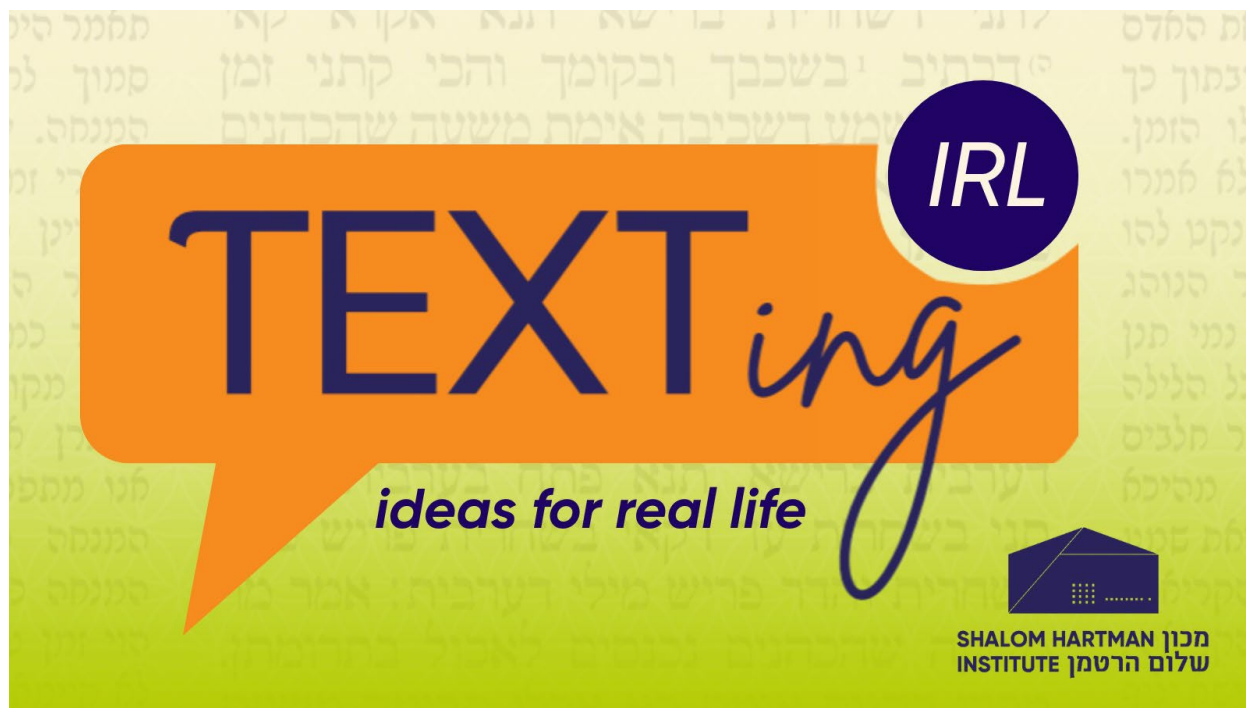




Jews: Strangers in Their Own Home?

Elana Stein Hain & Sarah Hurwitz

November 10, 2025

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | Genesis (Bereshit) 23:4 | 1 |
| 2. | Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "A Stranger and a Resident" | 1 |
| 3. | Leviticus (Vayikra) 25:23 | 1 |
| 4. | I Chronicles (Divrei Hayamim) 29:14-15 | 1 |
| 5. | Mekhilta deRabbi Yishmael, Masekhta DeNezikin 18 | 2 |

As antisemitism and anti-Zionism rise, many North American Jews have felt less welcome in the countries that they call home. How do we root ourselves deeply in our Jewish identities while remaining engaged in and committed to the broader world? On this episode of TEXTing IRL, **Elana Stein Hain** and author **Sarah Hurwitz** turn to this week's Torah portion and the concept of the *ger toshav*—the resident alien—to understand how North American Jews might navigate belonging, identity, faith, and the enduring challenge of embracing Jewish particularism while living in diverse societies.

*This source sheet is part of the **November 10, 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.

Sarah Hurwitz is a member of Cohort II of Rabbanut North America and the author of [Here All Along: Finding Meaning, Spirituality, and a Deeper Connection to Life – in Judaism \(After Finally Choosing to Look There\)](#)—which was a finalist for two National Jewish Book Awards and for the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature—and of [As A Jew: Reclaiming Our Story From Those Who Blame, Shame, and Try To Erase Us](#).

She was a White House speechwriter from 2009 to 2017, starting out as a senior speechwriter for President Barack Obama and then serving as head speechwriter for First Lady Michelle Obama. Prior to working in the White House, Hurwitz was the chief speechwriter for Hillary Clinton on her 2008 presidential campaign.

She has been profiled in *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Guardian*; interviewed on *The Today Show*, *Morning Joe*, and *NPR*; and named by *The Forward* as one of 50 Jews who impacted American life in 2016 and 2019. Hurwitz is a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School and was a 2017 Fellow at the Institute of Politics at Harvard.

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. Genesis (Bereshit) 23:4

גֵר־תוֹשֵׁב אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם וְנָנוּ לִי אֶחֱזֹת־קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם וְאֶקְבְּרָה מִתִּי מִלְפָּנַי :

"I am a resident alien with you; give me a burial site among you, so that I can bury my dead."

2. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "A Stranger and a Resident," in Rabbi Abraham Besdin, *Reflections of the Rav: Lessons in Jewish Thought*, vol. 1, 1979, p. 169

Abraham's definition of his dual status, we believe, describes with profound accuracy the historical position of the Jew who resides in a predominantly non-Jewish society. He was a resident, like other inhabitants of Canaan, sharing with them a concern for the welfare of society, digging wells, and contributing to the progress of the country in loyalty to its government and institutions. Here, Abraham was clearly a fellow citizen, a patriot among compatriots, joining others in advancing the common welfare. However, there was another aspect, the spiritual, in which Abraham regarded himself as a stranger. His identification and solidarity with his fellow citizens in the secular realm did not imply his readiness to relinquish any aspects of his religious uniqueness. His was a different faith and he was governed by perceptions, truths, and observances which set him apart from the larger faith community. In this regard, Abraham and his descendants would always remain "strangers."

3. Leviticus (Vayikra) 25:23

וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמָּכַר לְצִמְתָּת כִּי לִי הָאָרֶץ כִּי גֵרִים וְתוֹשְׁבִים אַתֶּם עִמָּדִי :

The land cannot be sold permanently, because the land is Mine; you are resident aliens with Me.

4. I Chronicles (Divrei Hayamim) 29:14-15

וְכִי מִי אֲנִי וּמִי עַמִּי כִּי־נַעֲצֹר כָּח לְהַתְנַדֵּב כְּזֹאת כִּי־מִמֶּךָ הַכֹּל וּמִיָּדְךָ נָתַנוּ לָךְ : כִּי־גֵרִים אֲנִיחֵנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ וְתוֹשְׁבִים כָּכָל־אַבְתֵּינוּ כִּצְלָמֵינוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְאִין מְקוֹה :

Who am I and who are my people, that we should have the means to make such a freewill offering; but all is from You, and it is Your gift that we have given to You. We are strangers with You, and we are those who settle, like our fathers; our days on earth are like a shadow, with nothing in prospect.

5. Mekhilta deRabbi Yishmael, Masekhta DeNezikin 18

אַבְרָהָם קָרָא עֲצֻמוֹ גֵר, שְׁנֵאָמַר : (בראשית כג, ד) "גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב אֲנֹכִי עִמָּכֶם." דָּוִד קָרָא עֲצֻמוֹ גֵר, שְׁנֵאָמַר : (דברי הימים א כט, טו) "כִּי גֵרִים אֲנִיחֵנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ, וְתוֹשְׁבִים כָּכָל אֲבֹתֵינוּ, כַּצֵּל יָמֵינוּ עַל הָאָרֶץ וְאֵין מְקוֹה." וְאוֹמַר : (תהלים לט, יג) "כִּי גֵר אֲנֹכִי עִמָּךְ, וְתוֹשֵׁב כָּכָל אֲבוֹתַי."

Abraham called himself a stranger, viz.: (Genesis 23:4) "I am a resident alien with you." David called himself a stranger, viz.: (Psalms 119:19) "I am a stranger in the land," and: (I Chronicles 29:15) "We are strangers with You, and we are those who settle, like our fathers; our days on earth are like a shadow, with nothing in prospect." And it is written: (Psalms 39:13) "For a stranger am I with You, a sojourner as all of my ancestors."