



Civic Friendship in Times of Crisis and War: Jewish Thought, Political Theory, and the Story of Hanukkah

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Dr. Billet's research focuses on 19th-century and early 20th-century German Jewish philosophy. Her current book manuscript focuses on different conceptions of "witness" within Jewish philosophy, and on the virtues of courage, truthfulness, intellectual humility, and fidelity as public virtues— virtues of citizens within the public square, or of individuals in relation to communities—within the philosophy and Jewish thought of Hermann Cohen (1842-1918).

Dr. Billet's recent publications include "'Do Not Grieve Excessively': Rabbis Mourning Children Between Law and Narrative in The Rabbinic Laws of Mourning and Soloveitchik's Halakhic Man" (Journal of Textual Reasoning, 2023); "Hermann Cohen's Virtue Ethics," in Jewish Virtue Ethics (SUNY Press, 2023); and "Between Jewish Law and State Law: Rethinking Hermann Cohen's Critique of Spinoza" (Jewish Studies Quarterly, 2018). In addition, she has several forthcoming articles on Hermann Cohen and other aspects of modern Jewish philosophy and ethics.

I. Introduction – Civic Friendship

1. Aristotle, *Eudaimonian Ethics*

“it is thought to be the special business of the political art to produce friendship...” (1234b22)

2. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

“[W]hat love is in its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs. Respect... is a kind of ‘friendship’ without intimacy and without closeness.” (243)

3. Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers*

“It is not the emotions of friendship that are relevant to politics, but rather its core practices.” (120)

4. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed III. 43*

“The festivals are all for rejoicing and pleasurable gatherings, which in most cases are indispensable for human beings; they are also useful in the establishment of friendship, which must exist among people in political societies...”

II. Jewish Sources on Civic Enmity – as Sources for a Jewish Conception of Civic Friendship

5. Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, Introduction

“If the Talmud is not philosophy, its tractates are an eminent source of those experiences from which philosophies derive their nourishment.”

6. Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 9b

However, the second Temple – a period in which people were engaged in Torah study, observance of mitzvot, and acts of kindness, why was it destroyed? Due to the fact that there was “sinat hinam.”

אַבְל מְקַדְּשׁ שְׁנֵי שָׁהִיוּ עוֹסְקִין בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת וּגְמִילוּת חֲסָדִים,
מִפְּנֵי מָה חָרַב? מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהִיְתָה בּוֹ שִׁנְאָת חִנָּם.

7. Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 55b-56a

Jerusalem was destroyed on account of Kamtza and bar Kamtza. There was a certain man whose friend was named Kamtza and whose enemy was named bar Kamtza. He made a feast and said to his servant: Go bring me Kamtza. The servant mistakenly brought him bar Kamtza. The host came and found bar Kamtza sitting and said to him, “...Arise and leave.” Bar Kamtza said to him: “Since I have already come, let me stay and I will give you money for whatever I eat and drink.” ... “I will give you money for half of the feast”... “I will give you money for the entire feast.” The host said to him: “No.” Finally, he grabbed his hand, stood him up, and took him out. Bar Kamtza said to himself: Since the Sages were sitting there and did not protest learn from it that they were content with what he did. I will therefore go and inform against them to the king. He went and said to the emperor: The Jews have rebelled against you...

אַקְמָצָא וּבַר קַמְצָא חָרוּב יְרוּשָׁלַיִם – דְּהָהוּא גְבָרָא
דְּרַחֲמִיהּ קַמְצָא, וּבַעַל דְּבַבְיָהּ בַר קַמְצָא. עַבְדֵּי סְעוּדָתָא,
אָמַר לִיהּ לְשִׁמְעִיהּ: זִיל אֵייתִי לִי קַמְצָא. אַזְל אֵייתִי לִיהּ
בַר קַמְצָא. אֲתָא, אֲשַׁפְּחִיהּ דְּהָהּ יְתִיב. אָמַר לִיהּ: מִכְּדִי
קוּם פּוֹק! אָמַר ... הוּא, ... הָהוּא גְבָרָא בְּעַל דְּבַבָּא
לִיהּ: הוּאִיל וְאַתָּא, שְׂבָקוּ וְיַהֲבִנָּא לָךְ דְּמֵי מָה דְּאַכִּילְנָא
וְשִׁתִּינָא. אָמַר לִיהּ: לֹא. אָמַר לִיהּ: יַהֲבִנָּא לָךְ דְּמֵי פְּלַגָּא
דְּסְעוּדָתִיךָ! אָמַר לִיהּ: לֹא. אָמַר לִיהּ: יַהֲבִנָּא לָךְ דְּמֵי
כּוּלָּהּ סְעוּדָתִיךָ! אָמַר לִיהּ: לֹא. נִקְטִיָּהּ בִּידֵיהּ וְאוֹקְמִיהּ
וְאַפְקִיָּהּ. אָמַר: הוּאִיל וְהוּוּ יְתִבִי רַבְּנֵי וְלֹא מַחוּ בֵּיהּ, שְׁמַע
מִינֵיהּ קָא נִיחָא לְהוּ, אִיזִיל אִיכּוּל בְּהוּ קוּרְצָא בִּי מְלָכָא.
אַזְל אָמַר לִיהּ לְקִיסָר: מְרַדּוּ בְּךָ יְהוּדָאִי!

8. Moshe Avigdor Amiel, *Derashot El-Ami* (Sermons to My People), Parashat Ki Tavo (Poland, 1934)

And this is indeed the difference between the first and second destructions. For the second destruction came primarily from wanton hatred (sinat hinam). In this case the sin itself, the wanton hatred, is what destroys the lifeblood of the people, and turned us into weakened members.... The destruction of the people is seventy-seven times worse than the destruction of the Temple (bayit). For when a house (bayit) is destroyed, later the homeowner himself, or his children and grandchildren, may find the strength and hope to reestablish that house on its hill. But when a people is destroyed, who will reestablish and nourish it?

ובאמת בזה הוא ההבדל בין חורבן ראשון לחורבן שני, כי החורבן שני, שבא בעיקר בשביל שנאת חנם. הנה העבירה גופה, השנאת חנם, החריבה את מקור החיות של האומה, ועשתה אותנו לאברים מדולדלים. "לב רגז" זהו החורבן היותר גדול. וגדול חורבן האומה שבעים ושבע פעמים מחורבן הבית, כי בית שנחרב, הנה יתעודד בעל הבית, הוא בעצמו, או בניו ובני בניו ויקימו את הבית על תלו, אבל עם כי יחרב מי יקימהו ומי יסעדהו....

9. 1 Maccabees 1:7-15, 20-25

Thus Alexander reigned for twelve years, and died,⁸ and each of his servants took power, each in his place. After his death they all donned diadems, and so too their sons after them for many years, and they multiplied evil in the world. Out of them there emerged a sinful growth, Antiochus Epiphanes (the son of King Antiochus), who had been a hostage in Rome, and he began to reign as king in the 137th year of the kingdom of the Greeks.

In those days there emerged out of Israel wicked men, and they seduced many, saying: “Come let us make a covenant with the Gentiles who are around us. For since the day we separated ourselves from them we have been visited by many troubles.” This proposal found favor in their eyes, and some of the members of the people volunteered and went to the king, and he gave them the authority to act according to the customs of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to the customs of the Gentiles. They made themselves foreskins, deviating from the sacred covenant and yoking themselves to the Gentiles; they sold themselves to the doing of evil....

Then Antiochus turned back after smiting Egypt, in the 143rd year, and came up against Israel and Jerusalem with a strong army. He invaded the Temple arrogantly and took the golden altar and the candelabrum and all its appurtenances, and the Table of the Presence and the libation cups and the bowls and the golden censers and the curtain; and the crowns and the golden decoration upon the façade of the sanctuary—he stripped them all off. And he took the silver and the gold and the precious vessels, and he took the hidden treasures that he found. After taking it all he departed for his own land; he worked pollution and spoke with great arrogance. And there came great mourning upon Israel, in all of their places.

10. Josephus, Jewish Wars, Book 1

1. AT the same time that Antiochus, who was called *Epiphanes*, had a quarrel with the sixth Ptolemy about his right to the whole country of Syria, a great sedition fell among the men of power in Judea, and they had a contention about obtaining the government; while each of those that were of dignity could not endure to be subject to their equals. However, Onias, one of the high-priests, got the better, and cast the sons of Tobias out of the city; who fled to Antiochus, and besought him to make use of them for his leaders, and to make an expedition into Judea. The king, being thereto disposed beforehand, complied with them, and came upon the Jews with a great army, and took their city by force, and slew a great multitude of those that favoured Ptolemy, and sent out his soldiers to plunder them without mercy. He also spoiled the temple, and put a stop to the constant practice of offering a daily sacrifice of expiation for three years and six months. But Onias the high-priest fled to Ptolemy, and received a place from him in the Nomus of Heliopolis, where he built a city resembling Jerusalem, and a temple that was like its temple; concerning which we shall speak more in its proper place hereafter.

2. Now Antiochus... compelled the Jews to dissolve the laws of their country, and to keep their infants uncircumcised, and to sacrifice swines flesh upon the altar; against which they all opposed themselves, and the most approved among them were put to death...

III. The Miracles of Hannukah and Lessons for Civic Friendship I. (Diplomatic/Military)

11. 1 Maccabees 4:25, 36-39, 43, 48-50, 52-60, 5:1-3

Thus there occurred that day a great salvation in Israel... And Judas and his brothers said: "Behold—our enemies have been crushed. Let us go up and purify the Temple and rededicate it." And so the whole force assembled and went up to Mount Zion. When they saw that the Temple had been desolated and that the altar had been desecrated, that the gates had been burnt down, and that plants were growing in the courts as if in a forest or on one of the mountains, and the chambers destroyed, they tore their clothes and mourned greatly... and they purified the Temple... And they built the Temple and sanctified the things inside the building and consecrated the courts, and made new holy vessels and brought the candelabrum and the incense altar and the table into the sanctuary. Then they offered up incense upon the altar and lit the lights upon the candelabrum, thus illuminating the inside of the sanctuary...

Arising early the next morning, the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month— which is Kislev—of the 148th year, they brought a sacrifice according to the Law, upon the new whole-offering altar that they had made; at about the season and the day in which the Gentiles had defiled it, at that time it was rededicated with hymns, lyres, (other) stringed instruments, and cymbals.... They carried out the dedication of the altar for eight days and brought whole-offerings with joy; and they offered a sacrifice of well-being and of praise... And Judas and his brothers and the entire community of Israel instituted the celebration of the days of the rededication of the altar in their season, every year, for eight days, beginning on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev, with mirth and joy.

At that time they also built a high wall around Mount Zion, and strong towers, lest the Gentiles again come and trample them, as they had done previously. ⁶¹And he stationed a force there to guard it, and he fortified Beth Zur...

When the Gentiles roundabout heard that the altar had been built and the Temple rededicated as they previously were, they were very wrathful, and they decided to wipe out the people of Jacob in their midst. So they began to kill members of the people and to exterminate them. But Judas fought...

12. Josepus, Jewish Wars, Book I

Now Judas, supposing that Antiochus would not lie still, gathered an army out of his own countrymen, and was the first that made a league of friendship with the Romans, and drove Epiphanes out of the country when he had made a second expedition into it, and this by giving him a great defeat there; and when he was warmed by this great success, he made an assault upon the garrison that was in the city, for it had not been cut off hitherto; so he ejected them out of the upper city, and drove the soldiers into the lower... He then got the temple under his power, and cleansed the whole place, and walled it round about, and made new vessels for sacred ministrations, and brought them into the temple, because the former vessels had been profaned. He also built another altar, and began to offer the sacrifices; and when the city had already received its sacred constitution again, Antiochus died; whose son Antiochus succeeded him in the kingdom, and in his hatred to the Jews also.

13. 1 Maccabees 8:1-2, 14-16, 19-21

Judas heard of the fame of the Romans, that they are mighty warriors but are well-disposed toward all who join them and establish friendship with whoever approaches them, and that they are mighty warriors. And he was told of their wars and of their valorous deeds.... But despite all of this, not one of them crowned himself with a diadem or wrapped himself in purple so as to pretend to be great. Rather, they made themselves a council, and every day 320 of them always take counsel together concerning the population and maintaining its good order. Every year they entrust a single person with governing them and ruling all of their territory, and they all listen to that one person; among them there is neither envy nor jealousy... They went to Rome—and the trip is very long!—and entered the council and declared: “Judas, also known as Maccabaeus, and his brothers and the community of the Judeans have sent us to you to establish alliance and peace with you, so that we may be listed among your allies and friends.” This found favor in their eyes.

IV. The Miracles of Hannukah and Lessons for Civic Friendship II. (Religious, Oil)

14. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 21b

What is Hanukkah, The Sages taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the days of Hanukkah are eight. One may not eulogize on them and one may not fast on them. When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary they defiled all the oils that were in the Sanctuary. And when the Hasmonean monarchy overcame them and emerged victorious over them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil that was placed with the seal of the High Priest. And there was sufficient oil there to light the candelabrum for only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit the candelabrum from it eight days. The next year the Sages instituted those days and made them holidays with recitation of *hallel* and special thanksgiving in prayer and blessings.

מאי חנוכה? דתנו רבנן: בב"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון דלא למספד בהון ודלא להתענות בהון. שפשנכנסו יוניים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל. ובשגברה 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.

V. The Miracle of Oil – A Biblical Intertext

15. 2 Kings 4:1-7

(1) A certain woman, the wife of one of the disciples of the prophets, cried out to Elisha: “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know how your servant revered GOD. And now a creditor is coming to seize my two children as slaves.” (2) Elisha said to her, “What can I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house?” She replied, “Your maidservant has nothing at all in the house, except a jug of oil.” (3) “Go,” he said, “and borrow vessels outside, from all your neighbors, empty vessels, as many as you can. (4) Then go in and shut the door behind you and your children, and pour [oil] into all those vessels, removing each one as it is filled.” (5) She went away and shut the door behind her and her children. They kept bringing [vessels] to her and she kept pouring. (6) When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” He answered her, “There are no more vessels”; and the oil stopped. (7) She came and told the agent of God, and he said, “Go sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your children can live on the rest.”

(א) וְאִשָּׁה אַחַת מִנְּשֵׁי בְנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים צָעָקָה אֶל־אֵלִישָׁע לֵאמֹר
עֲבָדְךָ אִישִׁי מֵת וְאַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ כִּי עֲבָדְךָ הָיָה יְרֵא אֶת־יְהוָה
וְהַנְּשִׂא בָּא לְקַחַת אֶת־שְׁנֵי יְלָדָי לָו לְעֲבָדִים: (ב) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ
אֵלִישָׁע מָה אַעֲשֶׂה־לָּךְ הַגִּידִי לִי מִה־יֵשׁ־[לָּךְ] (לכִּי) בַּבַּיִת
וַתֹּאמֶר אֵין לְשִׁפְחָתְךָ כָּל־בַּבַּיִת כִּי אִם־אֶסְוֹךָ שֶׁמֶן: (ג) וַיֹּאמֶר
לְכִי שְׂאֲלִי־לָךְ בָּלִים מִן־הַחוּץ מֵאֵת כָּל־[שְׁכֵנֶיךָ] (שִׁכְנֵכִי) בָּלִים
רְקִים אֶל־תִּמְעָטִי: (ד) וּבָאת וְסָגַרְתְּ הַדְּלֵת בְּעַדְךָ וּבְעַד־בָּנֶיךָ
וַיִּצְקִתְּ עַל כָּל־הַבָּלִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהַמָּלֵא תִסָּעִי: (ה) וְתִלְךְ מֵאֲתוֹ
וְתִסְגְּרִי הַדְּלֵת בְּעַדָּהּ וּבְעַד בְּנֵיהָ הֵם מְגִישִׁים אֵלֶיהָ וְהִיא
(מִיִּצְקֵת) [מוֹצֵקֵת]: (ו) וַיְהִי אִ כְּמִלְאֵת הַבָּלִים וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־בְּנָהּ
הַגִּישָׁה אֵלַי עוֹד כָּלִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ אֵין עוֹד כָּלִי וַיַּעֲמֹד הַשֶּׁמֶן: (ז)
וַתָּבֹא וַתִּגְדַּל לְאִישׁ הָאֵלֶּהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי מְכִרִי אֶת־הַשֶּׁמֶן וְשַׁלְמִי
אֶת־[נְשִׁיךָ] (נְשִׁיכִי) וְאֵת [וּבָנֶיךָ] (בְּנֵיכִי) תַחֲיִי בַנוֹתָר: