



## RABBI DONNIEL HARTMAN: BOUNDARIES AND JEWISH IDENTITY

(Begin audio)

**HOLO:** Welcome to the College Commons Bully Pulpit Podcast, Torah with a Point of View. Produced by the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, America's first Jewish institution of higher learning. My name is Joshua Holo, your host, and Dean of the Jack H. Skirball campus in Los Angeles. It's my great pleasure to welcome to the Bully Pulpit Podcast, Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman who is President of the Shalom Hartman Institute where he pioneered far reaching programs for scholars, educators, rabbis, and religious and lay leaders in both Israel and North America. He's a prominent public intellectual in Israel and abroad. And in 2016 he published the highly regarded book *Putting God Second, How to Save Religion from Itself*. Rabbi Hartman, thank you for coming. It's a pleasure to have you.

**HARTMAN:** My pleasure to be here.

**HOLO:** In doing some of the research for this interview, I checked out what appears to be the most recent video on your website. And it's a presentation to the B'nai Jeshurun where you talk about boundaries, which is a theme that's, of course, central to some of your writing. I was just curious, you made reference in that talk to intermarriage and I think you also made reference to the fact that B'nai Jeshurun's seem to be in a moment of decision of its own. Was your talk part of a deliberative process whereby they were thinking about their policy on intermarriage?

**HARTMAN:** Yes. A number of synagogues in Conservative or used to be in the Conservative Movement turned to us and asked, "How do we think about this question?" Now part of what we do at Hartman is that nobody asks us and nor are we interested or inclined to give a ruling. I'm not somebody's authority, they're waiting for me to say, "Is this correct?"

**HOLO:** Yeah, you're not their pasuk.

**HARTMAN:** I'm not the pasuk. I don't pretend to be a pasuk. And actually, I don't even like to be a pasuk. I actually want everybody to be a pasuk on their own. And the idea is that we are a place which teaches Torah, which will enable people to think about the question. And so B'nai Jeshurun and a whole other – and a group of other synagogues were deliberating how do we go beyond this statement that we reject intermarriage and we welcome the intermarried. And somehow that line just wasn't working. And they asked us if we could create a learning process which will enable them to discuss and deliberate. And so we created this program to think about what is Jewish identity? How do you think about the changing natures of Jewish identity? So for example, when we talk about boundaries, the Jewish people today are an intermarried people. It's not should we be, shouldn't we be. It's a fact.

HOLO: It's a fact.

HARTMAN: That fact has to create a different type of discourse. It can't anymore be a cancer. We're just simply who we are.

HOLO: Right. Right.

HARTMAN: And so now what do you do? How do you respond? How does that fact shape the discussion? And so yes, so in B'nai Jeshurun we helped the community think about that. And then ultimately, they did their process. But we had no part in that – in their decisions.

HOLO: So I want to ask a question about the actual content of the presentation, if I may. And I'll summarize what you said in the following way. And you'll tell me if I made – I got it right and that I'm fair about it. So I heard you articulate two key things. First, Jews have always breached and realigned our boundaries from the beginning. This is part of being Jewish. It's part of being any group, as you very clearly stated. This is humanity. And then you also added that insofar as we Jews are asking these questions about our own community, in a self-aware way, we have a choice as to whom we include in this group who we call the Jewish people, or Judaism, and whom to exclude. And that you explicitly advocate for, roughly, it's a highly developed argument of course, but you advocate for including as much as possible those who do in fact breach the boundaries provided that even part of them remains within the boundaries and part of them feels significantly and meaningfully obligated to our people and a part of our group.

HARTMAN: Correct. What I advocate for is that if a large percentage of the Jewish people are doing something it can't be beyond the boundaries.

HOLO: Okay.

HARTMAN: In other words, Judaism is not just a theoretical Torah. It's a sociological reality. And as such who we are is defined by what Jews do also.

HOLO: It feels very complainant is where I was going with this.

HARTMAN: Yes. But it goes back to the Bible where Judaism is not the religion around which the Jewish people were formed. We're very different from Christianity and Islam. Judaism is the religion that was given to the Jewish people. And so there's a Jewish people that proceeds Torah. And the whole Bible is a story of the Jewish people not keeping Torah. This notion of a covenant of peoplehood or what I, in this new book that I'm writing, I call it the covenant of being. That to be Jewish is to be part of a people independent from you do or believe. It goes back from the first moment of Jewish discourse.

HOLO: And it prioritizes the peoplehood over the covenant.

HARTMAN: Or it creates an interesting relationship in which what Jews do also shapes the covenant. You know, you can't just simply say Judaism is irrespective of what Jews do. And what Jews do shapes, ultimately, the tradition. Now there's newer Jewish laws which ultimately

even regulate this where an Israelite even though they've sinned remains an Israelite. So you don't kick people outside. Nobody could undermine membership. And then various laws that require that you speak to Jews where they are and you take into account what they do. So what's changed today is just that something that used to be a boundary is no longer a boundary. But the boundary breaking, as you mentioned beforehand, is consistent. We've always done it. Everybody's always...

HOLO: Everybody's done it.

HARTMAN: So now there's a new boundary. And the new boundary is – or now the boundary that used to be that was one of the most significant boundaries that Jews don't marry non-Jews. And that when a Jew marries a non-Jew they're assimilating. That's just simply no longer a fact.

HOLO: Anyone who goes to really any non-Orthodox synagogue, certainly Reform synagogue, Reform Judaism accounts for 50 percent of affiliated American Judaism. So clearly you're right. This is – if they're showing up at synagogues...

HARTMAN: If somebody thinks that I'm saying something revolutionary. I'm just saying, "Yeah, it's raining." It's raining so... There was a certain person who once said we have to declare that intermarriage is a cancer. And I said if you want to call – you're just calling half the – 50 percent of Jewish people cancer. It's not...

HOLO: We're seeing more cancer than body.

HARTMAN: This is – we are. So now the question is not whether that's a boundary. The question is what's the new boundary.

HOLO: So I suspect – you intimated this in your argument, which is you're willing to work to include in a productive way people who straddle boundary lines as long as they have enough of whatever it is on the Jewish side as well. That to me was compelling because the real question – I see two questions that come out of intermarriage. One is will you raise your kids Jewish, which simply kicks the can down the road and asks the question again, is this person Jewish. And then here's what I think is at the heart, the sociological, even the covenantal intuition of Jews no matter where they fall on the spectrum of observance. And it is the following: it is precisely the problem you posed, which is I would pose as exclusivity. In other words, it's not that they may or may not have one parent who's Jewish. And that parent may only be the father. Many Jews are perfectly comfortable with that. The real issue is - is that person going to indulge, engage in, or live a life that is divided? And fundamentally then the question is particularism in the abstract. Not in the do you hold an allegiance which trumps other allegiances. It shifts your formulation a bit. And your formulation was very generous. But I think people's anxieties come from a place of...

HARTMAN: No, I think your articulation is a very interesting one. And has a lot of promise. See we have to come up with articulations of boundaries that take into account where Jews are and where we think Jews could go. So, if for example, you have an articulation which says that in order to be Jewish you have to keep Shabbos, etc, you make a list, right. I say the Ten

Commandments.

HOLO: Right. Right.

HARTMAN: You're talking to yourself. But your boundary – I used a different one but I think yours is – I like it. It's a certain reading of certain texts that I quoted in that lecture and in this book that I wrote on the boundaries of Judaism that is Judaism your primary identity. I don't think you need exclusive, but you need primary. And part of what we see is that there's probably over a million non-Jews who've never converted who are living in Jewish families, who are willing to say affirmative to that same...

HOLO: Who are willing to raise their kids exclusively as Jews?

HARTMAN: Exclusively as Jews. So your primary identity as Jewish means you get up in the morning and, in my terms, do you say the Jewish people are my people. And do you say Judaism is my religion? As long as you declare that, you're inside the discourse.

Now, by the way, boundaries doesn't mean that I have to agree with everybody and every position within. It just means - we have lots of disagreements. There might be better – I might think that this person's a better Jew or worse Jew. That's perfectly legitimate. We all make a career of whose Judaism do we think we're better than. But that means that this is not leaving. This now, this group, is in fact part of the Jewish community.

Now this is so self-evident. You and I are talking and like hear a story, like we know. This is what the Jews are doing. Seventy percent of Jews who are getting married are marrying a non-Jew. That means we are somebody different. I think it's more nuanced than the one that I gave. And I actually prefer it. They're willing to make that declaration if we're willing to say...

HOLO: If we give them an opportunity to say it.

HARTMAN: So if we stop mourning, we actually might really win.

HOLO: So let's talk about the other side of the coin for a second, which is fundamentally emotional. And this is historian's task as I see it. It is not are you conservative or are you liberal, are you (*Hebrew*) on any rule, are you strict just because you're strict by temperament. Here is what you are, I think, or not - is are you yearning for a bright line to constitute that boundary? Or do you exist okay with a fuzzy and uneven boundary that's not a perfect circle and that doesn't – because if you – if you are comfortable with the fuzziness of the boundary, you're comfortable with our history which is the constant negotiation, back to the kingdom of Israel. It's not easy. But it is the nostalgia which is fundamentally yearning for a clarity.

HARTMAN: Correct. Which is a mythic notion that never existed.

HOLO: But how do we bring people on who have an understandable attachment to that?

HARTMAN: Right. Now that's – I understand that. And part of my life is to recognize that

certain people I'm not going to bring along. And that's okay.

HOLO: That's right. Because they're also in.

HARTMAN: And they're also in from another side. But also they're – you know, I remember one of my experiences as a teacher. I gave this lecture. And someone comes up and starts asking me a question. And I start answering it and I can see they're not here. And I realized, I said, you know what? I said, "Ignore me." I said, "I'm not a good teacher for you. My Torah is not good for you. And I want to reaffirm you. I don't want to debate you. Because if I will win we both lose."

HOLO: That's right.

HARTMAN: This – and that's – it's a very liberating thing. So some people who need all of that, some do who need these very strict clear boundaries to know who's in and who's out, basically the modern world is a very scary place for them. And so they run away from it because today it's not just – every identity, national, we're living in such complex identities. The problem that our discussion faces is – and this I'm aware of but I don't have an answer for and I don't think you do either. And that is what happens when ever increasing numbers of people don't even want to – not that they want to live with the fuzzy boundary. They want to get rid of boundaries.

HOLO: Boundarylessness.

HARTMAN: And there never has existed any social community, any social structure without boundaries. Imagine. I know there's few people who've tried...

HOLO: Philosophers in Athens and you know...

HARTMAN: I'm not talking about a few individuals who are... that's – they're the exception. You know, it's like few people are going to speak about oh yeah, we have open marriages. How many open marriages actually make it? Marriage. That means a boundary. That means I'm committed to you. I'm committed to you. Adultery outside of the boundary destroys marriage. Is there an adultery to Judaism? That's the question. Now for many people they don't want it. Now that is the next frontier.

HOLO: I question...

HARTMAN: And I don't have a great answer.

HOLO: I'm not sure if that's really the problem. That is the problem being posed to us by observers of generational trends. And there's a trend...

HARTMAN: I hope you're right.

HOLO: A trendy sociology about trends. And like I think you have kids, you want to send them

to nursery school. You know, the certain boundaries get imposed upon you and you find yourself actually wanting to.

HARTMAN: You know but that's interesting because you even – when you mentioned nursery school it's very interesting because the choices we make very often espouses, et cetera, are before we have our children. And then we're – we have this mythic notion that we can live in a boundaryless existence. Does, especially if we're marrying outside of – the partner is not – doesn't see themselves as Jewish, is there some claim that you make beforehand because very often then you're playing catch up and then it's a mess?

HOLO: I think there are many people who make claims. And I think they find that all of a sudden we all change and, you know – but it's...

HARTMAN: So like a couple says, "Oh my God, you changed."

HOLO: That's right.

HARTMAN: As if that's – what was I supposed to do? I was supposed to stay exactly I was the person my whole life.

HOLO: Right. There's an absurdity built into it. But it – I do think that we overstate the yearning for boundarylessness. I think that the flip side of the coin, the heavy lifting, on what we'll just for convenience sake call the liberal side, the more comfortable with fuzzy boundary side is to be comfortable with having relatively radical voices within us who are really, really rigid on this.

HARTMAN: Boundaries become by definition fuzzy boundaries. We don't want boundaries which aren't fuzzy boundaries but when boundaries are called non-fuzzy boundaries then everybody else says I'm against boundaries.

HOLO: Exactly. It is also a way to get a little bit around the polemics because fundamentally the polemic is we are arguing that, as you just said just now, a boundary is by definition fuzzy, uneven, un... If you disagree with that simple statement, then there's no cognitive bridge to cross. Or you live in a world where there's some, you know, Chabad has done a good job of trying to reconcile these two irreconcilable ways of...

HARTMAN: But look at what they've done. Chabad's great success is by giving up trying to make people Chabad.

HOLO: Yes. That's right.

HARTMAN: If their goal was to make people Chabad, it would be a colossal failure. They have two parallel ideologies. There is the Jewishness of their rabbi, of their educator who is clear cut boundaries for themselves. But they do not define the Jewishness that they live by as the necessary Jewishness for the people who they are outreaching to. And there they have almost – they have the most boundaryless of, you know, light a candle. Anything. Their notion is the

(inaudible), something. Anything you do. A little this. And it's a (inaudible) because almost nobody who goes to Chabad becomes Chabad.

HOLO: And they know that but – but...

HARTMAN: And their success is not demanding.

HOLO: Well, it's not demanding. That's – on the other hand they're also content to accept other kinds of support that aren't necessarily the demographic growth support. I mean that they – and that they...

HARTMAN: But I think it doesn't grow. Every – all of us, every move- we all – there's the finances of all of us.

HOLO: No, I don't begrudge them. It was not a cynical statement.

HARTMAN: But deep down, I think they have this – again it grows out of Kabbalat, that every little step is part of the Tikkun.

HOLO: That's because they can rely on an absolutely rigid and clear cut boundary which is the motherhood of the status of the mother. And in that utter clarity, that absolute nuancelessness, they are able then to work within it because it's a pretty big circle. So they play it well. And are true to themselves and they take a lot of critique for it on the ultra-Orthodox side. So, you know, they – I don't mean – and you know, you may know this that the – the Reform Movement, maybe in non-Orthodoxy in general in America, often fetishizes the Chabad example because of its apparent success. And it's more complicated. Great.

So bringing the conversation about boundaries and one's approach to a little bit more of the real world sociology of American Judaism today, which I know you know well, I want to ask this question. I hope it's not too boring but I'm curious about it, which is the following. Once a group or culture decides not to be fundamentalist, that they are willing and recognizing of the fact that they have to not only reinterpret their tradition with ever renewing sensibilities, but that they have no choice but to do it. That they're willing and they see it as part of their being, as you've said. Once they make that leap that it's not in a literal sense from Sinai but it's some kind of collaborative thing from Sinai and themselves, are all variance of traditionalism and innovativeness simply just a matter of degree?

HARTMAN: Yes.

HOLO: Is there no room for there being another axis of differentiation between them such as...?

HARTMAN: There might be, but you only know it's usually a hundred to two hundred years later. You never know it at that point. At that moment what was the thing? You know, and any time you try to make it at that moment – and so Maimonides for example, in your period of your expertise. Maimonides thought that...

HOLO: This is 12th Century Cairo.

HARTMAN: He thought that God having a body was...

HOLO: Unacceptable. Crazy.

HARTMAN: Because that made you, for him, you were part of the barbarian world. That was the line. You were either – you either accepted enlightenment or you were primitive. And the body thing connected to so many issues that he thought were so critical that if God had a body – now's not the time. But for him, this was...

HOLO: It was an expression of his monotheism as fundamental.

HARTMAN: You couldn't be a mono- it was – it was - today it would be similar to being, you know, you're – in Western you eating dogs.

HOLO: Right. Right. Right.

HARTMAN: You were just...

HOLO: Beyond the pale.

HARTMAN: Beyond the pale of anything comprehensive. And he gets up and he says that's the line. And he says anybody who believes that God has a body has no place in the world. And his colleagues look at him and say, you know, and on the page when we print Maimonides – there are people, you know, the Riven says there are people greater and wiser than you who believe that God has a body. Now at the time we didn't know.

But now if you go a couple hundred years later, nobody believes that God has a body. So at any given time you never know what is going to be the idea that becomes the idea. And conversely, the rabbis, they declared that the Talmud – that the study of Torah transcends them all. That's an example of the opposite. They set a line. And they said the story of Torah is the parameter that's going to determine Jewish excellence or not. And that was ultimately rejected by the Jewish community.

So we all love Torah. But could we really say that the study of Torah is greater than ethics? Modern Jewish life sees moral practice, of course we want to study the intellect, but is Torah consumed or defined by the study of Torah? So you have the rabbinic figures of the Second Temple creating a certain vision of an intellectual pursuit, which under Jewish law, if you were – according to many of the rabbis, if you were studying Torah you didn't have to pray because that was your engagement. Here they set a line. And they said – it wasn't a boundary but this is excellent – didn't take.

Over time we get to know what's more significant, what's less significant? What works? What doesn't work? You have to be very, very cautious in your generation to declare this is the definitive. This is not an issue of degree but of substance. It's almost impossible to know. For



example, you know, we're not talking about this but the same thing about what does it mean to be a lover of Israel or Zionist? Who – what's going to be the line? And what people – what used to be the line, what will be the line in 100 years? It's – so what you....

HOLO: Well breaching one as we speak with BDS. There are American Jews who consider themselves absolutely...

HARTMAN: Right. But we could still declare because they're – it's not – they are basically....

HOLO: They're marginal.

HARTMAN: BDS is a failed movement. It's failed movement. Politically it's failed. Economically it's failed in the Jewish community with all the – the people most...

HOLO: But it becomes a flash point within the Jewish community.

HARTMAN: I know but most of the – you see...

HOLO: That's probably true of the rabbis when they said, you know, (*Hebrew*). There were only 20 of them in a room.

HARTMAN: No, it's like we can make what – the fact that we're worried about things or declare doesn't mean that it is a substantive movement. So you could still declare, objectively, BDS as outside of the pale of the Jewish discourse.

HOLO: In a consensus fashion.

HARTMAN: In a consensus. In other words, it's not yet a reality that the Jewish community has to say you're part of me. Similar Jews for Jesus is not a reality that you have to take into account. And I was at a meeting with rabbis in the Jews for Jesus community. Do you know what the biggest problem in Jews for Jesus movement is?

HOLO: I have no idea.

HARTMAN: Continuity. Intermarriage rates – their intermarriage rates are 97.5 percent or something. So looks it's not – there was a time when the Jewish community thought that was going to be a reality. There has to be a modesty. We're part of a journey. We're not a journey of leaping from certainty to certainty. But it's a journey of knowing we stand for something important. Now, buckle your seatbelt, and let's see how the Jewish people play it out. And it could be in a way that we are going to water ourselves out into an oblivion. We almost did that many – in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. If it wasn't for the return of anti-Semitism in Europe, or the fact that it didn't disappear, it's not self-evident that we would have – that another hundred years. You know...

HOLO: It's never self-evident when we look backwards even though it feels like it is after the fact. But I think that the people who were really – the critical mass of people who were that close

to self-assimilation, or assimilation into the – were, in fact, also relatively slim, upper crust. It didn't account for the mass of Eastern Europe.

HARTMAN: That's right.

HOLO: But point taken that one never knows. And well I guess we're all along for the ride then.

HARTMAN: Hopefully it will be an interesting one.

(Break)

HOLO: You mentioned Israel. Let's move on to Israel. As you know, very well, Reform Jews in this country, the United States, are very heavily invested in the place of women at the Kotel, the Western Wall. Many movements in America have decried Prime Minister Netanyahu's tossing out of a recent multi-lateral agreement intended to address this issue in an important way. In tossing it out, he maintained the status quo and infuriated any number of people, including you. You spoke out against his dismissal with characteristic eloquence and passion. And I read it in a posting on the *Times of Israel*. You even went so far as to call Netanyahu's move an affront to Zionism itself. You are preaching to the choir insofar as I'm the choir. So thank you for that wonderful article.

HARTMAN: Thank you.

HOLO: In engaging with my Israeli colleagues, however, I've heard a different kind of critique. Namely that we non-Orthodox, diaspora Jews, we have to pick our fights a little bit more strategically or intentionally. And the argument (inaudible) to say we shouldn't probably invest too heavily in this one, meaning women at the Western Wall. And the two reasons that my Israeli friends and colleagues have cited are the following.

Number one, is that the wall itself, much less any dynamic that is based in its sphere is simply too symbolic to get traction in the real world. It's just utterly symbolic for Israelis. And while the symbolism may have some potency it also lacks a lot of potency in many, many circles.

And the second argument against this investment of our time and resources is that Israelis themselves are not so much offended by either side of the debate as they are uninterested. So I want to ask you, A, if it's an accurate critique. And, B, how do you feel about it?

HARTMAN: I think it's an accurate critique but I think it's irrelevant because it's not addressing the problem. It's true. This is an issue that American Jewry will have difficulty winning. That doesn't mean that it doesn't have to have this fight. Because while the issue might not be critical for Israelis, it is critical for North American Jews. The Kotel is critical for the ability to sustain a North American Zionism. By which I mean a Zionism which doesn't just support Israel but Zionism which wants to have a relationship with Israel. I don't believe that the Kotel is primarily a gender issue. And if it was, then you can ask what are the various gender inequalities going on in Israel and what's the first, second or third, and will this make the top?

HOLO: Right.

HARTMAN: Is this the top three? The top four? It might be because gender equality is a worthwhile issue to fight. Israelis fight it. Israelis have committed- I think this battle is about North American Jews saying does Israel see me. The Kotel, as you said very correctly, it's a symbol. And the critique is it's too symbolic. But symbolisms are critical. Symbolisms are what create community. Flags. You know, what does it mean? You know, as Anderson teaches, we all have imagined communities. We have small little communities. What is it? I forget what the critical number is. What is it? A hundred and forty? Or what's the number where the group actually coheres and it is self-evident and everybody sees each other, and you know each other.

HOLO: And you're seen from the outside as a group.

HARTMAN: That's fine. But the minute you go beyond a hundred and something, you know, I think monkeys stay in these groups. So the minute you go beyond that you basically have imagined communities. Where I have to imagine you and you have to imagine me as part of the same group. So now we have a convention that there's this Jewish people and that the world Jews around the world are one with each other.

Now, you sustain these conventions through symbols. Judaism is very good in symbols in time. Part of what Zionism does is it creates symbols in space. Shabbat is a symbol of a relationship with Judaism or with God. Or Thanksgiving is a symbol of your relationship and your love and thanksgiving to – and thankfulness towards America. We Jews, as we all know, we – all we had was time. So we specialized in symbolic time. So I once counted, there's about 263 Jewish special days a year. Holidays are the speed bumps which connect symbolical connections to Judaism. What Zionism does is it gives Jews a vehicle to connect through space.

HOLO: And place.

HARTMAN: And place. So not just through time. And that's part of the health of Zionism. So here, the Kotel, is one of the more powerful – or Jerusalem. Look at Jerusalem. We're claiming there is a physical symbol.

So part of what happened is that because North American Jews were influenced by Zionism, and in their relationship to Israel they want symbols in place, in space, and physical ones. And this is a success of Zionism. For me, the Kotel is very similar to the symbol of the gay, lesbian parade in Jerusalem. Also a symbol. Parade in Tel Aviv, knock yourself out.

Now to exist in Israel means I march in Jerusalem. The ultra-Orthodox says you can't march in Jerusalem because marching in Jerusalem used to be on Jaffa Street, which is 100 yards from Mishary(*ph*). So initially it said, "Okay, march in the university stadium." So they marched around the 400 meter stadium. And they went back because the police said I can't protect them. They went back to the Supreme Court and said, "This is not my freedom of speech. I want to speak." So the Supreme Court says, "You can march in Jerusalem." Okay, but let's come up with a compromise.

How do you march in Jerusalem in a way that takes into account the various sensibilities? And today there is a march in Jerusalem because here it is. I exist. I'm here. World Jewry is saying to Israel, "I'm willing to support you. I care about you. But I want you to understand you don't just have an ally. I drank the Kool-Aid. I'm part of you. Now part of what I want is do I have a place in Jerusalem? Do I have a place in Judaism's holiest space?" And do you know what was great about this? Because I don't want to take. I'm willing to compromise. I'm not going to go and I'm not going to force you to change. This is going to be a win-win. You're going to have your place. I'm going to stop – you're going to be safe. Could you just agree that from the country's perspective I also have a place? I'm also there.

I think part of what happened is that world Jewry has been saying this slowly over and over. And there was a taste that finally Israel was going to do it. And taking it back is basically saying, "I deny your existence." That is a big issue. The fact that Israelis don't understand that they think this is about the Kotel, they don't understand that this the symbol of whether Israel is a place where all Jews can say...

HOLO: I think it's actually a little bit more of Israeli (inaudible) where they're saying, you're silly for choosing that symbol of diaspora Jews. They like to dismiss - and so they...

HARTMAN: Yeah, but they themselves wear – on (*Hebrew*) for the soldiers...

HOLO: Right. Right.

HARTMAN: So here it is. You're saying, ah, it's a symbol. This is the big symbol. If anybody declares that Jerusalem, that East Jerusalem is not the capital of Israel you have no political power. You lose all political credibility in Israel. So here is it. You're obsessing about this. And you're saying, but on this issue North American Jews don't make...

HOLO: You're just being silly. Right. Right.

HARTMAN: It's duplicitous. I think it's just – doesn't understand the symbols to which – over which Israel is responsible and they fundamentally don't understand world Jewry.

HOLO: So fine. Let's disregard BDS as a movement, as a construct. But let's ask its fundamental question from a Jewish perspective, not from a non-Jewish perspective. And say, okay, Rabbi Hartman just said by virtue of being Jewish, by virtue of giving a damn about Israel we get a seat at the table. We don't get a vote necessarily. We don't send our children to the IDF. Fair enough. But we're not absent.

Okay, I think that's a fair and astute representation of the emotional position of American or diaspora Jewry vis a vie a state of Israel in the land of Israel, and the people. Great. Well, if we're going to get slapped down, the logical next step is for us to consider removing then our resources, and withholding them until such time as that mutuality gets reestablished, especially because we are not pigs. We're not (*Hebrew*) about this. We're not saying that we get to tell you what to do every time an Israeli...

HARTMAN: That's right. This is not a foreign policy.

HOLO: Right. Right. Right. This is not...

HARTMAN: Not telling your kids when to go to war.

HOLO: Exactly.

HARTMAN: One of the strategic questions that North American Jewry has to ask, and it's by the way in every relationship, you know, one of the fundamentals of any couple's therapy is you have to stop trying to be right.

HOLO: Darn.

HARTMAN: And everyone – what do we do? We go to a therapist whose job it is to tell us that they agree that we're right and they're wrong. And that just does – not what it's about. Relationships are not about being right. It's not about winning. It's asking yourself how do you move forward. So I can understand a world Jewry who would want to get divorced from Israel.

HOLO: I'm not even talking about divorce. I'm talking about...

HARTMAN: But I can even understand that. I can understand...

HOLO: Turn over the tables.

HARTMAN: Turn over the tables. Okay. That temper tantrum doesn't build a relationship. And my critique is that it just is – is that it doesn't. And it just feeds into the opposite. Because if somebody said I told you, you know....

HOLO: Right. Right. Right.

HARTMAN: You see. You see. They don't really care. So the ones who win are the enemies of Liberal Jews in Israel who said, "I told you they don't really care."

HOLO: They don't really care.

HARTMAN: What's so interesting is so many of them are anti-Zionists themselves and they're questioning the Zionist credos of Liberal Judaism. I understand it. But it's just not effective.

HOLO: Alright. So you – so I think we probably agree that it's not a good strategy. Even if it comes from a place of long-term commitment and continued love.

HARTMAN: Because it's also – and part of the reason why it's so difficult today is that even though your motivations are different, it aligns with another group of people you're doing the same thing which certain people are doing who are rejecting the validity of the State of Israel. So then, you're...

HOLO: That alignment. I'm... Right. Right.

HARTMAN: You get interpreted in ways that are... It's your own little nuance.

HOLO: And nobody else sees it or understands it (inaudible).

HARTMAN: You were doing a political act that is politically – and you...

HOLO: To yourself even if you let it play itself out.

HARTMAN: Exactly.

HOLO: So if we're going to agree around this table that that step, that tactical step is probably a step too far, then maybe we agree that everything up to that step should be as vigorous and as vociferous, and as loving but committed as possible. I think the Reform Movement does an admirable job of...

HARTMAN: Correct. Now the next stage though, and this is – this is part of my life's work and part of the Reform Movement's in Israel's life's work, and in this we are allies, is that Israel is going to change not through political advocacy alone, but it's going to change through education. We have to change the Israelis. Now we don't have to change all of them. This is what we have to learn from the ultra-Orthodox. Ultra-Orthodox are a dominant force in Israeli political life because they have eight percent who are willing to vote on the issue. We don't need to win. We need 10 percent.

HOLO: Right.

HARTMAN: You want me in a coalition? Well to me in a coalition means A, B, C, and D. That 10, 15 percent is an achievable goal. But it's going to take a generation. And it's not going to happen through legislation and it's not going to happen through – through articles and through protests. It's going to happen through the slow education of a new generation of Israelis.

HOLO: And I'm going to make a plug on this episode because I want the listeners, especially those associated with the Reform Movement, to know that you citizens of the United States, your way to enact Rabbi Hartman's advice is to vote for ARZA and the World's Zionist Organization Elections. It's an indirect way to achieve this but it matters a great deal. This is an example of us being at the table. So I just hijacked your comment Rabbi Hartman. You've been a very gracious...

HARTMAN: It's a good hijack.

HOLO: Alright. About a month or so ago, I don't have the date with me, you posted another piece on the *Times of Israel* also a repudiation of Netanyahu policy. I see a pattern here. I wouldn't presume but – in this case you are excoriating the Prime Minister for his hardened policy towards Israel's 45,000 African refugees. Now, these African refugees had been protected

by the Supreme Court of Israel from being jailed. But the Netanyahu Administration made life difficult for them without – they did a runaround, effectively, the Supreme Court. And you can correct me if you read it differently.

In this context, you made an impassioned plea for Israel's Jewish identity not defined demographically alone, although you make an important consensus on to the important to demography. But in this case the key ingredient for Jewish identity is a spiritual one. It is defined by the dignity of the compassionate. It was a very moving piece. And you should know, for what it's worth, my son who did a semester in Israel with the school, he goes to Jewish high school in Los Angeles, was exposed to this problem. They're sophisticated in this school and they present in Israel. And this was the example he cited for his college essay about a relationship with Israel which is - so it's alive. It matters.

So, having made a powerful and explicit argument for Tikkun Olam, I want to ask you to build in a slightly different direction but take the spirit and answer a question that goes in a slightly different direction which is to ruminate a bit on the state of the balance of powers in the Israeli government, in this case the Executive and Judicial, and its importance in the fabric of Israel's democracy. This is a theme which American Jews care a lot about.

HARTMAN: Right now, there is an ideological battle going on in Israel, cultural battle. In its more extreme form it's whether Israel's going to be a liberal democracy or not, or just a democracy, majoritarian democracy. Liberal democracy is not liberalism. Liberal democracy is the commitment to the rule of the majority which is limited by the inalienable rights, liberties of people.

HOLO: Constitutional.

HARTMAN: Constitutional protections. There are many forces in Israel who want to limit those constitutional protections. That who believe that Israel would be better served by a majoritarian, a simple majority democracy where the majority will understand what's best for Israel. Any inhibitions on that should be removed. Now you advocate very often for this majoritarian democracy, or non-constitutional democracy when you feel that your community is embattled and you have to protect its well-being. The sense is is that the majority knows what it needs to do for its security. And the other issues, the constitutional protections, the liberties which provide inalienable protections for individuals is at the expense of what the community wants and needs.

HOLO: There is some zero sum game going on.

HARTMAN: That's correct. And so part of what's happening, and this is one of the great paradoxes of Israel. Israel is now more powerful than ever before. But it's precisely in the midst of that power that there is a growing discourse of fear. And Israel's not alone in that. All of Western democracy is, including America. And what we've discovered is that all of our constitutional protections aren't working. Fear is overriding many of these constitutional protections. And the population doesn't want to be limited by individuals, the rights of individuals which they believe are threatening the viability, safety, security, well-being of this majority. And so the majority is getting up and saying, "I don't want to. I don't have the strength

now. Now is not the time.”

HOLO: Yeah, yeah, now is not the – that’s right. Now’s not the time.

HARTMAN: Now’s not the time for me to worry about you. Now I have to worry about me. And I speak about this often that fear is not an emotion. It’s a vision modifier. Constitutional rights require that you see – in the Jewish tradition that I feel obligated by. When I walk into public sphere I have to worry about what you need not just about what I need. What fear does is it stops me from seeing you and it directs my feelings towards myself. And it is an evolutionary necessity because if I don’t refocus my vision, my species will disappear. So when I encounter fear, or I experience fear, I either have to...

HOLO: It’s only a necessity when you’re seeing it accurately.

HARTMAN: No.

HOLO: Or the thing that you fear is actually...

HARTMAN: But that doesn’t even matter. In my mind, I will die if I don’t listen to my fear. Because I either need to fight or flight. This is what I have to do when I encounter that fear. So I have to respond. So the minute I experience it, real or imagined, and part of what’s fascinating about our societies how little amounts of terror are actually required. Or in Israel it’s now 38,000 refugees could activate that fear just like that. And part of what’s going on now is that it used to be in Israel that the great protectors of liberal democracy were the Likud Party in the right wing. Because it was the laborites, the socialites, socialists who said, “It’s the larger community. It’s the well-being of the community and the individual should suffer for the...”

HOLO: But Jabotinsky and the Revisionists were very liberal in their protections.

HARTMAN: They were far more – they were the stalwart. They were the ones who stood. And it was...

HOLO: And it was himself also.

HARTMAN: Always Rivlin.

HOLO: And he’s – he’s...

HARTMAN: He used to be mainstream. And it was actually the people from the Labor Party, socialists who said, you know, we know what’s best for the country. And it’s, you know, it’s like – even the Kibbutz Movement, it’s about the community. It’s about the well-being.

HOLO: Serious communal.

HARTMAN: It’s communal. It had the liberal, the individual inalienable rights were secondary.



HOLO: Yeah.

HARTMAN: Now they stood for – now it's switched. And now the group in power is a coalition between far right individuals and the current government, which want to remove these constitutional protections not necessarily because they're going to enact terrible things. They just don't want to be limited because they want the freedom to do what they need to do because Israel's now in an existential danger. Now – now it's an existential danger.

HOLO: Of all the moments.

HARTMAN: Of all the moments. This is the moment where the Supreme Court – this is it. And it – now some of them want it because of the settlement movement. Because...

HOLO: Even because they're lobbied by the settlement.

HARTMAN: Because they're lobbied by the settlement. And they're supporting the settlement movement and they want to be able to build settlements wherever they want to. And the Supreme Court says you can't. You can't build it on private grounds. You can't – there are – are there other issues? Do Palestinians have rights? So all these issues.

So right now the – the reason I wrote about the refugees is it's about the refugees but it's a much larger question. It's who is Israel. Is Israel more Jewish, the more liberal democratic it is, the more we believe as our tradition teaches us that all human beings are created in the image of God, and all human beings make demands upon me. All human beings obligate me. And am I willing to create a society that feels obligated by that? Or am I willing to subsume their rights under some larger self-defense, self-interest principles?

I'll just share with your listeners just one interesting – there's an interesting law in Judaism which says (*Hebrew*) in Hebrew. The poor of your city come first. It's true. When you have to give out charity the poor of your city come first. But under Jewish law the poor of your city includes non-Jews. We're now using the poor of our city is not your city. The poor of your city is not a geographical issue. It's now the Jews. It's now the majority.

HOLO: We're asserting another boundary.

HARTMAN: We're reasserting another boundary. And this – it's the refugees is the test case for me because refugees there is no security in danger. But it's refugees. It's Reform. It's Liberal Judaism. It's gay, lesbian. It's rights. It's the rights of non-Jews in Israel. It's the rights of Palestinians in Judea and Samaria. So all of these – this – we're at a moment of testing Zionism right now. Are we going to be something great? Or are we just going to become just one more mediocre Western democracy that many of them are? You know, very often we're the best democracy in the Middle East. That's not a very high standard. You know, the standards are getting lower.

HOLO: It's a deeper double standard. We as Jews love to be a light unto the nations and special, except when we feel like we're getting scrutiny and all of a sudden, whoa, why are you picking

on Israel. And we want...

HARTMAN: We want to be a light unto the nations but the define ourselves – but not have to get feedback.

HOLO: Right.

HARTMAN: I – I – it's a self-defined light. It's a nice story.

HOLO: It works well.

HARTMAN: And if it works – it's like my mother thinks I'm wonderful, you know. It's a family. We want to reaffirm for ourselves. It's actually – but being a country is a higher standard. And it's – one of the things I love about Israel is that it challenges us. But then we have to meet that challenge.

HOLO: Well, before we end the interview I want to give you an opportunity. On the website your upcoming book is called *Who Are the Jews?* Can you give us a preview?

HARTMAN: I try to understand how our tradition understood what Jewishness means. We had a complex story. And it's a story of a Judaism of being and a Judaism of becoming. And in the book I tell the story of the relationship between the two, or what each – what does the Torah of the Judaism of being? What's the Torah of the Judaism of becoming? How do they compliment each other? And what happens when they're out of balance? And part of what's happening in Jewish life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is that some of this balance is being redefined. And in some cases, as we said at the beginning, there's going to be new boundaries. But it's a story about the essence of Jewishness. But it's not a historical analysis. It's an attempt to create ideas which will help us think and address some of the challenges that we're facing in the future.

HOLO: Well, I look forward to it. And I want to thank you very much for taking the time. It's been a real pleasure.

HARTMAN: It's been a pleasure. Thank you very, very much.

HOLO: Until the next time.

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