham.