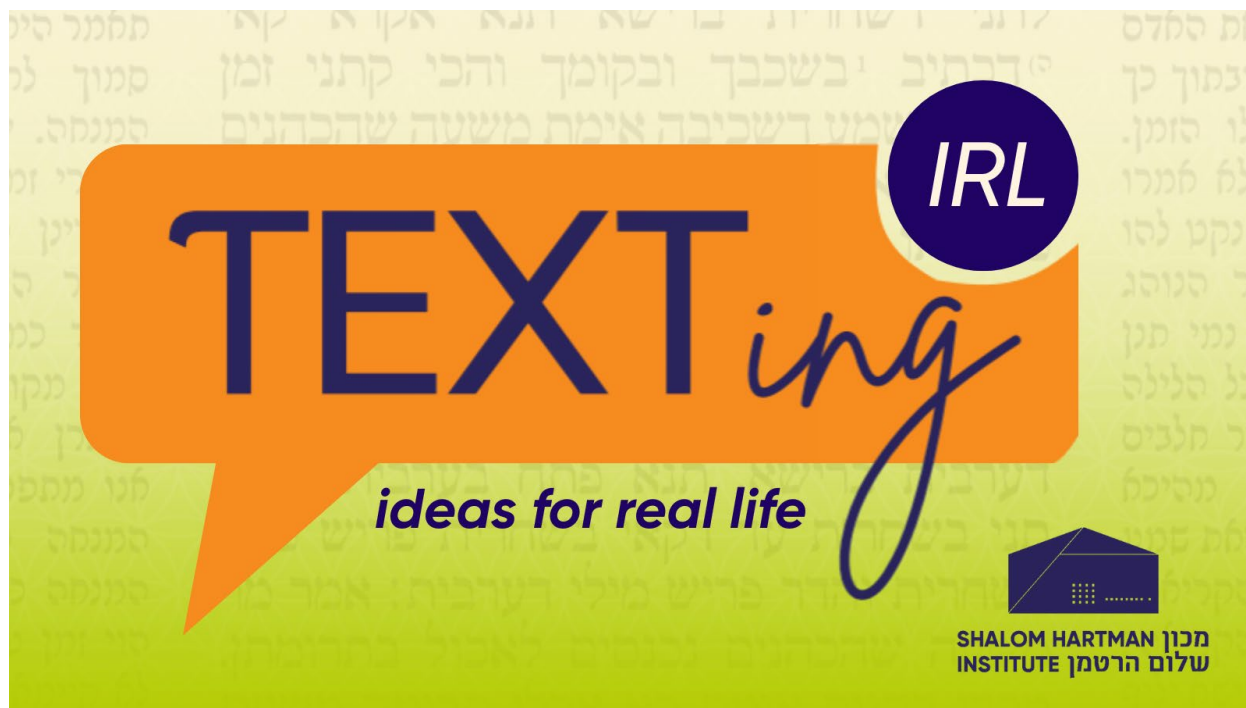




Loving and Leaving: A Zionism of Longing

Elana Stein Hain & Yonah Hain

July 20, 2026

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 1. | Sifre Devarim (Deuteronomy) 34 | 1 |
| 2. | Otzar Midrashim, Midrash Petirat Moshe (The Death of Moses) | 1 |
| 3. | <i>Sefer Petirat Moshe Rabbenu Alav Hashalom (The Book of the Death of Moses)</i> ,
Jerusalem, 1897 | 3 |
| 4. | Sifre Devarim (Deuteronomy) 34 | 4 |

What does it mean to love Israel deeply while choosing to build your life elsewhere? In this episode of TEXTing IRL, Elana Stein Hain and her husband, Columbia/Barnard Hillel Campus Rabbi Yonah Hain, get personal and reflect on their family's two years living in Israel, their decision to return to New York, and the competing demands of family, career, Jewish identity, and Zionism. Drawing on Parashat Vaetchanan, the Shema's commandment to teach our children, and rabbinic teachings about Moses' longing to enter the Land of Israel, they explore the fulfillment of the self and the challenge of making life-changing decisions in uncertain times.

This source sheet is part of the July 20, 2026 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 Fellow at the Kogod Research Center of the Shalom Hartman Institute, 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.

Yonah Hain is the Campus Rabbi at Columbia/Barnard Hillel. He serves as a member of the Columbia University Office of Religious Life. Yonah leads religious, educational and interfaith initiatives at Hillel with a particular passion for interdisciplinary approaches to Jewish learning and living.

Rabbi Hain has served as teaching faculty across the Jewish world from the Shalom Hartman Institute and Yeshivat Sha'alvim to the Drisha Institute for Jewish Education, YCT Rabbinical School, and the Hadar Institute. He has also been a recurring contributor to the TEXTing podcast. Most recently, Yonah was a doctoral fellow at Ben-Gurion University and a researcher at the National Library of Israel while writing his dissertation on the role of personal agency in Rabbinic Literature.

Previously, Yonah was at NYU's Bronfman Center, making him a New York City university rabbi for over two decades. Yonah is currently living in Jerusalem with his family.

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. Sifre Devarim (Deuteronomy) 34

”וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ” (דברים ו:ז) – שִׁיְהוּ מְחַדָּדִים בְּתוֹךְ פִּיךָ, שֶׁכְּשֶׁאָדָם שׁוֹאֵלְךָ דָּבָר לֹא תִהְיֶה מְגַמְגֵּם בּוֹ, אֲלֵא תִהְיֶה אוֹמְרוֹ לוֹ מִיָּד...

“You shall teach diligently (v’shinantam) your children” (Deuteronomy 6:7)—

Let them be sharp in your mouth,
so that if someone asks you something,
you will not mumble through it,
but will rather reply immediately...

2. Otzar Midrashim, Midrash Petirat Moshe (The Death of Moses)

עמד משה בתפלה לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם, אם מפני יהושע תלמידי אני מת ואתה דוחה אותי כי הוא יעבד לפני העם הזה - יעבר הוא לפני כרב ואני אחריו בתלמיד, הוא ככה גדול ואני ככהן הדיוט, הוא כמלך ואני כעבד ואלך ואראה את ארץ ישראל. אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא נשבעתי בשמי הגדול שלא תעבור את הירדן.

Moses stood in prayer before the Holy Blessed One. He said before God: “Sovereign of the Universe, if I will die because of Joshua, my student, and you’re pushing me away because he will lead this people, he can be the leader, and I’ll be his student. He can be like the High Priest and I’ll be like a regular priest. He can be like the king and I’ll be like a servant, and I will go and see the Land of Israel.” The Holy Blessed One said: “I have sworn by My Great Name that you shall not cross the Jordan.”

השיב משה ואמר לפניו, רבון העולמים תן לי רשות שאהיה כעוף השמים בלח שם המפרש שלך ואעשה את שתי זרועותי ככנפי השחר, ואפרח בהן באויר העולם למעלה מן הירדן ואלך ואראה את הארץ! אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא אם אתה עושה כן חשוב עליך כמו שעברת את הירדן ונמצאת שבועת בטלה.

Moses replied and said before God: “Sovereign of the Universe, give me permission to be a bird of the skies through the power of Your Name, and I will make my two arms like the wings of dawn, and I will spread them in the air of the world above the Jordan, and I will go and see the land!” The Holy Blessed One said to him, “If you do so, you will consider yourself to have crossed the Jordan, and my oath will be void.”

אמר לפניו רבון העולמים אהיה כדג בלח שם המפרש שלך ואעשה שתי זרועותי כשני סנפירים וכל שערות גופי קשקשים ואקפוץ בתוך הירדן ואעבר בתוך התהום ואלך ואראה את ארץ ישראל. אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא אם אתה עושה כן חשוב כמו שעברת ונמצאת שבועת בטלה, ועוד תהום של יונה הוא שנאמר ”תהום יסובבני.”

Moses said before God: "Sovereign of the Universe, I will be like a fish through the power of Your Name, and I will make my two arms like two fins and all the hairs of my body like scales, and I will jump into the Jordan and pass through the depths, and I will go and see the Land of Israel." The Holy Blessed One said to him: "If you do so, it will be as if you crossed and my oath will be void. Furthermore, the depths are Jonah's, as it says, 'The depths were around me' (Jonah 2:6)."

אמר לפניו רבנו של עולם אשב על כנפי עננים ותפריחני באויר העולם כשיעור ג' פרסאות למעלה מן הירדן כדי שיהיו עננים מלמטה ואני מלמעלה ואליך ואראה את הארץ. אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא אם אתה עושה כן חשוב עליך כאלו עברת, ונמצאת שבועתי בטלה, ועוד כתבתי על ידך בתורתך לא תסיג גבול רעה, והאויר והעננים כבר כתובים הם לאליהו שנקמר ויהי בהעלות ה' את אליהו, ואומר ויעל אליהו בסערה השמים, והיאך אתה מבקש דבר שאינו שלך.

Moses said before God: "Sovereign of the Universe, I will sit on the wings of the clouds, and make me fly in the air of the world about three spans above the Jordan, so that there will be clouds below and I above and I will go and see the land." The Holy Blessed One responded: "If you do so, it will be as if you crossed and my oath will be void. I also wrote by your hand in my Torah 'Do not move your fellow's border,' and the air and the clouds are written for Elijah, as it says, 'And when God was to take up Elijah' (2 Melachim 2:1), and it says, 'And Elijah went up in a storm to heaven' (2 Melachim 2:11), and how can you request something that is not yours?"

אמר לפניו רבנו של עולם חתכני איברים איברים והשליך אותי למעלה מן הירדן בידי גבריאל המלאך ואחר כך תחייני ותעמידני על רגלי כדי שאלך ואראה את הארץ, אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא אם כן, חשוב עליך כמו שעברת, ונמצאת שבועתי בטלה.

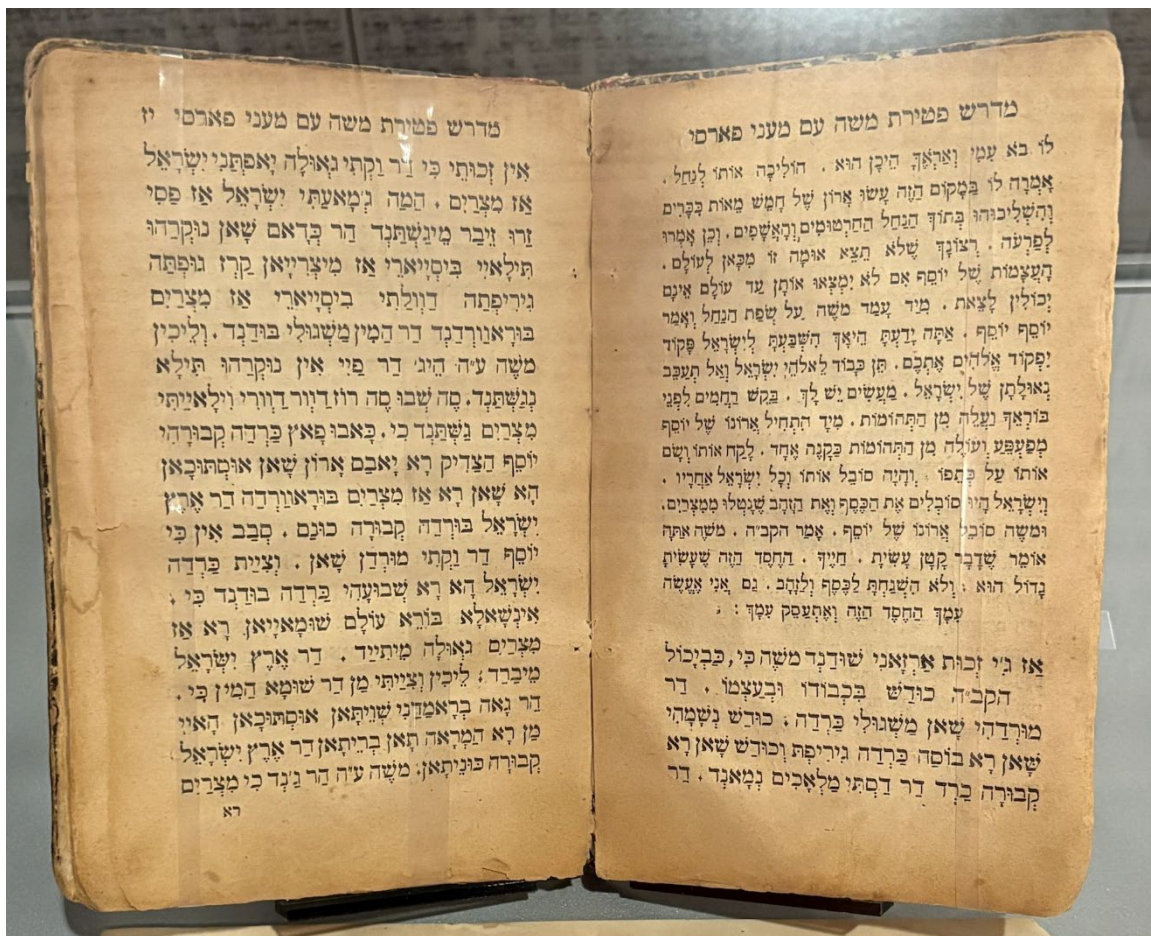
Moses said before God: "Sovereign of the Universe, cut me limb by limb and throw me above the Jordan in the hand of the angel Gabriel, and afterward let me live and stand me on my feet so that I will go and see the land."

אמר לפניו רבנו של עולם הראני נא אותה במראית העין, אמר ליה בדבר זה אני שומע לך, שנקמר כי מנגד תראה את הארץ. באותה שעה הראה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא כל ארץ ישראל ארבע מאות פרסה על ארבע מאות פרסה, ויתן כח בעיניו לראותה כולה מראשה ועד סופה, הנמוך והגבוה, והסתר והגלוי, הרחוק והקרוב בסכייה אחת, באותה שעה אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה זאת הארץ אשר נשבעתי . . .

The Holy Blessed One responded: "If you do so, it will be as if you crossed and my oath will be void." Moses responded: "Sovereign of the Universe, show it to me as an image." God responded: "In this matter I will listen to you," as it is said, 'You will see the land from the other side' (Devarim 32:52)." At that time, the Holy Blessed One showed Moses all

the Land of Israel, four hundred spans by four hundred spans. God gave him power in his eyes so that he could see it all in one look from top to bottom, the lowest and the highest, the hidden and the revealed, the far and the near. At that time, the Holy Blessed One said to Moses: "This is the land that I swore to Abraham" (Devarim 34:4) . . .

3. **Sefer Petirat Moshe Rabbenu Alav Hashalom (The Book of the Death of Moses),**
Jerusalem, 1897



This book contains the midrash on Moses's death and its translation into Judeo-Tajik, spoken by the Jews of Bukhara. Judeo-Tajik here is written in Hebrew letters. This book is part of the collection at ANU – Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv, Israel.

4. Sifre Devarim (Deuteronomy) 34

”לְבָנֶיךָ” – אֱלֹהֵי תַלְמִידֶיךָ, וְכֵן אַתָּה מוֹצֵא בְּכָל מְקוֹם שֶׁהַתַּלְמִידִים קְרוּיִים בָּנִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (מַלְכִים ב ב ג): ”וַיֵּצְאוּ בְנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית אֵל אֶלְיָשָׁע”, וְכִי בְנֵי נְבִיאִים הָיוּ? וְהֵלֵא תַלְמִידִים הָיוּ! אֲלָא מִכֵּן לַתַּלְמִידִים שְׁקֻרוּיִים בָּנִים.

“Your children” (Deuteronomy 6:7)— these are your students. And so do you find everywhere that students are called children, for it is said: “And the children of the prophets who were in Bet El went out to Elisha” (2 Kings 2:3). Now, were they indeed the offspring of prophets? They were students! Rather, on this basis we know that students are called children.