

Politics, Religion, Jewish Law, and Philosophy:
An Evening in Memory of David Hartman

Department of Jewish Studies
McGill University
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Introductory Remarks
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It is wonderful to see so many people here at this Evening in Memory of Rabbi Professor David Hartman. Thank you all for braving the Montreal weather in order to come. I believe this evening's program has both an academic and a deep personal significance. Rabbi Professor David Hartman, who died in Jerusalem a little over a year ago, was a world famous rabbi and scholar, Professor of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University; a creative philosopher—in the words of Michael Sandel, “the public philosopher of the Jewish people;” and, in the words of the New York Times obituary that appeared upon his passing, “a charismatic teacher and prolific author,” author of such major works as *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest*, winner of the National Jewish Book Award, *A Living Covenant*, perhaps his major work, *Israelis and the Jewish Tradition: An Ancient People Debates its Future*, originally given as the prestigious Terry Lectures at Yale, *Love and Terror in the God Encounter*, devoted to exploring the theological legacy of his teacher R. Joseph Soloveitchik, and many more works. But above all, he was a builder and a visionary. The proponent of a vision of Judaism deeply rooted in the Halakhic, that is, the Jewish legal tradition, but at the same time open to the radical challenges posed by the modern world and in particular to the radical challenges posed by what he saw as the Jewish people's return to history with the rise of the sovereign State of Israel, Hartman is best known for being the Founding President of the Shalom Hartman Institute, a major research, leadership, and teaching center in Jerusalem devoted to realizing that vision, an institute which, again to quote from the New York Times, serves as “a theological and cultural landmark for thousands of Israeli and Diaspora Jews.” I do not wish to enter here into the details of Hartman's illustrious career, many of which will be discussed by R. Lopatin in his lecture, but wish to note that although Hartman became world famous only after he moved to Israel in 1971, his rabbinic, scholarly, and teaching career really began here in Montreal, when he came here from New York in 1960 to serve as the first rabbi of the newly formed Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem Synagogue in Cote St. Luc. He served there for 11 years until he made aliyah in 1971, in the process transforming it into one of Montreal's leading modern Orthodox synagogues. As his daughter, Dr. Tova Hartman remarked in her eulogy for her father, he “loved to tell about how before he came to Montreal there were no *sukkos*, and of all the *sukkos* the people in the community helped each other to build, and by the time he left it was one of the *sukka* capitals of the world.” In addition, in 1968 he, together with a group of parents, founded the Akiva Day school which embodies his vision of a traditional religious but open and pluralistic Jewish education. Even the Hartman Institute had its roots in Montreal, with Hartman organizing retreats in the Laurentian Mountains bringing together Jewish rabbis and thinkers from across the entire religious and intellectual spectrum, among them such notable figures as, first and foremost, Eli Wiesel; then from the Reform movement, Steven Schwarzchild and Emil Fackenheim; from the Conservative movement, Hermann Schaalman, Yochanan Muffs, and Moshe Greenberg; and from the Orthodox, Eliezer Berkovits, Yitz Greenberg, and Aharon Lichtenstein—a veritable who's who. Finally, coming more particularly to Hartman's special connection with McGill, Hartman became the first teacher of Jewish philosophy in the then fledgling Jewish Studies Program around 1969, at the same time as he began working on his doctorate under Raymond Klibansky, which he received in 1973. I was already teaching at McGill when Hartman flew in from Jerusalem for his thesis defense, which I attended, along with the noted Maimonidean scholar, Zev Harvey, Hartman's successor in Jewish philosophy at McGill, now Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew

University. A revised version of the thesis was published as his first book. *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest*, which, as already mentioned, won the National Jewish Book Award in the area of Jewish thought.

The Department of Jewish Studies therefore feels honored to sponsor this evening in tribute to Hartman's memory and his life work. My colleagues, Carlos Frankel and Anna Gonshor will be introducing the speakers, but I just wish to emphasize that our three visiting lecturers, Professors Bill Galston and Charles Taylor and Rabbi Asher Lopatin, in addition to being leading, indeed world-famous figures in their own disciplines, were all close personal friends of David Hartman, and all will be speaking on topics of pressing relevance that were close to his heart. Bill Galston and his wife Miriam have for the past number of years been the North American coordinators of the Annual Summer Hartman Philosophy Conference, and both he and Miriam have worked tirelessly to ensure the ongoing vitality and vibrancy of that important event; Charles Taylor first met and befriended Hartman in the late 1960s when he was already a distinguished Professor at McGill and Hartman was just beginning his academic career there; and R. Lopatin is a graduate of the Hartman Institute's Rabbinic Leadership Initiative Program and is now a Senior Rabbinic Fellow of the Institute. It should come as no surprise, then, that all three were delighted to receive my invitation to them to speak, accepting it with graciousness and alacrity. As for myself, David Hartman influenced me greatly—personally, religiously, and intellectually—from the time I was an undergraduate student at Yeshiva College and met him and, may she be distinguished for a long life, his wife Bobby when visiting Montreal in 1964—and I remember being absolutely blown away by both of them. So, again, it is wonderful to see all of you here for what promises to be an outstanding program.