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A Jewish Purpose: Claiming Your Link in the Chain

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the October 7th massacre, in which over 1,200 Israelis—primarily Jews—were murdered and 240 civilians taken captive, the global Jewish community was left grappling with difficult questions. How did this happen? Why wasn't the Israeli army better prepared? How long had this attack been in the making? Yet, in the days that followed, I found myself asking a different question: What responsibility do diaspora Jews have to the Jewish people in Israel? Are we obligated to advocate, provide financial or material aid, mourn, amplify their voices, educate others, combat misinformation, fight antisemitism, or protest for the return of the captives?

Seeking answers, I turned to the broader question of Jewish responsibility—both to fellow Jews around the world and to the survival of the Jewish people. I chose to explore this issue through the lens of two renowned Jewish philosophers: Mordecai Kaplan and David Hartman. Both thinkers were deeply committed to ensuring Jewish continuity, making responsibility a central theme in their work.

In the first chapter, I examine Kaplan's perspective and how his ideology was shaped by the era in which he lived. At the turn of the 20th century, he witnessed monumental social, political, and economic shifts in Europe and North America that reshaped Jewish life. As Jews gained greater access to civil society, Kaplan sought to define the responsibilities they must uphold to preserve their identity while embracing modernity. In *Judaism as a Civilization*, he reimagined Judaism not solely as a religion but as a dynamic civilization, ensuring its survival in an ever-evolving world. Throughout the chapter, I identify three core responsibilities drawn from his writings that emphasize the role of the individual in sustaining Jewish continuity.

Hartman, by contrast, developed his philosophy in response to the defining events of his lifetime—the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the 1967 Six-Day War. In the second chapter, I reflect on how these experiences shaped his understanding of Jewish peoplehood and the responsibilities that come with it. Grounding his vision in the biblical covenant made at Sinai, Hartman believed that a Jew's obligation to the broader Jewish people is intrinsic to their identity. From an early age, he grasped the magnitude of this covenant and its continuing significance. In *A Heart of Many Rooms*, he explored Jewish peoplehood through a lens of diversity, arguing that the strength of the Jewish future lies in its members and continued engagement.

Both Kaplan and Hartman offer insights into the nature of Jewish responsibility, providing frameworks for understanding what it means to be part of a people bound by history, faith, and shared destiny. As we continue to grapple with these questions today, their ideas remain as relevant as ever, challenging and inspiring us to define our commitments to one another in an ever-changing world.

CHAPTER I

Mordecai Kaplan

Introduction

Mordecai Kaplan devoted his life to ensuring the survival and vitality of the Jewish people in an ever-changing world. Confronted with the challenges of modernity, assimilation, and shifting communal structures, he sought to redefine Jewish identity in a way that could endure beyond traditional religious frameworks. His work, *Judaism as a Civilization*, offered a vision in which Judaism was not solely a faith but an evolving civilization.

At the core of Kaplan's philosophy was a sense of responsibility—one that extended beyond personal belief or practice to a collective commitment to Jewish continuity. He outlined three fundamental responsibilities that every Jew, regardless of religious observance or ideology, must uphold. Throughout this chapter, I will summarize the following responsibilities: fostering and preserving Jewish consciousness across generations, maintaining ongoing interaction with fellow Jews, and ensuring continuous Jewish education. These responsibilities, he believed, were essential to the survival of Jewish civilization, serving as the threads that wove together a diverse and ever-expanding people.

Kaplan's approach was both pragmatic and forward-looking. He did not simply call for a return to the past; rather, he examined the realities of Jewish life in the modern world and identified the key elements necessary to preserve a strong and dynamic Jewish future. This chapter explores Kaplan's vision of Jewish responsibility, examining how his ideas sought to cultivate a strong and enduring Jewish identity. By understanding his approach to Jewish

continuity, we can better appreciate the ways in which his philosophy continues to inform contemporary conversations about Jewish identity, community, and the obligations we hold toward one another as a people.

Historical Context

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Jewish life underwent a transformation. For centuries, Jews had lived in isolated communities, sometimes referred to as 'ghetto' separated from broader society—not necessarily by choice, but by the restrictions imposed by the surrounding non-Jewish population. In Christian Europe, theological prejudice was deeply ingrained; many Christians viewed Jews as "Christ-killers" or religiously inferior, which fueled mistrust and hostility. Jews also were governed by discriminatory laws, faced limited occupational choices, and restrictions on cultural and social participation, and were generally regarded with disdain by Christians. However, as Europe underwent changes in economics, politics, social structures, and ideology at the close of the eighteenth century, the fabric of Jewish life and social existence was forever altered. According to Jacob Katz in *Out of the Ghetto*, "Nowhere was life affected more deeply than in the Jewish community, which existed among these nations and was regarded until then as apart from the rest."[1]

As Jews became integrated members of society, a new chapter in Jewish life opened. Although the specifics of this transformation varied from place to place, there was a widespread shift toward granting Jews naturalization and citizenship rights. On the surface, this seemed extraordinary—a long-awaited dream for many Jews to finally enjoy equal rights and

[1] Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Syracuse University Press, 1998), 1.

opportunities alongside their neighbors. This new life was on the horizon, promising economic benefits, better social dynamics, and a fundamental shift in the Jewish community's way of life. However, when put into practice, the impact on the Jewish community, its traditions, and its engagement was worrisome. Was keeping Jewish ritual consistent with being a full participant in civil society? As, Katz noted,

> The expectation that Jews would undertake manual occupations and venture into agriculture raised the further question of their ability to do so without coming into conflict with Jewish religious precepts. The same question arose with regard to the duties to the state that citizenship would impose upon the Jew. Would he be able to serve in the army when it entailed desecrating the Sabbath or violating the dietary laws?[2]

Some "traditionalists" according to Katz, "viewed the changes in Jewish and non-Jewish society as nothing short of catastrophic."[3]

Most Jews were not "traditionalists" and found themselves in a new reality brimming with opportunities for social and cultural engagement beyond traditional boundaries. This newfound landscape sparked their eagerness to explore what life had to offer, often drawing them away from their usual participation in Jewish communal settings. For Jewish leaders and thinkers, the challenge became one of competition for their attention: how could the Jewish community foster connections to tradition and present compelling reasons for remaining active community members?

One of such thinkers was Mordecai Kaplan, known for his vision of sustaining Jewish identity in a changing culture. His influential work, *Judaism as a Civilization*, reimagines Judaism as an evolving religious civilization. Kaplan envisioned a role for all Jews—traditional and liberal, religious and secular—in a "reconstruction of Judaism" as it confronted the realities

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[2] Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Syracuse University Press, 1998*),* 61.

[3] Katz, *Out of the Ghetto,*142.

of the post-Enlightenment world. He hoped to foster a dynamic and inclusive Jewish community that could thrive amid modern challenges.

It is no surprise that Mordecai Kaplan embraced the role of Jewish leader and innovator. As the son of Rabbi Israel Kaplan (1913-1985)—a renowned Talmudic scholar ordained by the leading Lithuanian Jewish luminaries and a judge in the *beit din* of the "Chief Rabbi" Jacob Joseph (1848-1902)[4] in New York City—he was steeped in Jewish texts and teachings. His parents, however, also encouraged him to engage socially and intellectually with the broader world, enabling him to explore relationships and ideas outside the Jewish community. Kaplan wrote in his diary, "Moreover, I had by that time done considerable study and thinking in the field of anthropology and sociology. Though those studies undermined the conception of religion as a supernatural intervention in human life, they prepared the way for evaluating religion as a normal and indispensable expression of human nature."[5]

This exposure to diverse perspectives motivated Kaplan to investigate modern approaches to Jewish identity, blending tradition with contemporary thought, during his education at Jewish and secular institutions. He pursued his traditional Jewish education at Etz Chaim Yeshiva and later at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), where he received his Rabbinic ordination. His secular studies took him to the City College of New York (CCNY) and Columbia University, where he studied philosophy, sociology, and education. Reflecting on his parents' influence, prominent scholars in the field of American Jewish history, Jeffrey

[4] Rabbi Jacob Joseph was born in Kovno, Lithuania, in 1848. He studied under Rabbi Hirsch Berlin and later became the magid (communal preacher) of Vilna, Poland. In 1888, he immigrated to New York with the goal of uniting the Orthodox Ashkenazi community under a centralized leadership. He is remembered as the first and only "Chief Rabbi" of New York City. However, his authority was not universally accepted, as some synagogues resisted his leadership. Despite these challenges, he played a key role in establishing a European-style Orthodox community in New York, complete with rabbinic leadership and a rabbinic court.

[5] Quoted in Jeffrey S. Gurock and Jacob J. Schacter, *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community: Mordecai M. Kaplan, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 32-33.

Gurock and Jacob Schacter, cite Kaplan's diaries where he opened up about his parents, "If not for them, he 'might have gone into the study of law or medicine or worked my up in business, but my parents 'heart, especially mother's, was set upon my becoming a rabbi because in that calling I would be leading a Jewish life, and furthering the spiritual welfare of my people."[6] And further, Kaplan's choice to remain committed to the cause of the Jewish people did not stop him from continuing to educate himself in contemporary sociology. According to Kaplan's biographer Mel Scult, "His goal was ever before him. He wanted to help create a Jewish civilization that would be an integral part of the modern world."[7]

To achieve this vision, Kaplan needed to design a framework to make it possible. He identified Judaism's essential elements to preserve and developed compelling arguments for their relevance, as many Jews distanced themselves from tradition. His ultimate aim was, said Gurock and Schachter, "to show the need for and to point the way toward an integration of the Jews in American life without the disintegration of Judaism as a distinctive civilization."[8]

Kaplan on Jewish Responsibility

From a young age, Kaplan felt a responsibility for the Jewish people. Reflecting on his early years, he remarked, "by the time I was twelve I was already eager to serve the cause of our people."[9] In *Judaism as a Civilization,* Kaplan explored what it meant to do just that. He

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[6] Mordecai Kaplan interview with the *Intermountain Jewish News* 63, no. 21 (May 21, 1976):28, quoted in Gurock and Schacter, *A Modern Heretic*, 21.
[7] Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 369-370.
[8] Jeffrey S. Gurock and Jacob J. Schacter, *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community: Mordecai M. Kaplan, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 34.
[9] Mordecai Kaplan interview with the *Intermountain Jewish News* 63, no. 21 (May 21, 1976):28, quoted in Jeffrey

suggested various responsibilities that the community must uphold to ensure its continued success and vitality. He highlighted three: fostering and preserving Jewish consciousness across generations, ongoing interaction with fellow Jews, and ensuring life-long Jewish education for each generation.

Fostering and Preserving Jewish Consciousness

In *Judaism as a Civilization*, Kaplan consistently returned to the importance of a Jew's collective and individual consciousness. Following the French sociologist Amele Durkheim, he defines Jewish collective consciousness as the living energy of the Jewish people: "We must behold Judaism... not in any one doctrine or sum of doctrines but in the innermost life force which has vitalized the Jewish people."[10] Kaplan defined Jewish collective consciousness as the coming together of individuals immersed in Jewish culture. According to Kaplan, Jewish culture is made up of: "the synagogue, the Hebrew language, the Zionist movement, Jewish education or even student societies."[11] Note here that Kaplan stressed the multi-dimensional ways that one may arrive at Jewish consciousness, not just one way. He elaborated on these methods for fostering Jewish consciousness, urging every Jew to internalize Jewish culture.

Involvement in one's synagogue, which promotes public worship, Torah study, and Jewish education, is one way for an individual to internalize the Jewish people's consciousness: "Public worship is a means of giving a people that collective consciousness which unifies its life

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S. Gurock and Jacob J. Schacter, *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community: Mordecai M. Kaplan, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 21.

[10] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Kaplan Journal, January 13, 1914*, in *Communings of the Spirit: The Journals of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, ed. Mel Scult (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 63, quoted in Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), iii.

[11] Mordecai Kaplan to Henry Hurwitz, January 20, 1918. Hurwitz Papers, American Jewish Archives, quoted in Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), iii.

and integrates all of its individuals into an organized totality."[12] And when an individual Jew does this to others, the community's collective energy is unique and difficult to replicate in any other way. This collective act—a union of hearts yearning for self-realization, justice, healing, and companionship—awakens an awareness of the social glue that binds the Jewish people.

For Kaplan, the uniqueness of Jewish prayer lies in its repetitive evocation of our shared ancestry. The Amidah, the central prayer of every Jewish service, begins by invoking the names of the patriarchs—and in many liberal prayer communities today, such as Reform and Conservative synagogues, the matriarchs as well. Kaplan noted, "This practice reflects a 'consciousness of kind,' a deep sense of connection rooted in our common national ancestry."[13] However, prayer can also serve as a way for the individual Jewish consciousness to become awakened. Kaplan summarized the words of Anglo-Jewish educator Laurie Magnus in his, "Religio Laici Judaica: The Faith of a Jewish Layman":

> A certain element of uniformity is necessary, because it is the very purpose of worship to arouse a feeling of common consciousness…. Public worship meets two essential needs of human nature: the need for selecting and retaining those aspects of reality that make life significant, and the need for identifying oneself with a community which aspires to make life significant.[14]

Therefore, participating in synagogue worship is a meaningful way to foster and preserve collective and individual Jewish consciousness.

Kaplan asserted that the Hebrew language is also a powerful means for cultivating and absorbing Jewish consciousness. He argued:

> A language enables the individuals of a nation to enter into communication with one another and, at the same time, develops in each a consciousness of his people as distinct

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[12] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 346.
[13] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 32.
[14] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 347.

> from other peoples or of his people's otherness. Whereas a common land is an indispensable condition to a civilization, a common language is an indispensable vehicle of a civilization, and the most conspicuous element in it.[15]

Today, the use of Hebrew varies significantly depending on location. In the State of Israel, it is used in everyday interactions. In places such as Europe and the United States, Hebrew is primarily used in Jewish prayer settings or Hebrew language courses. Many synagogues offer Hebrew education for children, either on weekends or weekday afternoons. These programs focus on foundational Hebrew skills, from learning the Aleph Bet to conversational modern Hebrew. They often incorporate Hebrew into the synagogue environment, referring to spaces and people in Hebrew, to make the language more engaging and relevant. For example, teachers may be called 'מורה' (*morah/moreh*), and classrooms are referred to as 'כיתה' (*kitah*).

Despite these differences in usage, a shared vernacular persists across time and space, connecting Jewish communities worldwide. In this vain, Kaplan believed that "if the synagogue were to substitute the vernacular for the Hebrew, the Jews of one country could not unite in worship with the Jews of another."[16] He argued that Jews should maintain Hebrew usage even in places where it is not used as the. Kaplan drew on the words of Israel Zangwill, a prominent British author and leading Zionist of the nineteenth century, to underscore the vital role of a shared language:

> A language thus helps to keep alive the collective consciousness of a people. In the words of Zangwill: 'Language is the chief index of life. As no man is dead so long as the mirror put to his lips reveals a breath, so no race is extinct so long as there comes from its lips the breath of speech. A people that speaks is not dead; a people that is not dead speaks.[17]

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[15] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 190.
[16] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 348.
[17] Zangwill, Israel: "Language and Jewish Life," *The Voice of Jerusalem,* 245, quoted in Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 191.

Kaplan also believed that Zionism—the pursuit of a secure national homeland for the Jewish people—also strengthened Jewish consciousness. Kaplan wrote that the "Zionist movement has reclaimed Jewish womanhood and Jewish youth for an interest not alone in the rebuilding of Palestine, but in all matters Jewish. The Hadassah organization is noted for its success in arousing thousands of American-Jewish women to a sense of responsibility to the Jewish people, no less than for its effective health work in Palestine."[18] Here, Kaplan argued that the pursuit of a political goal awakened individual Jewish consciousness and unified it in community. This resonance was particularly strong for women and children. Traditionally, women held less outward-facing roles within Jewish religious life, but Zionism offered them an opportunity to take on significant responsibility in shaping a brighter future for the Jewish people. Engaging Jewish youth in the pursuit of Zionism was also an essential strategy, guaranteeing the next generation's involvement and the continuity of Jewish identity and purpose.

Beyond the upbuilding of Palestine, Zionism had the potential to transform Jewish life the world over. Kaplan wrote:

> if it were not for the fructifying effect of the interest in the upbuilding of Palestine, the work of the communal centers, synagogues, philanthropic and educational institutions might have gone on, but it would have become soulless and spiritless. As evidence of Zionism's power to supply Jewish life with new inspiration and vigor, we might point to the fact that Jews who had become totally alienated from Jewish life have for the first time found themselves spiritually, and are giving the best of their thought and energy to the Palestinian movement.[19]

Collective Jewish consciousness flourishes when a group of people shares a common hope and

[18] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 66.
[19] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 66.

vision for the future.

Kaplan reflected on Palestine as it was during the Biblical era, a time when the land was inhabited by Jews. He argued that without Palestine, the Jewish people could never have developed into a nation with a unified culture and collective consciousness:

> The Jewish people has always been highly conscious of its relationship to the land where it developed its national life. It did not accept that relationship casually, after the fashion of most nations. Unlike the other ancient peoples, it never considered itself autochthonous; it never forgot that it came to the land from elsewhere, and that only in the land did it begin to function as a nation.[20]

Kaplan was able to witness the birth of the State of Israel and its first thirty-five years of growth before his death and he would likely be intrigued by the vibrant culture that has flourished in modern Israel. And simultaneously, while Israeli culture has indeed spread to Jewish communities worldwide, places like America have simultaneously developed their unique expressions of Jewish culture.

Ongoing Interaction with Other Jews

Kaplan asserted that, in addition to fostering and preserving Jewish consciousness across generations, Jews should also feel a responsibility to interact regularly with their fellow Jews in the here and now. In emphasizing this responsibility, he noted that the survival of Jewish life doesn't depend on unity among Jews or uniformity in Jewish practice but rather on regular interaction. He cited a sociologist who compared the family unit to the Jewish people: "The family does not depend for its survival," wrote University of Chicago professor E. W. Burgess, "on the harmonious relations of its members, nor does it necessarily disintegrate as a result of conflicts between its members. The family lives as long as interaction is taking place and only

[20] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 264.

dies when it ceases."[21] In today's Jewish world, this call for continued engagement is more crucial than ever. As division deepens within the Jewish people—stemming from differences in religious observance, political views on Israel and their countries of residence, levels of assimilation, language, culture, and denominational affiliation —many Jews have distanced themselves or have begun avoiding interactions with those with whom they disagree. Kaplan urged us to persist in our connections, despite these differences, maintaining dialogue within the Jewish community. Building on this idea, he wrote, "But one thing is certain: The sooner Jews will come to think of that which unites them as a civilization, the sooner will they overcome the process of disorganization which is reducing them to the status of a human detritus, the rubble of a once unique society."[22]

Kaplan's understanding of Jewish pluralism and social life was influenced by his father, according to Gurock and Schacter, "Israel Kaplan believed that he had much to discuss with all types of Jews-including the religiously radical. It bothered his wife, Anna Kaplan, particularly as it involved her son, Mordecai Kaplan."[23] However, despite Anna's feelings, Mordecai's years of observing his father led him to adopt a similar approach. For example, "even if Kaplan no longer walked with God in the traditional sense of the word, he clearly liked strolling among and interacting with Orthodox Jews…and their community bespoke a kinship with traditional Judaism that Kaplan, in actuality, no longer possessed."[24] This was particularly salient, given

[21] E. W. Burgess, "The Family as a Unity of Interacting Personalities," *Family,* March 1926, VII, 4, quoted in Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 223.
[22] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 224.
[23] Jeffrey S. Gurock and Jacob J. Schacter, *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community: Mordecai M. Kaplan, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 9.
[24] Jeffrey S. Gurock and Jacob J. Schacter, *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community: Mordecai M. Kaplan, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 62.

Kaplan's complex relationship with Orthodox Judaism, which he struggled with both in practice and theology during his formative years. Though he broke away ideologically, he still managed to stay connected, showing a respect for tradition and community while reimagining Jewish life in ways that moved beyond Orthodoxy. From a young age, the ability to stay in relation with all types of Jews, despite their differences, was important to him. According to Scult, Kaplan believed "Judaism should have at its core the sense of a common past. Focusing on this sense of a shared historical experience would allow the Jews to be traditional or Reform and yet continue to identify with one another."[25]

Lifelong Learning

The transmission of Jewish content, cultural or religious, was integral to Kaplan's idea of Jewish responsibility. Kaplan envisioned lifelong Jewish education across generations as a way to ensure confidence in the continuity of the Jewish people. He believed: "Before all else, the parent who gives his child a Jewish training wants his child to grow up as a Jew."[26] Therefore, education—"training"—is what led to Jewish continuity. The relationship between parent and child was an important aspect of continued Jewish education. According to Kaplan, the characteristics and focus of the home are directly linked to the success of shaping a child's Jewish identity. He argued, that "no religion was as successful as Judaism in making the home a training school for virtue. The influence of the home life extended to all other activities and relationships."[27] Kaplan himself admitted that, without his parents' encouragement, he, "might

[25] Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 90.
[26] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 58.
[27] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 106.

have gone into the study of law or medicine or worked my way up in business, but my parents' heart, especially mother's, was set upon my becoming a rabbi because in that calling I would be leading a Jewish life, and furthering the spiritual welfare of my people." [28]

Kaplan emphasized the influence that parents naturally exert within the home on the continuity of Judaism. When deciding to raise a family, Jewish parents take on the responsibility for caring for more than an isolated unit, but rather a larger collective—the Jewish people. For Kaplan asserted that "the first encounter of the individual with the community takes place in the narrow environment of the home, which exercises its influence for good by transmitting to the child not universal concepts and loyalties but a specific tradition or social heritage."[29] While a child may learn universal concepts outside the home, understanding their historical context and unique place in the world can only be conveyed through the lens of their ancestry, a perspective imparted by their parents within the home. Kaplan claimed: "It is there that the principal Jewish habits and Jewish values should be transmitted from one generation to the other. Therefore, whatever touches upon Judaism as a way of life has a bearing upon the Jewish home."[30]

[28] Mordecai Kaplan interview with the *Intermountain Jewish News* 63, no. 21 (May 21, 1976):28, quoted in Jeffrey S. Gurock and Jacob J. Schacter, *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community: Mordecai M. Kaplan, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 21.
[29] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 342.
[30] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 416.

Why Continuity?

At the heart of Kaplan's ideas on Jewish responsibility lies a commitment to Jewish continuity. His three key responsibilities—fostering and preserving Jewish consciousness across generations, maintaining ongoing interaction with fellow Jews, and ensuring continuous Jewish education—are all fundamentally tied to the continuity of the Jewish people. This begs the question of why Jewish continuity is such a crucial aspect of Jewish responsibility? Some might assume this arises from the repeated attempts throughout history to eradicate the Jewish people. From slavery in Egypt and the destruction of the First and Second Temples, the Crusades, the Holocaust, and contemporary Islamic extremism, Jews have faced continuous attempts by external forces to erase their identity and existence. However, Kaplan's book clearly emphasizes maintaining Jewish peoplehood through tangible means, such as preserving tradition, rather than relying on physical defenses. His focus on Jewish continuity stemmed more from the external dynamics and how individuals engage with these forces. While Kaplan supported the creation of a Jewish state to ensure the security and sovereignty of the Jewish people, he also believed it was equally essential for Jews living outside the state to sustain their culture and identity through active engagement within their unique communities.

When Kaplan wrote *Judaism as a Civilization*, Judaism in the diaspora was grappling with its place in the world. Specifically, Jews in North America faced pressure to assimilate into the non-Jewish American population. Accompanying the newfound freedoms of everyday life came a natural distancing from their unique historical tradition and peoplehood. Scult summarized this quandary:

> Many asked themselves, "Why remain Jewish?" Their religious leaders had to offer a compelling answer for those on the road to assimilation. Educated people often found that

> their beliefs concerning ethics and other ultimate issues were the same as those of others of their class and education. So, what was the necessity for different religions? Why not just the dominant religion if there was to be any at all?[31]

Kaplan responded to this challenge, in the words of Kaplan's rabbinical contemporary Max Arzt,

> If progress means further complexity and differentiation, religion must be many to satisfy man's needs. Religion will be one and universal insofar as it will be identified more and more with the experience of life's momentousness and worthwhileness. It will be many and multiform insofar as different individuals and groups look to different sancta as symbols of life's worthwhileness.[32]

In simple terms, the quest to find meaning in life is universal, but human beings differ in how they conduct that search. Here, we witness how Kaplan approached the matter of Jewish continuity. He recognized the importance of helping Jews discover what makes Judaism meaningful to them, inspiring Jewish institutions to focus on those personal connections. In this way, the Jewish people would remain loyal to their four-thousand-year-old tradition and would feel a sense of responsibility to preserve it for future generations. According to Kaplan, the role of the American Jewish religious leader at this point was, "to show the need for and to point the way toward an integration of the Jews in American life without the disintegration of Judaism as a distinctive civilization."[33]

Kaplan argued that "The Jew to be a true American must be a better Jew. This means that he must belong to a Jewish community where the ideals, by means of which he is to help mold American life, are to be developed. To be a Jew means to participate in some form of Jewish

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[31] Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 345.
[32] Max Arzt, "Dr. Kaplan's Philosophy of Judaism," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America, Thirty-fifth Annual Convention at Rockaway Park, N.Y. May 12-15, 1935* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly of America, 1939), 206, quoted in Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 345.
[33] Jeffrey S. Gurock and Jacob J. Schacter, *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community: Mordecai M. Kaplan, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 34.

community life where the standards of right and wrong are to be clearly formulated and accepted."[34] Here, we see Kaplan's strategy for integrating American life with Jewish life. He believed that for Jews to successfully become part of American society, they first needed to be active members of a Jewish community. The two are interconnected, contributing to the creation of a well-rounded, productive society of responsible individuals. Kaplan's argument is rooted in the idea that Americans need a community of leaders and peers for inspiration, role models, and support in their daily lives, which in turn enables them to contribute meaningfully to civil society. He maintained that "Jewish social consciousness is the aim and individual character development is the means."[35] Kaplan believed that only by cultivating Jewish identity and living according to Jewish values could Jews develop the moral character and social consciousness necessary to be exemplary citizens, contributing to their own community and the wider civil community.

Kaplan wrote about how the Jewish community should provide opportunities for character development and Jewish interaction. He believed that the first step in building a Jewish community should not be prayer:

> I have learned from experience that it would be futile to expect you to organize along congregational lines, and to make worship the main purpose of your association. You are not ready for that as yet. You have to know each other better, and it is the problem of how you are to know one another better that you ought first to undertake to meet. You ought to constitute yourselves a neighborhood association, with the only aim of broadening your lives through mutual acquaintances. You ought to take your pleasures together.[36]

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[34] Horace Kallen, "Nationalist and the Hyphenated America," *Menorah Journal* 1 (April 1915): 779-86, quoted in Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 133-134.

[35] Kaplan journal, June 29, 1916 quoted in Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 137.

[36] *YMHA Bulletin*, November 1913, p. 11 quoted in Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 134.

Kaplan believed that religion emerges from communal life but does not create it. A group that only worshiped together without shared activities would not last. This idea resonates strongly in today's communities, where synagogues are in decline.[37] This decline in synagogue attendance was due in part to the transformation of the synagogue "from the sole institution in which nearly all communal functions took place to an entity focused primarily on worship and on children's education."[38] Kaplan, presciently, suggested alternative strategies to create and sustain Jewish community outside of prayer. He stated the following: "It must come to the assistance of the Jew: first, by obtaining for him a place in the sun; secondly, by helping him make his social and economic adjustments; thirdly, by imparting to him cultural values and habits which can make his life significant." [39] Essentially, Kaplan believes the leaders of Jewish communities today should spend their efforts more on helping their members secure a stable and respected position in society, assisting them in adapting to social and economic challenges, and providing them with cultural values and practices that give their lives meaning.

One way to build this type of community is through ongoing Jewish education, which Kaplan identified as the third key responsibility of the Jewish people. In Kaplan's words, "The continuity of Judaism is maintained so long as the knowledge of Israel's past functions as an integral part of the Jew's personal memory, and is accompanied by some visible form or action symbolic of that fact." [40] This memory of the Jewish past is created through education on

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[37] In 1999, Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg and his late son, Jonathan J. Greenberg wrote, "The last three decades have been a bear market for shuls [synagogues]. Membership and participation rates have dropped significantly. Complaints of boredom and irrelevance fill the air. Shul life has been criticized for excessive factionalism and small-mindedness…" Rabbi Yitz Greenberg and J.J. Greenberg, "The Synagogue: A Time for Tearing Down & a Time for Building Up," in Edgar M. Bronfman, *A New Synagogue for a New Era*, *Contact* 2 (Autumn 1999), 3.
[38] Marc Lee Raphael, *The Synagogue in America: A Short History* (New York: NYU Press, 2011)
[39] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 285.
[40] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 514.

Judaism's history and what constituted its formation. Kaplan continued, "This involves educating the Jew into a clear understanding of his position in the world, both materially and spiritually, and getting him to meet his difficulties with intelligence and courage."[41] Kaplan recognized that for an individual to grasp what it means to be Jewish in the modern world, they must first understand what it meant to be Jewish from the very beginning.

At the heart of Kaplan's commitment to Jewish continuity was a deep desire for Jewish individuals to lead meaningful lives as engaged citizens in broader society, grounded in the belief that this success is only possible when Judaism plays an integral role in their lives. As he emphasized in the conclusion of *Judaism as a Civilization,* "He hopes that their hearts will be set upon so revitalizing their social heritage, so reconstructing their mode of life, so conditioning their future, that the Jewish people might become once more a source of spiritual self-realization to the individual Jew."[42] We can conclude that for Kaplan, preserving Judaism was not a self-serving endeavor but a pursuit aimed at ensuring the success of his people and his country. He believed that without the continuation of Jewish tradition, the Jewish people risked becoming lost, deprived of meaning, and unable to achieve their highest potential in this life.

Applying Kaplan's Vision: A Personal Perspective

Kaplan's three key responsibilities for all Jews—cultivating Jewish consciousness across generations, engaging with fellow Jews, and promoting lifelong Jewish education—align with his ultimate goal of preserving Jewish solidarity in a society increasingly pulling away from it. I

[41] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 297-298.
[42] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 514.

particularly appreciate Kaplan's pragmatic approach to these responsibilities. Rather than setting lofty, unattainable goals for Jews and Jewish communities, he surveyed the societal landscape and developed realistic, achievable responsibilities that resonated with the current reality.

Kaplan's focus on preservation instead of change, emphasized the conservative elements of his thinking even as he innovated in all the ways I describe below. He sought to uphold Jewish collective consciousness as Jews began to explore activities and relationships beyond their traditional sphere. He believed that if he could motivate them to sustain their Jewish identity, even as they ventured beyond their familiar boundaries, they would not completely sever their ties to Judaism. Instead, they would have the opportunity to weave their Jewish heritage into their new, acculturated way of life. One of the ways he hoped to maintain Jewish identity was to encourage Jews to live near other Jews. Kaplan noted, "The inevitable and frequent contact of Jew with Jew, which out of living in the same neighborhood, must lead to the intensification of Jewish life, since it gives rise to institutions and organizations which inevitably reinforce whatever like-mindedness the Jews brought with them."[43]

In suggesting that Jewish consciousness could be preserved through Hebrew language and prayer, Kaplan chose practices that could be easily integrated into the new modern life for Jews. He understood that as they settled in the United States, they would be exposed to the common practice amongst their Christian neighbors to attend weekly worship. By encouraging the retention of Jewish prayer, Kaplan provided a way for Jews to feel connected to the broader society by participating in prayer services of their own, albeit in a different vernacular. While Christians would attend church on Sunday to honor their Sabbath, Jews would observe their Sabbath by attending synagogue on Friday evening or Saturday.

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[43] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 49.

Similarly, he viewed the Hebrew language as something that could be learned like any other language taught in the school system. However, one challenge with this approach is that Hebrew has no utility outside of the Jewish community, whereas languages like Spanish might be more universally practical, offering connections with a broader society. Jewish parents thus would be more likely to prioritize teaching their children Spanish or other widely spoken languages—as has been the case over the last century. Yet, in choosing to learn Hebrew, parents would make a deliberate effort to preserve Jewish consciousness for future generations, reinforcing their commitment to sustaining Jewish identity and tradition in an evolving world. For American Jews, the Hebrew language also serves as a link to the State of Israel, where Hebrew is the primary spoken language and a cornerstone of national identity. Learning Hebrew enables American Jews to engage more deeply with Israeli culture, literature, and society, fostering a stronger connection to the Jewish homeland and the Jews living there. Furthermore, this connection reinforces the global solidarity of the Jewish people, bridging geographic and cultural divides.

Kaplan's second responsibility, to maintain ongoing interaction with fellow Jews, remains relevant. When Jews live in communities where others share their heritage, they are more likely to be exposed to Jewish experiences and build connections within the Jewish community. Conversely, if Jews choose to live in isolated areas without a surrounding Jewish presence, the responsibility falls entirely on them as individuals to create and sustain Jewish life on their own. However, the choice of where to live has historically been a sensitive issue for American Jews. Many sought economic opportunities in less populated areas, striving for independence, while also rejecting the idea of living in "ghettos" that confined Jewish life in earlier eras. For American Jews, the freedom to choose where to live was a core aspect of

embracing American ideals of autonomy and self-determination. While it was possible to live near other Jews while also pursuing economic opportunities, balancing both goals often posed a significant challenge.

The responsibility of "ongoing interaction with fellow Jews" doesn't necessarily mean constant communication. To me, it can refer to the simple act of passing other Jews on the street or shopping at the same stores. This form of interaction doesn't require deep conversations but offers opportunities for future connections and a sense of belonging. If these interactions continue, there remains a chance for peoplehood to flourish. These brief, everyday encounters can serve as gateways to increased participation in the Jewish community. Encountering the same Jewish person on their way to synagogue or shopping for Shabbat dinner can spark awareness and serve as a gentle reminder of one's own Jewish identity. Over time, these moments may inspire greater engagement and curiosity about one's Jewish identity, helping to strengthen the bonds of peoplehood. Without such interaction, even the opportunity for connection vanishes.

Moreover, interacting with Jews who practice differently from us is especially valuable—it highlights the diversity within our tradition and offers fresh perspectives on our own beliefs and practices. These encounters challenge us to reflect on why we do what we do—why we don't keep Shabbat, or why we choose to keep kosher—and encourage us to explore our choices more deeply. These interactions can introduce us to new traditions, inspire further exploration of our faith, and strengthen our bonds with fellow Jews. Even brief interactions open our eyes to the vast spectrum of Jewish life, deepening our understanding of the tradition and the people it connects

Kaplan's third responsibility, "lifelong learning," is a fitting response to the need to

continue Judaism's 4,000-year-old tradition. Historically, Jewish culture has always valued reading sacred texts and ongoing learning. Kaplan recognized that our tradition is meant to be continuously studied, debated, and drawn upon for inspiration in contemporary life. This was evident in his desire to find new, innovative ways for Jewish individuals to connect to Jewish learning in modern-day America. Teaching our history and sacred Biblical text reminds observant and non-observant Jews of their ties to this thousand-year tradition. It reminds them of their link in the tradition and hopefully inspires them to contribute to their rich historical tradition. Lifelong learning sustains the transmission of our rich history, customs, and values, such as holiday practices, daily prayers, and ethical principles. Through this commitment to learning, each generation renews its connection to Judaism's legacy, ensuring that it remains vibrant and relevant.

CHAPTER II

David Hartman

Introduction

Rabbi David Hartman argued that Jewish solidarity should not be defined by persecution but by the covenant forged at Sinai. "We will mourn forever because of the memory of Auschwitz," he wrote, "We will build a healthy new society because of the memory of Sinai."[44] Rather than shaping a spiritual vision around tragedy and loss, he sought to build one grounded in hope, connection, and the Torah. For Hartman, Jewish unity is not born from suffering but from the enduring covenant that has bound the Jewish people together for generations.

In this chapter, I will examine Hartman's life and the historical moments that shaped his ideas, including the Holocaust, the founding of the State of Israel, the Six-Day War, and his decision to make *aliyah*. I will analyze how these experiences influenced his understanding of covenant and Jewish solidarity, particularly his belief that Jewish unity should be rooted in Sinai rather than in collective trauma. I will also compare his ideas to those of Mordecai Kaplan, whose Reconstructionist philosophy redefined Jewish identity through a civilizational lens.

Additionally, I will explore Hartman's interpretation of covenant and its implications for Jewish peoplehood, considering how his vision challenges contemporary debates on religious pluralism and the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora. Finally, from my perspective in 2025, I will reflect on the relevance of Hartman's teachings today—how they inspire and challenge Jewish

[44] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 266.

communities in an era of political and ideological division. With Jewish solidarity feeling more fractured than ever, Hartman's push for covenant over catastrophe gives us a powerful way to rethink what truly holds us together.

Hartman's Biography

For Rabbi David Hartman (1931-2013), the responsibility of each Jew to the broader Jewish people traces back to Sinai. From a young age, he grasped the magnitude and significance of the covenant between God and the people of Israel. In *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices Within Judaism* (1999), he explored his understanding of Jewish peoplehood and responsibility, writing: "From my parents' home, I learned that a family dedicated to a Torah way of life can feel secure without drawing sharp lines defining the boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders."[45] His parents, Shalom and Batya Hartman, instilled in him a deep commitment to pluralism—a value that shaped his approach to Jewish life. For Rabbi Hartman, this meant engaging in open dialogue with all, regardless of their observance or belief. Whether someone was a practicing Jew, a non-practicing Jew, a believer, or a skeptic, he welcomed them to the table, bound together by the covenant created at Sinai.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Hartman studied at three different yeshivot—Yeshiva Chaim Berlin, Lubavitch Yeshiva, and Lakewood Yeshiva—before earning rabbinic ordination from Yeshiva University, where he studied under renowned scholars, including Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (1903-1993).[46] After ordination, he pursued a graduate degree in philosophy at

[45] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), xiv.

[46] Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was an outstanding Orthodox Jewish philosopher and Talmudist, known for his leadership in Modern Orthodoxy and his synthesis of traditional Jewish thought with Western philosophy.

Fordham University. His strong foundation in Jewish learning, coupled with his philosophical studies, allowed him to embody his commitment to pluralism and engage meaningfully with perspectives beyond his own. Rooted in tradition yet shaped by modern thought, he saw his role as both inheritor and interpreter of his family's legacy, writing: "My commitment to continue my father's and grandfather's way of life has to be reappropriated through knowledge and personal conviction. Living in dynamic pluralistic societies challenges me continually to confront and reclaim the spiritual vision of my ancestors."[47]

This commitment led Hartman to make several impactful decisions throughout his life, the most prominent being his decision to make *aliyah* and move his entire family to Israel in 1971. Following this significant life change, he established the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem in 1976, a Jewish research and educational institute dedicated to pluralistic Jewish thought and learning for scholars, rabbis, educators, and community leaders in Israel and North America. In addition to his work at the Institute, Hartman served as a Professor of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for over two decades. He was also a visiting Professor of Jewish Thought at the University of California, Berkeley (1986–1987) and the University of California, Los Angeles (1997–1998). From 1977 to 1984, he advised Zevulun Hammer, Israel's Minister of Education, and later served as an advisor to multiple Israeli prime ministers on issues of religious pluralism and the relationship between Israel and the Jewish diaspora.

[47] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 251.

Historical Context

For Rabbi David Hartman, his understanding of the Jewish people and their solidarity was shaped by the historical events that marked his lifetime. These events included the tragic loss of six million Jews in the Holocaust, the miraculous establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the transformative Six-Day War, and the growing awareness of the urgent need to ensure Jewish continuity. These experiences not only influenced his personal worldview but also guided his vision for a Jewish future rooted in hope, responsibility, and covenant.

The Holocaust

The Holocaust posed a profound challenge to traditional Jewish theology, existence, and demographics. Philosopher Richard L. Rubenstein captured this struggle, writing, "No example of mass murder other than the Holocaust has raised so directly or so insistently the question of whether it was an expression of Heilsgeschichte, that is, God's providential involvement in history."[48] This question weighed heavily on the hearts and minds of Jews worldwide. Those who had endured unimaginable horrors were now left searching for both physical and spiritual refuge, each finding their own path forward.

For some, reconnecting with faith meant redefining their understanding of God. As Rubenstein reflected:

> After Auschwitz and the return to Israel, the God of Nature, or more precisely the God who manifests Himself, so to speak, in and through nature was the God to whom the Jews would turn in place of the God of History, especially in Israel. This is consistent with the view that religion is essentially the way we share the crisis moments, that is, the turning points, of both the life cycle and the calendar. My rejection of the biblical God of History

[48] Rubenstein, Richard L. *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 161.

led me to a modified form of nature paganism.[49]

In rejecting the "God of History"—the God who had defined the Jewish people for millennia—many yearned for something to take His place. They needed a new source of meaning, a way to rebuild their shattered sense of faith and purpose. As Rubenstein noted, "Their experience of the death of God rests upon their loss of faith in the transcendent God of History, but not necessarily upon the loss of the sense of the sacred."[50] For some, that sacredness was found in nature, a continual and unbroken presence. Others turned to their communities, finding hope in shared traditions and collective resilience. As Rubenstein observed, "Judaism can be understood as the way Jews share the decisive times and crises of life through the traditions of their inherited community. The need for that sharing is not diminished in the time of the death of God."[51] Even in the absence of divine intervention, the bonds of Jewish tradition and communal experience remained essential pillars of meaning and survival.

Establishment of the State of Israel

As the God of nature and the sacredness found in Jewish tradition and communal experience gained prominence, the yearning to return to the land of the Jewish people became increasingly relevant. For Rabbi David Hartman, whose spiritual vision was rooted in the Jewish tradition passed down to us at Sinai, the idea of returning to the biblical land of the Jewish people resonated profoundly. He believed that healing could not come from lingering in mourning but from a renewal in Israel and a focus on the future. As he wrote:

[49] Rubenstein, Richard L. *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 175.
[50] Rubenstein, Richard L. *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 294.
[51] Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 174.

> ... if the broken threads of Judaism are to be mended, the mending is likely to take place in Israel. Moreover, this Tikkun will involve both religious and secular Jews, who are bound together by a common inheritance that includes not only the Holocaust but the Bible. Neither the secular nor the religious Jew would have found a home in Israel were it not for the Bible. The Holocaust may have driven them to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. Only the Bible has the power to keep them there. Thus, in Israel, and probably in Israel alone, is there hope for the beginnings of a Jewish Tikkun.[52]

While Rubenstein grappled with the implications of divine absence, Hartman focused on rebuilding Jewish life through the covenantal legacy of Sinai and the establishment of the Jewish state. Hartman viewed the creation of Israel as an opportunity to unite Jews from diverse backgrounds in a shared homeland. The Holocaust made it clear that, regardless of one's denomination or practice, every Jew faced a shared challenge of faith and purpose. This common experience became a foundation for Hartman's vision of Jewish solidarity, where the power of unity could provide spiritual renewal and strength.

Hartman was a man of action who seized the opportunity to participate in the renewal taking place in Israel, urging others to follow his example. He was outspoken about his vision for Israel as the new center of Jewish life and encouraged fellow Jews to embrace the same realization. As he asserted, "Anyone who cares about the legacy of Jewish history must realize one thing: the future of Jews in America and everywhere else will be defined by the type of Jewishness we build in Israel. If we fail, diaspora Jewry will be ashamed to show its public face."[53] His call for *aliyah* was not merely ideological but deeply personal—an appeal for Jews

[52] Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 190.

[53] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 255.

to take an active role in shaping their collective future. "Aliyah is a call to the individual to arise, to assume a dramatic role in history, to participate in nation building."[54]

Six-Day War

The Shalom Hartman Institute was founded nearly a decade after the Six-Day War, another pivotal moment for the Jewish people, and particularly for Hartman. In establishing the institute, he sought to inspire American Jews, especially American rabbis, to come study in the heart of Jewish life—Israel. As Hartman reflected, "Nowhere is the tension between tradition and modernity felt more strongly today than in the State of Israel, and above all in Jerusalem."[55] The creation of this institution was influenced by the shift in American Jewish consciousness that the Six-Day War catalyzed. Historian Jonathan Sarna noted,

> The Six-Day War heightened Israel consciousness across all sectors of the American Jewish community. In the years that followed, Israel became the central focus of American Jewish life. Philanthropy, political activity, education, religious life, and culture all became 'Israel-centered'—so much so that critics charged American Jews with using Israel for "vicarious fulfillment of their Jewish identity.[56]

The Six-Day War of 1967 profoundly shook Jews worldwide. Many feared that history was on the verge of repeating itself—that Israel's destruction could lead to another Holocaust. At the time, Israel was seen as the underdog, surrounded by Arab nations determined to wipe it off

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[54] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 256.

[55] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 141.

[56] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 336.

the map and vastly outnumbered in the region. Reflecting the anxiety felt by many Jews, Jonathan Sarna wrote, "In the days preceding the 1967 Six Day War, we have seen, the specter of "another Holocaust" filled Jews with dread."[57] Israeli historian Benny Morris echoed this sentiment in *Righteous Victims*, describing the existential fear that gripped the country: "The Israeli believed he was fighting for his life, his family, and his home. Beyond that, there was a mortal fear for the very existence of the national collective."[58] Following Israel's remarkable and unexpected victory—along with its acquisition of territories, some of which it later returned—the image of the Jew transformed in the eyes of the Western world. As Morris observed,

> The war did wonders for the state's international standing, almost overnight converting it from a minuscule backwater into a focus of the world's attention. Israel was now seen by the West, and primarily Washington, as a regional superpower and a desirable ally among a bevy of fickle, weak Arab states. The May crisis and the war also generated a surge of unity and self-confidence among the world's Jews; it even gave rise to a modest wave of immigration to Israel from western Jewish communities.[59]

Hartman, in inviting American Jews to make *aliyah* or to spend significant time in Israel, called American Jews to share in that transformation, to witness and participate in the creation of a new self-confident Jewish identity.

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[57] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 334.

[58] Tom, Segev, (Heb.) *The Seventh Million. (*Tel Aviv: Keter/Domino, n.d.), 368, quoted in Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 311.

[59] Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 329.

Continuity Crisis

Why did these events shape Hartman's identity and mold his vision for the future of the Jewish people? Because they were inflection points in Jewish history—moments that could have led either to the end of a vibrant, flourishing Jewish life or toward renewal and rebirth. For Hartman, these events were not just historical turning points; they were a call to action—an invitation to rebuild, to reimagine, and to ensure the continuity of Jewish life for generations to come. He was not alone in this conviction. Historian and professor of American Jewish History, Jack Wertheimer, concluded: "Perhaps never before has a Jewish community pinned so much of its hopes for 'continuity' —for the transmission of a strong Jewish identity to the next generation —on programs of formal and informal education."[60] These educational initiatives encompassed a wide range of programs, including:

> Jewish daycare centers, nursery schools, all-day schools, supplementary schools, Sunday Schools, high schools, colleges, university-based Jewish studies programs, Talmudic academies, rabbinical schools, and adult education programs, as well as a wide range of informal programs, from summer camps to youth groups to Jewish Community Center activities to synagogue retreats, all of which fell under the rubric of Jewish education, and almost all displayed dramatic growth.[61]

Hartman saw education as a bridge between past and future, a way to root the next generation in the defining narratives of the Torah—Sinai, the Exodus, and the journey to the Promised Land. He wrote, "Torah is also to be studied in order to introduce a child to his or her

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[60] On this conference, see Plaut, *Growth of Reform Judaism,* 20; Davis, *Emergence of Conservative Judaism,* 130-134, 424; Sussman, *Isaac Leeser,* 196-201; Sherman, *Bernard Illowy,* 151-165; Meyer, *Response to Modernity,* 243-244, quoted in Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 328.

[61] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 328.

collective historical roots."[62] Creating educational models that fostered this connection was central to his vision for the Jewish people. These stories, foundational to Jewish identity, became the cornerstone of his hope for renewal, offering a way to link Jewish history with the lived experience of contemporary Jews.

Hartman's Response

In light of the events happening around him, Hartman argued that Jewish solidarity should not be defined by persecution but by the covenant we forged with one another at Sinai. Hartman's call for Jewish solidarity is rooted in his belief that, at Sinai, when all Jews entered into a covenant with God and received the Torah, and committed themselves to a shared religious and spiritual community. As he emphasized, "What the tradition asks of Jews is that in each generation they renew the covenantal moment of Sinai."[63] He stressed that this tradition was always meant to be communal, not individualistic and that through interpretive practices, familial customs, and a deep connection to the State of Israel, we can fully realize and live out this sense of solidarity.

In demonstrating how the interpretive tradition of drawing meaning from the Torah can foster communal engagement rather than create division, Hartman cited the Talmud: "Make yourself a heart of many rooms and bring into it the words of the House of Shammai and the

[62] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 67.

[63] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), xxvii.

words of the House of Hillel, the words of those who declare unclean and the words of those who declare clean."[64] He expanded on this tradition, urging: "In other words, become a person in whom different opinions can reside together in the very depths of your soul. Become a religious person who can live with ambiguity, who can feel religious conviction and passion without the need for simplicity and absolute certainty."[65] By weaving this text into his book and inspiring its very title, Hartman underscored the idea of unity without uniformity. Coming together as a Jewish community does not require leaving personal interpretations of the Torah behind; rather, it invites individuals to bring their perspectives forward, enriching the conversation and deepening the community's collective understanding through complexity and nuance.

In encouraging diverse groups of Jews to come together for the sake of Torah study and learning, Hartman acknowledged the inherent challenges of this endeavor. Yet, he reminded readers that, ultimately, it is God who holds the final word and authority. As he wrote, "You argued, you discussed, you disagreed with intensity, but you understood that you were defending a human point of view, not the final word"[66] This idea echoes Hartman's belief in the covenant at Sinai. When we are reminded of Sinai, we recall that it was God who gave the Jewish people the Torah and its laws—not any individual. As stated in Exodus 19:8, after receiving the Torah and entering into the covenant with God, the people of Israel responded, "All the people

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[64] Sotah 7:12 quoted in David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 21.

[65] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 21.

[66] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 23.

answered as one, saying, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do! 'And Moses brought back the people's words to the LORD."[67] This collective affirmation underscores that authority rests with God, not with any single human perspective.

Expanding on the responsibility to engage in interpretation despite differing perspectives, Hartman wrote:

> One should not feel paralyzed because of doubt or inhibited from entering an interpretive process because of the realization that one's moral intuitions are not self-evident and universal. The legacy of the interpretive community requires its contemporary heirs to be fully awake to the possibility that the interpretive strategies they adopt may not be shared by all, and that diversity and disagreement are not signs of inauthenticity.[68]

Once again, Hartman urged us not to shy away from diversity and disagreement but to embrace them as essential strengths of communal learning—opportunities to gain new insights and enrich our understanding.

In addition to emphasizing Torah study as a means of fostering communal connection, Hartman highlighted the vital role of family participation and responsibility in nurturing Jewish solidarity. He wrote, "The family–the essential link between generations–is vital for sustaining the covenantal community's covenantal consciousness."[69] This 'covenantal consciousness'—which riffs on Kaplan's and Durkheim's "collective consciousness"—refers to the awareness and commitment to the sacred promise made at Sinai—a collective bond forged and accepted in partnership with God. Hartman urged, "The family is not only a biological survival unit but also

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[67] Exodus 19:8, English translation from The Contemporary Torah, JPS, 2006

[68] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 36.

[69] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 58.

a framework for developing identity grounded in the covenantal aspirations of Judaism."[70] By 'covenantal aspirations', he points to the responsibility of parents to instill a sense of identity rooted in the history and memory of the Jewish people, stating, "The father and mother must provide frames of reference rooted in the history and the memories of the covenantal community of Israel."[71] In this way, the family becomes not just a vessel for continuity but a living connection between tradition and future generations.

Hartman called on Jewish parents to nurture a sense of communal responsibility and historical awareness in their children. He encouraged teaching both the struggles and achievements of Jewish history, fostering a deep connection to the broader Jewish narrative. As he wrote,

> The role of parents is to help children develop a sense of history and an empathic identification with the world of experience beyond their own. Whether these memories will be relevant and meaningful to the child is another issue. The mother's and father's task is not to decide how the child will use these memories; their obligation is to see to it that the child does not enter into the future without the burden of the past.[72]

Hartman further emphasized this point by asking, "Does your child know how to handle unforeseen crises and have the resources to deal with unanticipated misfortune?"[73] From a Judaic perspective, he argued, the family serves as a vessel of historical transmission. The significance

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[70] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 63.

[71] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 64.

[72] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 65.

[73] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 70.

of parents lies not in a child's dependence but in their ability to impart memory and legacy. Without this, he warned, "the child has no Sinai, no Egypt, no Abraham—in a word, no memory."[74]

As an advocate for communal action, whether through ongoing Torah study or passing Jewish memory to future generations, Hartman was evidently driven by a commitment to engagement rather than complacency. As he wrote, "I do not live by what happened at Sinai; I live by what Jews did with what happened at Sinai."[75] This belief underscores his passion for what Jews accomplished in creating the State of Israel. For Hartman, returning to the land of Israel and establishing a modern state from the ground up exemplifies how Jews applied the lessons of Sinai. In this way, he drew a direct connection between the covenant at Sinai and the Jewish connection to Israel.

In connecting Israel to the covenantal consciousness shared by all Jews, Hartman wrote,

> Israel gives Jews the sense that there is a larger family, and that they are a part of it. The initial shock that some people experience when making aliyah is the realization that they are no longer on the margins. I remember my son's excitement when he went grocery shopping in Jerusalem and, with joy, exclaimed, 'The whole supermarket is kosher!'[76]

For Hartman, the creation of the State of Israel provided the Jewish people with a means to actualize the covenant made at Sinai. The country offers countless opportunities to unite individuals in diverse ways and integrate Jewish life into their daily routines. As he wrote, "As a

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[74] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 70.

[75] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 120.

[76] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 128.

historical people, Israel must continue to believe in and bear witness to the idea of possibility—the possibilities of what human communities can become."[77]

Hartman and Kaplan

Both Hartman and Kaplan were devoted to the Jewish people, dedicating their lives to fostering vibrant, self-motivated, and engaged Jewish communities. While they shared a commitment to Jewish continuity, the paths each one took to achieve this vision diverged. For Hartman, the covenant at Sinai was the defining framework for Jewish peoplehood and religious renewal. In contrast, Kaplan did not center his philosophy on Sinai but instead viewed Judaism as an evolving civilization rooted in the historical circumstances bestowed upon it.

Both thinkers grappled with defining moments in Jewish history, each forging a distinct response to the Jewish community's challenges. Hartman, whose philosophy was rooted in the biblical covenant, saw Jewish continuity as intertwined with the State of Israel and the opportunities it provided. For him, renewal meant both a physical return to the biblical land and a spiritual recommitment to the covenant forged at Sinai—building something new upon ancient foundations.

Kaplan, by contrast, focused on the present reality. Rather than looking to another place for answers, he sought to create something relevant and enduring within the civilization in which Jews already lived. His vision was not about returning but about evolving and ensuring that Judaism remained a dynamic force within contemporary society.

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[77] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 208.

Like Kaplan, Hartman believed his spiritual vision could not be realized in isolation. Just as the Torah and its obligations were received within a community at Sinai, so too must we live out these principles in the context of the Jewish community. Kaplan argued that one of the primary responsibilities of Jewish individuals is to maintain ongoing interaction with fellow Jews, a sentiment echoed in Hartman's vision of renewing our covenant from Sinai. Rather than relying on suffering to sustain Jewish unity, Hartman emphasized that true spiritual solidarity calls out to us from the moment our ancestors stood side by side at Sinai. As he wrote, "Solitary, lonely individuals with no sense of community cannot appropriate the spiritual way of life that emanates from Sinai."[78]

Both thinkers placed a great deal of importance on the family system and how it could either pass forward the Jewish tradition or have it stop with their generation. Kaplan asserted that when deciding to raise a family, Jewish parents take on the responsibility for caring for more than an isolated unit, but rather a larger collective—the Jewish people. Kaplan explained, "the first encounter of the individual with the community takes place in the narrow environment of the home, which exercises its influence for good by transmitting to the child not universal concepts and loyalties but a specific tradition or social heritage."[79]

Similarly, Hartman urged, "The family is not only a biological survival unit but also a framework for developing identity grounded in the covenantal aspirations of Judaism."[80] By 'covenantal aspirations', he pointed to the responsibility of parents to instill a sense of identity

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[78] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), xxviii.

[79] Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 342.

[80] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 63.

rooted in the history and memory of the Jewish people, stating, "The father and mother must provide frames of reference rooted in the history and the memories of the covenantal community of Israel."[81] In this way, he believed the family becomes not just a vessel for continuity but a living connection between tradition and future generations.

Kaplan and Hartman both saw the family unit as essential to transmitting Jewish tradition, reflecting their shared commitment to Jewish continuity. At the core of Kaplan's vision was a belief that Jews could thrive as engaged citizens in broader society—so long as Judaism remained a central guiding force in their lives. Both thinkers lived through pivotal moments in Jewish history, times that could have marked either decline or renewal. This urgency drove them to seek solutions for the future of Jewish life. For Hartman, these events were more than historical turning points; they were a call to action—an opportunity to rebuild, reimagine, and secure the endurance of Jewish identity for generations to come.

Reclaiming Jewish Destiny: A Response to Hartman

Hartman's spiritual vision for the Jewish people—a vision rooted in the covenantal response at Sinai rather than defined by millennia of suffering—resonates with me. It reflects what I see as a more positive perspective on Jewish history, shifting the focus from pain and mourning to solidarity and responsibility.

[81] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 64.

I recognize that the human condition often inclines us to remember the negative more vividly than the positive. Yet, as Hartman reminded us, "Such concepts as psychological determinism, historical inevitability, and fatalism are alien to our tradition's understanding of human action. Belief in radical freedom, in an open future, in surprise and novelty are crucial elements of normative Judaism."[82] It's easy to fall into the cycle of seeing Jewish history through a lens of inevitability, but as Jews, we are called to resist that notion. Instead of being defined by suffering, we must remember our core beliefs—our covenantal responsibilities and the radical freedom bestowed upon us to shape a future beyond the suffering of our past.

As Hartman suggested, "The religious response should not be discouragement but, on the contrary, encouragement to try again–that is, a teshuvah response[83]. Perseverance in the historical struggle to extend human responsibility by eliminating sources of suffering and chaos is the religious response called for by the biblical and rabbinic traditions."[84] If we are truly a people who forged a covenant at Sinai after receiving the Torah—a text that commands us to uphold justice and work to eliminate suffering—then honoring that covenant means returning to Sinai, not defining ourselves through events such as the Holocaust, the Six-Day War, or October 7th. These moments of profound pain cannot be forgotten, but memory and self-pity alone are

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[82] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 260.

[83] 'Teshuvah response': Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik wrote on Teshuva (Repentance) in his book *Halakhic Man*, "Repentance, according to the halakhic view, is an act of creation- self-creation. The severing of one's psychic identity with one's previous "I," and the creation of a new "I," possessor of a new consciousness, a new heart and spirit, different desires, longings, goals,—this is the meaning of that repentance compounded of regret over the past and resolve for the future." -Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (JPS, 1983), p. 110.

[84] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 82.

not enough. To truly honor those who suffered, we must persevere. We must lean into our freedom, embracing the open future that our tradition insists is always possible.

This idea of embracing our freedom and open future also comes with great risk if not approached with intention. I can understand why Hartman was so inspired by the creation of the State of Israel—he saw the Jewish people doing exactly what they were meant to do. Rather than retreating into despair after the Holocaust, they channeled their energies into action. They did not sit back in self-pity; they stood up, got their hands dirty, and built a country—a home that, like Sinai, had the power to unite the Jewish people.

Hartman's spiritual vision came closer to realization with the creation of the state of Israel. Yet, as this still-young nation—now 76 years old—continues to navigate its place in the world, particularly in the Middle East, I wonder if Hartman would see his vision drifting further from its hopeful ideal. When Israel was first established, American Jews were especially eager to support it, seeing in the new state a reflection of their own values—democracy, personal freedom, and resilience. As Sarna noted, "A year later, in 1948, the state of Israel came into being, a development that further improved the American Jewish image, especially as Americans came to view Israel as a 'democracy similar in background and institutions to the United States.'"[85]

Now that democracy in the United States faces significant challenges—even direct threats—one might hope that American Jews could look to the State of Israel for inspiration as a model of a thriving democracy. However, the mass protests of 2023 against judicial reforms that were seen as undermining Israel's democracy quickly placed the country in the same boat as

[85] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 274.

America's own fragile system.[86] For Jews already frustrated and anxious about the erosion of democracy in the U.S., the political turmoil in Israel may not serve as a source of hope. Instead, it may push them even further away.

I assume that the current political turmoil was not part of Hartman's spiritual vision for the Jewish people or the State of Israel. That's not to say he did not anticipate disagreement and debate among Jews living in the same land—on the contrary, he saw vigorous discourse as a sign of strength. As he wrote, "The fact that our country tolerates serious and often heated disagreement is a sign of its internal health and strength."[87] At the same time, Hartman was clear that solidarity does not require blind allegiance. He cautioned, "However, it is important to remember that solidarity does not imply agreement with whatever the community does; it does not mean that whatever policy the Israeli government pursues must be accepted unconditionally. Unconditional loyalty to a nation or a state is tantamount to idolatry."[88] For Hartman, true commitment to Israel meant engaging with it critically, upholding both justice and responsibility rather than offering unconditional support.

Today, engaging in hopeful yet critical discourse about the State of Israel has become increasingly difficult for many. Under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the most right-wing, nationalist coalition in Israel's history—dominated by religious zealots determined to impose a singular vision for the country while disregarding the needs and desires of others—has made it

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[86] Carrie Keller-Lynn, "Justice Minister Unveils Plan to Shackle the High Court, Overhaul Israel's Judiciary," *The Times of Israel*, January 4, 2023, https://www.timesofisrael.com/justice-minister-unveils-plan-to-shackle-the-high-court-overhaul-israels-judiciary/.

[87] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 259.

[88] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 200.

harder to see meaningful, positive change. This reality stands in direct contrast to Hartman's vision for Israel, as he wrote: "Israel must be a place where diverse Jewish groups, with their own perceptions and values, can engage in serious discussion with one another. Respect for religious pluralism is a vital necessity if Israel is to serve as the spiritual and physical home of the entire Jewish people."[89]

While diverse Jewish communities still exist in Israel, their ability to thrive under the current government is becoming more difficult. Just a few months ago, a Reform synagogue in Holon, a suburb of Tel Aviv, was denied the opportunity to build anew—a stark reminder of the growing challenges facing religious pluralism in Israel today. The refusal to embrace diverse expressions of Jewish practice and belief only deepens divisions, making Jewish solidarity even harder to sustain—both within Israel and among Jews worldwide. Anticipating this very challenge, Hartman wrote, "Modern religious leadership must learn from the innovative spirit of the talmudic tradition."[90] I completely agree. The Talmudic tradition not only models how to hold opposing views productively, but it also offers the tools and wisdom needed to foster Jewish solidarity in the twenty-first century, even in the face of deep disagreement.

One particularly poignant statement from Hartman reads, "No matter what future legislation will be passed in the Knesset, diaspora Jews must never turn their backs on Israel."[91] I resonate with this sentiment. Hartman did not suggest that we should never disagree with

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[89] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 194.

[90] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 246.

[91] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 216.

Israel—on the contrary, he emphasized that disagreement is not the same as abandonment. Being part of the Jewish people and a Jewish nation is not an easy task. It demands continuous engagement, a commitment to justice and peace as our prophets ordained, and an ongoing effort to shape the best possible future for our people. To turn one's back on Israel—the Jewish nation and the Jewish people—is, in a sense, to remove oneself from the covenant made at Sinai. We carry a profound responsibility: to uphold the legacy of our matriarchs and patriarchs, our grandparents, our siblings, and all those who came before us.

I close with the words of Rabbi David Hartman, which capture the weight of this responsibility:

> To be a Jew is to be claimed by three thousand years of history. The individual is the carrier of a legacy, of a covenantal promise of the Jewish people to become a holy nation. The Jewish family, therefore, was always imbued with a national purpose: to mediate the founding memories of the Jewish people for the next generation.[92]

[92] David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism* (Turner Publishing Company, 2012), 253.

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