



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון  
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן

## **“The Many in the Hands of the Few:” On Power, Morality, and Nature**

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1. Al HaNissim, from the Siddur

על הנסים ועל הפרקו ועל הגבורות ועל התשועות ועל המלחמות שעשית לאבותינו בימים  
ההם בזמן הזה :

בימי מתתיהו בן יוחנן כהן גדול חשמונאי (י"ג חשמונאי) ובניו  
כשעמדה מלכות נון הרשעה על עמך ישראל להשכיחם תורתך (נ"א :מתורתך) ולהעבירם  
מחקי רצונך

ואתה, ברחמיך הרבים, עמדת להם בעת צרתם : רבת את ריבם דנת את דינם נקמת את  
נקמתם מסרת גבורים ביד חלשים ורבים ביד מעטים וטמאים ביד טהורים ורשעים ביד  
צדיקים וזדים ביד עוסקי תורתך ולא עשית שם גדול וקדוש בעולמך ולעמך ישראל עשית  
תשועה גדולה ופרקו כהיום הזה.

ואחר כן (י"ג קך), באו בניך לדביר ביתך ופנו את היכלך וטהרו את-מקדשך והדליקו נרות  
בחצרות קדשך

וקבעו שמונת ימי חנכה (נ"א : שמונה ימים) אלו להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול.

And (we thank You) for the miracles, and for the salvation, and for the mighty deeds, and  
for the victories, and for the battles which You performed for our forefathers in those  
days, at this time.

In the days of Matityahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his  
sons, when the wicked Hellenic government rose up against Your people Israel to make  
them forget Your Torah and violate the decrees of Your will.

But You, in Your abounding mercies, stood by them in the time of their distress. You  
waged their battles, defended their rights, and avenged the wrong done to them. You  
delivered **the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few,**  
the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and  
the wanton sinners into the hands of those who occupy themselves with Your Torah. You  
made a great and holy name for Yourself in Your world, and effected a great deliverance  
and redemption for Your people Israel to this very day.

Then Your children entered the shrine of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your  
Sanctuary, kindled lights in Your holy courtyards, and instituted these eight days of  
Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name.

## 2. I Maccabees 2:50–66

<sup>50</sup> Now the days drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons: <sup>51</sup> “Arrogance and scorn have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. <sup>52</sup> Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors.

<sup>53</sup> “Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. <sup>54</sup> Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? <sup>55</sup> Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. <sup>56</sup> Phinehas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. <sup>57</sup> Joshua, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel. <sup>58</sup> Caleb, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land. <sup>59</sup> David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. <sup>60</sup> Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven. <sup>61</sup> Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. <sup>62</sup> Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions.

<sup>63</sup> “And so observe, from generation to generation, that **none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength.** <sup>64</sup> Do not fear the words of sinners, for **their splendor will turn into dung and worms.** <sup>65</sup> **Today they will be exalted, but tomorrow they will not be found,** because they will have returned to the dust, and their plans will have perished. <sup>66</sup> My children, be courageous and grow **strong in the law,** for by it you will gain honor.

## 3. I Maccabees 4:1–10, 28–32

<sup>1</sup> Now Gorgias took five thousand infantry and one thousand picked cavalry, and this division moved out by night <sup>2</sup> to fall upon the camp of the Jews and attack them suddenly. Men from the citadel were his guides. <sup>3</sup> But Judas heard of it, and he and his warriors moved out to attack the king’s force in Emmaus while the division was still absent from the camp. <sup>4</sup> When Gorgias entered the camp of Judas by night, he found no one there, so he looked for them in the hills, because he said, “These men are running away from us.”

<sup>5</sup> At daybreak Judas appeared in the plain with three thousand men, but they did not have armor and swords such as they desired. <sup>6</sup> And they saw the camp of the Gentiles, strong and fortified, with cavalry all around it; and these men were trained in war. <sup>7</sup> But Judas said to those who were with him, “Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. <sup>8</sup> Remember how our ancestors were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them. <sup>9</sup> And now, let us cry to Heaven, to see whether he will favor us

and remember his covenant with our ancestors and crush this army before us today. <sup>10</sup> Then all the Gentiles will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel.”...

<sup>28</sup> When he saw that their army was strong, he prayed, saying, <sup>29</sup> “Blessed are you, O Savior of Israel, **who crushed the attack of the mighty warrior by the hand of your servant David**, and gave the camp of the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan son of Saul, and of the man who carried his armor. <sup>30</sup> Hem in this army by the hand of your people Israel, and let them be ashamed of their troops and their cavalry. <sup>31</sup> Fill them with cowardice; melt the boldness of their strength; let them tremble in their destruction. <sup>32</sup> Strike them down with the sword of those who love you, and let all who know your name praise you with hymns.”

#### 4. Bereshit (Genesis) Rabbah 11, Theodor-Albeck edition

Tinnaeus Rufus asked R. Akiva: Why is today different than any other day? טנוסרופוס הרשע שאל את ר' עקיבה אמר ליה מה יום מימים?

He responded: How are you different than any other man? אמר ליה מה גבר בגוברין?

He said to him: What did I say to you, and what did you say to me? אמר ליה מה אמרית לך ומה אמרת לי?

He responded: You asked me How is Shabbat different from other days? I asked you How is Rufus different than other men? אמר ליה אמרת לי מה שנה שבת מכל הימים אמרתי לך מה רופוס מכל גבריא?

He said to him: The king wished to honor me. אמר לו שרצה המלך לכבדו,

[He said back:] This too (=Shabbat) the Sovereign wished to honor her. אף זה רצה הקב"ה לכבדו,

How can you show me [that today is Shabbat]? מנין את מודע לי?

He responded: The Sambatyon River<sup>1</sup> will prove it, for it pulls along rocks all week, but rests on Shabbat.

אמר ליה נהר סבטיינוס יוכיח שמושך  
אבנים כל השבוע ובשבת מניח.

He responded: You're leading me to a distant place [i.e., your evidence is far-off]

אמר ליה לנגדא את נגד לי, אתמהא,

He said to him: The necromancer will prove it, for the dead rise all week, but not on Shabbat.

אמר ליה והרי המעלה זכורו יוכיח שכל  
הימים עולה ובשבת אינו עולה.

He went to check on his father. Indeed, on weekdays, he arose, but on Shabbat he did not. After Shabbat, he brought his father's spirit forth. He said to him: since you died, have you become Jewish? Why do you arise every day except for Shabbat?

אזל בדק באבוי, סלק כל יומי ובשבתה  
לא סלק, בתר שבתא אסקיה, אמר ליה  
אבה מן דמייתת איתעבדת יהודי  
אתמהא, מפני מה עלית כל ימות השבת  
ולא עליתה בשבת?

He responded: All who do not keep Shabbat among you voluntarily keeps it here against their will.

אמר לו כל מי שאינו משמר השבת  
אצלכם ברצונו משמרה הכא על כרחו.

He said to him: What work do you even do during the week?

אמר לו ומה עמל יש לכם שם?

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<sup>1</sup> In the course of his march he saw a river, the nature of which deserves to be recorded in history. It runs between Arcea, located in Agrippa's kingdom and Raphanea, and has an astonishing peculiarity. For, when it flows, it is a copious stream with a current far from sluggish; then all at once its sources fail and for the space of six days it presents the spectacle of a dry bed; again, as though no change had occurred, it pours forth on the seventh day just as before. And it has always been observed to keep strictly to this order; whence they have called it the Sabbatical river, so naming it after the sacred seventh days of the Jews. Josephus (37 – c. 100) , *The Jewish War* 7.96-99

It is considered an evil presage when persons who wish to see these springs find them dry: a circumstance which happened very recently, for example, to Lartius Licinius, who held the office of legatus after his praetorship; for at the end of seven days after his visit he died. There is in Judea a river that runs dry every Sabbath. Pliny the Elder (23 - 79 CE), *Natural History*, 31.18.24

He responded: On weekdays we are judged, but on Shabbat we rest. אמר לו כל ימות השבת אנו נדונין ובשבת אנו נינוחין.

He returned to Rabbi Akiva. He said to him: If you are right that the Holy Blessed One honored Shabbat, then God should not make winds blow or rain fall and Shabbat. חזר אל ר' עקיבה אמר לו אם כדבריך שהקב"ה כיבד את השבת אל ישב בה רוחות אל יוריד בה גשמים!

He responded: Drop dead! This is as one who carries four *amot*. אמר ליה תיפח רוחיה דההוא גברא! כזה שמטלטל ארבע אמות.

A philosopher asked R. Hoshaya: If circumcision is so precious, why was it not given to Adam? פילוסופוס אחד שאל את ר' הושעיה אמר לו אם חביבה המילה מפני מה לא ניתנה לאדם הראשון?

If so, he replied, why do you shave the corners of your head and leave your beard? אמר לו אם כן מפני מה אותנו האיש מגלח פאת ראשו ומניח זקנו?

Because it great with me in folly, was the answer. אמר לו מפני שגדל עמי בשטות.

If so, you should blind your eye and cut off your hands! אמר לו אם כן יסמא אותו האיש עינו ויקטע את ידיו!

To such an argument have we come?!, observed he. אמר ליה ולאלין מלייה אתינן אתמהא!

He said to him: I cannot send you away empty-handed, said he; the real reason is this: whatever was created in the first six days requires further preparation, e.g., mustard needs sweetening, vetches need sweetening, wheat needs grinding, and humanity too needs preparation/amendment. אמר ליה להוציאך חלק אי אפשר אלא כל מה שנברא בששת ימי בראשית צריכין עשייה כגון החרדל צריך למתק, התורמוס צריך למתק החטים צריכים להיטחן, אפילו אדם צריך תיקון.

## 5. Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 10a

Turnus Rufus the wicked asked R. Akiva: If your God loves the poor, why does God not sustain them? He responded: So that we can be saved through them from the judgement of Gehinnom.

He responded: On the contrary, this is what obligates them to Gehinnom. I will offer a metaphor: What is this like? A human king who got angry at his servant and imprisoned him and commanded regarding him that no one feed him or give him to drink. And one person went and fed him and gave him to drink. When the king heard, would he not be angry at him?! And you are called servants, as is said: "For the Children of Israel are My servants (Lev. 25:55)."

Rabbi Akiva responded: I shall offer a metaphor: what is this like? A human king who was angry at his son and imprisoned him. And he commanded regarding him that no one feed him or give him to drink. And one person went and fed him and gave him to drink. When the king heard, would he not send him a gift? And we are called children, as is written: "You are children to the Lord your God (Deut. 14:1)."

He responded: You are called children and servants: when you do God's will, you are called children, and when you do not, you are called servants. And now you are not doing God's will.

He responded: Behold it says: "Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? (Isaiah 58:7) When do we bring the poor that are cast out into our houses? Now, and the verse states: "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry?"

שאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את ר"ע א-להיכם אוהב עניים הוא מפני מה אינו מפרנסם אמר לו כדי שניצולו אנו בהן מדינה של גיהנם

אמר לו [אדרבה] זו שמחייבתן לגיהנם אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה למלך בשר ודם שכעס על עבדו וחבשו בבית האסורין וצוה עליו שלא להאכילו ושלא להשקותו והלך אדם אחד והאכילו והשקהו כששמע המלך לא כועס עליו ואתם קרוין עבדים שנאמר (ויקרא כה, נה) כי לי בני ישראל עבדים

אמר לו ר"ע אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה למלך בשר ודם שכעס על בנו וחבשו בבית האסורין וצוה עליו שלא להאכילו ושלא להשקותו והלך אדם אחד והאכילו והשקהו כששמע המלך לא דורון משגר לו ואנן קרוין בנים דכתיב (דברים יד, א) בנים אתם לה' א-להיכם

אמר לו אתם קרוים בנים וקרוין עבדים בזמן שאתם עושין רצונו של מקום אתם קרוין בנים ובזמן שאין אתם עושין רצונו של מקום אתם קרוין עבדים ועכשיו אין אתם עושין רצונו של מקום

אמר לו הרי הוא אומר (ישעיהו נח, ז) הלא פרוס לרעב לחמך ועניים מרודים תביא בית אימתי עניים מרודים תביא בית האידנא וקאמר הלא פרוס לרעב לחמך

6. **Michael Wyschogrod, "Judaism and the Sanctification of Nature," *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Martin D. Yaffe, 293–4**

For Nietzsche...Jewish morality was a slave morality and thus anti-evolutionary. Evolutionary morality is the right of the stronger to destroy the weaker. Nature wants the weak to perish. The weak contribute to the march of evolution by perishing; and when they refuse to perish, then the weaker have triumphed over the stronger. This is the reversal of evolution, and it occurs through slave morality, which is the brainwashing of the strong by the weak in order to inhibit them from exercising their strength. The strong have the power to destroy the weak; that is what nature desires because it wants the weak out of the way. The weak invent biblical prophetic morality, which speaks about protecting the widow and the orphan, the poor, the disadvantaged, all those who cannot care for themselves. Evolution is thus stopped in its tracks, and the weak proliferate...

Evolutionary thinking, I would maintain, is a form of modern nature religion, because the basic conflict between nature and history is the conflict between the moral and the natural...

7. **Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 21b**

מאי חנוכה דתנו רבנן בכ"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון דלא למספד בהון ודלא להתענות בהון שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי ונצחום בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאום ימים טובים בהלל והודאה

What is [the reason of] Hanukkah? For our rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [commence] the days of Hanukkah, which are eight, on which a lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. ...For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient for one day's lighting only; yet a miracle was wrought therein and they lit [the lamp] therewith for eight days. The following year these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and Thanksgiving.

8. **Malka Zeiger Simkovich, “Uncovering the Truth About Chanukah,”**  
<https://www.thetorah.com/article/uncovering-the-truth-about-chanukah>

A careful reading of the Talmudic passage reveals that the military clash between the Jews and the Greeks is acknowledged but marginalized. The Talmud states:

For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein,  
and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them...

Apparently, the writer of this passage felt that mentioning the military victory was unavoidable in order to explain the context of the miracle of the oil. Yet he describes the clash in such a way as to make it clear that the Hasmoneans were on the defensive, and ultimately successfully “prevailed” against the Greeks. The rabbis did not deny the military victory, but removed it from being the central focus of celebration.

Understanding the history of the Jews living in Roman Palestine in the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century helps us to appreciate why the Rabbis were so hesitant to associate themselves with a militaristic history during the centuries that Talmudic material was being arranged and recorded. During these centuries, the quality of life in this region plummeted. The legal code of the 5<sup>th</sup> century Christian Emperor Theodosius prohibited Jews from holding all governmental posts except for tax collectors. They were also prohibited from building new synagogues within the Empire.

Unrestrained anti-Jewish rhetoric on the part of 5<sup>th</sup> century Church fathers burgeoned during this period. The situation deteriorated further in the 6<sup>th</sup> century when the Christian Emperor Justinian wrote his own legal code, in which further restrictions were placed on Jews, such as the prohibition of publicly reading the Torah, and reading the Mishnah. It is no surprise, therefore, that the Rabbis did not want to present themselves as supporters of a political uprising.