



Study Guide and Discussion Questions

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Study Guide – Humanist Readings in Jewish Folklore

1. Talking Back to God

1. In his introduction to the stories in this chapter, the editor writes that “Jews have challenged God’s moral authority” throughout the centuries in Jewish literature, beginning with stories of Abraham, Moses, and Job in the Hebrew Bible. Do you agree that this is “Humanistic”? What are we to make of other biblical stories in which these same figures acquiesced to God’s will, despite their own presumed reservations? Do you suppose that all Jews derive the same lessons from these stories, or are varying interpretations of these stories possible?
2. What are we to make of stories such as the ones in this chapter, in which human beings are able to persuade a supposedly all-knowing and all-just God to change his behavior? Is the God presented in these stories perhaps something less than all-knowing and/or all-just, and thus also more human? Would the authors of these stories agree with your characterization? If not, how might they reconcile these stories with their religious beliefs?
3. Can stories feature God as a character and still be considered “Humanist”? If not, what are we left with as foundational literature? If you doubt the existence of God, how is this similar or different from doubting the historical existence of human characters like Abraham, Rachel, or Moses? If these characters are products of the human imagination, what can these stories still teach us about Jewish history, ethics, and beliefs?
4. What is your response to the story entitled “Questioning God’s Handiwork” (p. 20), which ends with the ruling, “Just look at the mess God made [of the world], and then look at this beautiful pair of pants!” From the perspective of a tradition that teaches that God literally made the world in six days, can this story be considered deeply heretical—particularly with the repeated claims in Gen. 1 “and God saw that this was good”? Can this story continue to have resonance for us today, even if we doubt that God literally “made the world in six days”?
5. What are we to make of the famous story included in this chapter, “The Rabbis Overrule God” (pp. 20-21)? How can Rabbi Eliezer lose the argument, despite the fact that God Himself appears to take his side? What are we to do with the moral provided by Rabbi Joshua, “always follow the majority ruling”? Is it possible for “the majority” to be wrong sometimes, even about issues of great consequence? What of the fact that none of the other rabbis are convinced to change their positions, either by Rabbi Eliezer’s arguments, or by the subsequent supernatural interventions? Do you think their views are based on principle, or simply “groupthink” and/or stubbornness?

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2. Confronting Injustice

1. In the postlude to the first story under the heading of “Non-Cooperation” (pp. 25-26), the editor poses the “troubling” question: “To what extent should subject people collaborate with a hostile authority?” (p. 26). What is your answer to this? Can you imagine the dilemma of being a member of a “subject” people and bearing witness to criminal behavior within your own ranks? Is it appropriate to entrust the meting out of justice to the ruling power, or is this better dealt with internally?
2. Regarding the second brief story in this section, on p. 27, do you agree with the advice attributed to Raba (“Let him kill you, but do not commit murder”)? Is such a horrific killing truly to be considered murder, or can it potentially be considered self-defense? Is it reasonable to suspect that the prefect would kill both parties in the end in one or both scenarios, and does that make any difference? Is the killing the only issue, or is it the motivation behind the killing that matters as well?
3. In his introduction to the section entitled “Korah: Demagogue or Dissident?” (pp 36-39), Muraskin explains that Korah is “one of the most despised figures in the Torah because he incited the Hebrews in the desert to rebel against Moses.” He goes on to say, however, that from our point of view as modern Secular Humanistic Jews, “there is considerable merit in Korah’s criticisms of Moses’ authoritarian rule and irrational rituals, the privileges of the priesthood and the oppressive burdens placed on the people by religious law.” Should we in fact find merit in siding with the “villains” of the Torah? How about other “villains” from Jewish tradition, such as Elisha ben Abuyah or the Wicked Son from the Passover Haggadah? Even if Korah raises some legitimate grievances, do we have to endorse his methods, such as “mak[ing] Moses appear ridiculous in the eyes of the people” (p. 36) or “inciting the people to rebellion against Moses” (p. 37)? Do you think all Jews would consider Moses’ rule “authoritarian,” and if so, would they necessarily consider this a bad thing?
4. Pages 48-53 (“The Story of the Golem: the Defender of the Jews”) feature the famous legend of the Golem of Prague. Why do you suppose this story, with such unavoidably supernatural elements, is included in an anthology entitled “Humanist Readings in Jewish Folklore”? Who are the Humanist role models in this story? Do they include the Maharal, who seeks answers in heaven and creates a Golem out of clay to deliver the city from the blood libel accusations? The Golem itself, which possesses “no wisdom or understanding”? The non-Jewish constable and city watch, who allow themselves to be persuaded by the evidence and who reverse their harsh decision in the end? Are there any larger themes, such as Jewish self-reliance, that are separable from these supernatural story elements?
5. Challenging injustice is not uniquely Jewish, of course. What do you find in these stories that make them distinctively Jewish examples of this human impulse?

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3. Mentshlekht (Human Decency)

1. In the section of this chapter entitled “The Primacy of Ethical Behavior,” Muraskin shares several stories about ordinary people who are considered to be as virtuous as (or possibly even more virtuous than) esteemed rabbis and scholars. What are your reflections on this? If the uneducated can enjoy a portion in the World to Come equal to that of the most learned, why study? Which of these stories is your favorite and why?
 2. In the section of this chapter entitled “Respecting Other Opinions,” the speaker notes that “the disciples of Hillel were considerate and respectful, studying not only their own opinions but also the teachings of the Shammaites” and that “they even gave precedence to the School of Shammai by quoting their views first” (p. 82). What applications can attitudes such as these have for contemporary Jews? If the schools of Shammai and Hillel were still around today, do you think they would continue to “show love and friendship towards one another” despite their differing views? Is it possible to respect differences of opinion outside of as well as within our own communities?
 3. The last story of this chapter, under the heading “Rabbi Meir Learns from a Heretic, a.k.a. an *Apikoros*,” features Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah, the legendary heretic rabbi also known as *Aher* (“the other one”). According to Rabbah in this story, because Meir “found a pomegranate, . . . ate the inside, but threw away the peel,” he is to be praised—and moments later, God himself is convinced of this. Are there lessons for us in this parable? Is it possible to learn things from people with whom you don’t agree about everything? Is it possible even to learn from people who are considered “wicked”?
 4. As in the previous chapter, being a decent person is not uniquely Jewish. What about these stories is distinctively Jewish—subject matter, setting and characters, approach to the issues, all of these or something else?
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4. The Rich and the Poor

1. In the first story of this chapter, under the heading “Why Sodom Was Destroyed” (pp. 87-88), we learn of the rabbis’ explanation for why the city of Sodom was destroyed in Genesis 19: it was because the city’s inhabitants were inhospitable to strangers and the poor, rather than (or perhaps not merely because of) “the sexual depravity of its inhabitants” (p. 87). What are we to make of this interpretation, especially considering the apparent lack of evidence for the former reason in the Torah? Is this a case of the rabbis reading their own values into the story, and are they to be applauded or condemned for this? What do you think the rabbis would think of our modern capitalist system, with its stark inequality between the richest and the poorest?
2. What are we to make of the rabbi’s defense of the orphan servant girl in “Justice for the Worker and the Poor” (pp 89-90), even against his own wife? With no evidence of a crime committed by the servant, and the rabbi to defend her, do you think they would have a strong case in the Rabbinical Court? Are there echoes in this story of other passages from the Bible about caring for “the orphan, the widow, and the stranger”?

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3. What are your reflections on the stories involving Rabbi Israel Salanter (pp. 91-92), the founder of the Mussar movement? Can we reconcile the lessons in ethical behavior from these stories with the piety and *frum* lifestyle of their protagonist? Do these two stories show how these tendencies can sometimes be in conflict with one another (e.g., shortening the Shabbat dinner to make less work for the maid), and is Salanter to be applauded for giving primacy to ethical concerns over ritual ones?
 4. Pages 97-8 discuss Maimonides' Eight Degrees of Charity [*tzedakah*]. What parallels to each category are you familiar with, e.g., named donors on buildings (representing #5)? Do you agree with Maimonides' choices of which kinds of charity are better than others? What might be some political ramifications of his highest level, "preventing poverty" by teaching a trade or "putting [someone] in the way of business"?
 5. In the last story of this chapter, under the heading "The Light Side: The Miracle of the Broken Leg" (p. 106), a poor man, who had been scorned, breaks his leg and suddenly enjoys comfort and care. Is there a lesson in this for us today? Are we too quick to turn a blind eye to the everyday suffering of our fellow human beings, even as we presume to help those who are most in need?
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5. The Dangers of Fanaticism

1. The second story under the heading "The Destruction of the Second Temple" (pp. 108-110) tells of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, the First Century C.E. rabbi, who smuggled himself out of the besieged city of Jerusalem by faking his own death. Does Rabbi Johanan deserve some credit for hatching this clever ruse to save himself? Is he necessarily more deserving than everyone else of being rescued from the besieged city? Do the sages deserve some credit for proposing that the Jews make peace with the Romans? Are the Zealots only to be condemned for their views and their behavior, or is the story potentially more complex than this?
2. In the third story of this section (pp. 110-111), the rabbis draw different conclusions about the anecdote of Bar Kamza and its relevance to the destruction of the Second Temple. Particularly intriguing is Rabbi Johanan's conclusion that "[t]he overzealousness of R. Zechariah ben Avkulus led to the destruction of the Temple," because Zechariah refused to sacrifice a blemished animal. Do you agree with Johanan's conclusion? Is it fair to blame the destruction of the Temple on Zechariah's regard for ritual law? What of Rabbi Eleazar's conclusion, "See how serious a thing it is to embarrass a person," which puts the blame on the unnamed rich man? Is there also a lesson in this story about compassion for our enemies?
3. In the first story under the heading, "Life Must Go On," Rabbi Joshua instructs the people: "Not to mourn at all is impossible, because of the destruction that has befallen us. But to mourn too much is also impossible because we are forbidden to impose a decree on the community that the majority will find unbearable" (p. 112). When tragedy strikes in our lives, is it sometimes tempting to "mourn too much"? Are the concerns of "the majority" the only reason why it is unwise to do so? What is the proper balance between feeling the grief we need to feel in times of sorrow and looking forward to the future with hope?
4. The last story in this chapter, "Wrong Priorities" (p. 114), has some intriguing parallels with a parable of Jesus in Matthew 15 (also in Mark 7—see <http://ebible.org/web/MAT15.htm>). Does this information change our understanding? Was a Jewish writer "kosherizing" a New Testament insight, or just a coincidence?

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6. Jewish Humor

1. In his introduction to this chapter, Muraskin includes a quote from author Sholem Aleichem that begins: “When is a Jew not inclined to joke...because of troubles, poverty, sickness and worries about making a living?” Do you agree with Sholem Aleichem’s analysis of the impetus for Jewish humor? Do you suppose these same impulses are found in the cultural traditions of other minority groups? Do you think Jewish humor has changed in the past several generations with the increasing affluence and success of many Jews in the West?
2. In the last story of the section entitled “Poking Fun at the Pious,” (pp. 119-121) the rabbi concludes: “nothing helps in a time of trouble like chanting Psalms.” Is there more to this amusing story than meets the eye? Are Teltza’s concerns about her future and her future family completely unfounded, or is there some wisdom in her line of thinking? What of the fact that her mother, her father, and all the people of the town are influenced by her imagined griefs? Is there any harm in the townspeople chanting Psalms, if they believe it is the only thing that might help? Do you think the miller is an *apikoros* (heretic), or simply a keen observer and a pragmatist?
3. In the second story under the heading of “The Witty Vs. The Wealthy” (pp. 124-5), a man in the House of Study hatches a plan to end inequality: “If people would follow my plan, they would put all they own, cash as well as property, into a common fund and then each one would draw upon it according to his needs. Believe me, there would be enough for everyone.” Has such a radical redistribution of wealth ever been attempted, to your knowledge? Is it possible without violence? Is this the best way to end poverty, in your opinion, and would there truly be “enough for everyone” (however “enough” is to be defined)? Do you think the characters in this story would have been able to conceive of the concept of economic growth, and is inequality truly a threat to social order?
4. Medieval disputations between Jews and Christians often ended in further Jewish persecution and even expulsion. They were also clearly unfair, the medieval religious equivalent of a show trial. Is it then appropriate to tell a humorous story out of the experience like “The Disputation” (p. 127-130)? What is the limit on drawing humor from suffering and persecution?
5. What is your definition of *chutzpa*? How do the three stories on pp. 133-135 reflect this trait? Do you agree that *chutzpa* is an “exclusively secular” characteristic? What of the sick man in the story on pp. 133-4 who is denied permission to eat by the rabbi who himself is “enjoying a hearty lunch”? Are *chutzpadiks* necessarily always heroes, or is it possible to show *chutzpa* for self-serving or bad causes?

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7. Women

1. What are we to make of Lilith, as depicted in the story “Lilith, the First Feminist”? Is she a sympathetic character, by virtue of her being rejected by Adam? Is she a villain, because of her decision to prey on innocent newborn children? Is it possible for her to be a bit of both? Is she redeemed by her promise “not to harm even one hair” on the heads of newborn babies who wear an amulet around their necks, or is this an arbitrary reason to spare the lives of blameless children? What are your thoughts on the culture that created this tale, a world in which infant mortality was common and medicine rudimentary? Can people be forgiven for believing in superstitions when no other explanations are readily forthcoming?
2. “The Story of Susanna” (pp. 145-148) tells of a blameless woman who is wrongly accused of adultery and saved only by the cunning of “a young man named Daniel” (explained by Muraskin as being the same Daniel of the eponymous book of the Bible). What are the lessons for us in this story, if any, about the dangers of trying defendants in “the court of public opinion” and of accepting the word of authority figures at face value? Are there other lessons as well that can be learned from Susanna’s example? Can you think of any potential parallels between this story and the contemporary “#MeToo” movement, with the testimony of women all too often ignored even in our own time?
3. The story beginning on p. 150 under the heading “You’ve Come a Long Way, Skotsl” is a tribute to the aspirations of women through the centuries to full participation in Jewish life. Muraskin mentions that women are now ordained as rabbis and counted for a *minyán* in the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements, and that women are making strides in Orthodox Judaism as well—however, it is almost certainly the case that more work remains to be done. What are your feelings on the topic of gender equality in contemporary Judaism? Has “Skotsl come” in fact at long last, or do issues such as pay equity and family leave remain a problem in the Jewish community as well as in the larger world? How can all of us strive to do better?
4. A few of the stories in this section contain some anti-feminist themes: “Wisdom before Beauty” about an ugly daughter, “The Rabbi and the Rebbitzen” about a *schlemiel* [good-for-nothing] paired with a shrew. One can imagine much worse in Jewish folklore NOT chosen for an anthology of *Humanist Readings*. How should we evaluate the values of pre-modern literature and culture – in light of its own period, or from the perspective of our own? Can we learn positive lessons from literature that also includes offensive motifs?

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8. Jewish-Gentile Relations

1. In the story “A Midrash on Racism,” a scholar hurls a racist insult at a friendly man with a black complexion, begs the man’s forgiveness, and receives it, but with a warning for the future. Following this incident, the scholar teaches his disciples: “One should always be soft like a reed, not hard like a cedar” (p. 157). Does this lesson follow from the incident preceding it, in your opinion? How is the scholar “hard like a cedar” prior to this? What other kinds of situations, real or imagined, could lead one to this conclusion? Are there any circumstances in which, or any larger philosophic values about which, it is better to be rigid and inflexible rather than compromising?
 2. What can the stories under the headings “A Jew Comes to the Aid of a Roman” (pp. 158-60) and “A Roman Comes to the Aid of a Jew” (pp. 161-163) teach us about compassion towards our neighbors, even if they are sometimes also our oppressors? Is real friendship between rulers and subjects ever truly possible?
 3. Under the heading of “Dealing Honestly with All People,” a brief story about a donkey and a precious jewel is presented (p. 166). The key line from the story is Shimon ben Shetakh’s response, “I bought a donkey, not a jewel.” What lessons can this teach us about the importance of honesty in commerce with all people? Can you think of any negative examples of buyers and sellers who think they are buying or selling one thing and end up getting another? Can there ever really be laws to enforce morality in cases such as this?
 4. How are non-Jews depicted in these stories? Do you think this is typical or exceptional for how they appear in Jewish folklore in general? Is a story highlighting the “exceptional” individual from an otherwise suspected and distrusted group a way to counteract prejudice, or does such a story reinforce it?
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9. The Value of Education

1. The first story “Respect for Learning...” ends with the moral: “A bastard who is a scholar is superior to a High Priest who is an ignoramus” (p. 171). Do we live in a true meritocracy even today, or are privileges still bestowed on those with the proper pedigree in some circumstances? How might we hope to increase educational and work opportunities for everyone, regardless of background and parentage? Can “undistinguished” people such as those in the story realistically be expected to educate themselves to the highest levels in this day and age, or is it becoming less possible for the underprivileged to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” in our increasingly complex world? What are the implications of this for our society?
2. The humorous story included under the heading “How to Teach an Unwilling Student” (pp. 174-177) teaches a larger lesson about empathy and compassion. However, it may also serve as a warning about the dangers of persuasion. What if, instead of a wise man, a trickster had showed up to convert the rooster-prince to something more sinister? Is it easy to see from this story how trust can be both used and abused? What are the implications of this story for us and our own responsibility to try and set the best possible example for our students and children?

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3. What about the limits on the traditional emphasis on education, such as the exclusion of women, and the exclusive focus on Torah/Talmud instruction for boys (see Elisha story in this chapter)? Is it fair for us to claim this approach to “education” as reflecting our own contemporary values? What do you know about the ultra-Orthodox sects in Upstate New York where this is still more or less the practice (i.e., Torah instruction for boys only, limited or no instruction in English language and arithmetic, virtually no liberal arts curriculum at all)? Does their approach in fact more closely resemble the traditional approach in Judaism than does our secular K-12 and post-secondary system? To be fair, is this traditional emphasis on religious over secular learning unique to Judaism?
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10. Parents & Children

1. In the first story of this chapter, “Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother,” the father admonishes his son by saying: “Had you really wished to honor me you would have taken pity upon your poor brother and not brought him here dressed in tatters. You would have known that the way to honor me was to clothe him decently...the expenses you incurred for the wedding were only for your honor” (p. 182). Do you have siblings and, if so, what resonance does this story have for you? Would you ever allow your siblings to arrive “in tatters” to an important family event? Even assuming not, where do siblings’ responsibilities to each other begin and end? Are we each in fact “our brothers’ (and our sisters’) keepers”?
2. The second brief story of this chapter, “A Parent’s Responsibility,” deals with a son who goes astray and his father who becomes irate at the fact. The father’s friend, however, provides the moral: “You yourself ruined your son...You ignored all other occupations and taught him to be a perfumer; you ignored all other streets and deliberately opened a shop for him in the street of prostitutes!” How common do you suppose it is for parents to fail to see their own shortcomings when their children struggle and suffer? This story, furthermore, is described as a “parable”; what is the larger lesson it seeks to teach?
3. The two stories in this chapter under the heading of “Respect for the Elderly (or Teach Your Children Well)” both feature an adult son with means, an elderly father in need of care, and a precocious and quick-witted grandson who teaches his father a lesson. What lessons can these stories teach us both about caring for elderly parents and about the example we set for our children? If you have had the experience of taking care of elderly parents or grandparents, do these stories resonate with you on a personal level?

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11. Friendship

1. The first brief story of this chapter on p. 187 tells of a man compelled to help his enemy whose donkey is overloaded with too much cargo; the men share a meal after the incident and quickly become friends. Have you ever provided assistance to, or received assistance from, someone you disliked or who disliked you? If so, how did it feel? Have you ever withheld assistance from someone you did not consider a friend? What prevents us from helping each other more, and how can we all learn to be more compassionate?
2. The key phrase of the second story in this chapter (pp. 187-188) gets to the heart of the very concept of love: “If you do not know what gives me pain, how can you say that you truly love me?” Do you know what gives your own loved ones their pain, and do they know what gives you yours? Do you agree that this is one of the key components of real love? Would you call this empathy, and do you think it is something that can be learned?
3. “Just as I found carob trees when I came into the world,” says Honi the Circle-Maker in the story on pp. 189-190, “so I am now planting carob trees for my grandchildren to enjoy.” What benefits have you enjoyed thanks to the efforts of your own parents and grandparents, particularly efforts which they may not have themselves lived to see “bear fruit”? What good work do you hope to do in your own lifetime that you hope will benefit future generations? Are we doing enough for future generations, particularly with regard to big concerns such as climate change?

12. The Sanctity of Human Life

1. This chapter begins with a famous Talmudic maxim: “...whoever saves one life is as though he had saved the whole world” and “whoever kills one man is as if he destroyed all mankind” (p. 191). What are your reflections on this? Can you think of examples in history of people who saved lives, and do you think we always give them the credit they deserve? Can there be instances where killing one person (e.g. a violent criminal or a brutal dictator) is in fact the only way to save other lives, and should killing this person be considered the same as “destroying all mankind”? Could you imagine other exceptions such as killing in self-defense, warfare, and other scenarios?
2. The next paragraph also states another famous saying: “The creation of a single man was...so that no man will ever be able to say to another ‘My ancestor was greater than yours.’” How do we reconcile this with various obsessions with pedigree, both within and outside of the Jewish community? What of the special privileges and responsibilities granted to the Cohens and the Levites, or to those descended from sages and other important figures? Do we still care about such things as lineage in the modern Jewish community, or have we evolved on these issues? And is it problematic for Secular Humanistic Jews, who don’t believe in Creationism, to use this aphorism?

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3. In the last brief story of this chapter (pp. 193-4), the Berdichever *Rebbe* is faced with a dilemma: finish pleading his case to God to bring about the Messiah and the Redemption, or return to Earth to save the life of Hirsch, a poor old man on the brink of starving to death. The *Rebbe* immediately decides to return, musing: "...where is it written that I have the right to sacrifice Hirsch's life for the sake of all humanity?" Do you agree with the *Rebbe*'s conclusion? Are there circumstances in which it would be appropriate to sacrifice one life to save many more, or is this never in fact appropriate? Is it reading too much into this story to find within it a version of the "trolley problem"? Is there another issue at stake in this story as well, namely, that a man could be allowed by the community to starve nearly to death on the holiest day of the Jewish year?
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13. The Evil of Slander

1. In the first brief story of this chapter (p. 195), the rabbi teaches the young woman: "lies are like feathers; once scattered, it is impossible to retrieve them. Nor can the damage they have done ever be recalled or completely amended." Have you or anyone you know ever been guilty of spreading lies, half-truths, or unconfirmed rumors? Have you or anyone know been the victim of such falsehoods? Is the young woman in the story to be commended for acknowledging her misdeed and coming to the rabbi for guidance? Is there anything else she can possibly do to make amends for her misbehavior?
 2. In the third brief story of this chapter (p. 196), Samuel ha-Nagid retorts: "I have cut out [the slanderer's] evil tongue and have given him instead a kindly tongue." Most remarkably, he does this by showing kindness to his enemy and softening his enemy's heart. Can you relate to this story in any way? Have you ever found in your own life that kindness is a more effective response than hostility to insulting or aggressive behavior?
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14. Some Humanistic Principles to Live By from Pirke Avot

1. In the second paragraph of this chapter on p. 197, four types of people are depicted: the medium type, who says, "What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours"; the ignoramus, who says, "What is mine is yours and what is yours is mine"; the saintly person, who says, "What is mine is yours and what is yours is mine"; and the wicked person, who says, "What is yours is mine and what is mine is mine." Do you agree that someone who says "What is mine is yours and what is yours is yours" is a saintly person? What's so terrible about saying "What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours"? Does this point of view seem to forecast a version of Jewish socialism, in your opinion, or something similar? What do you think the rabbis would have to say about economic systems such as mercantilism, capitalism, neoliberalism, or libertarianism?

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2. In the third paragraph of this chapter, Hillel is quoted in a series of pithy maxims, including two rather strange ones: “do not be sure of yourself until the day you die” and “do not make pronouncements that cannot be understood at once in the confident thought that they will be understood later on.” What is he talking about in these sayings? Is there nothing to be gained in being sure of yourself (albeit without being oversure of yourself) while you are still alive? What of the advice against “pronouncements that cannot be understood”? Isn’t history full of people who were considered “ahead of their time” and whose insights were only truly appreciated later on? Can we disagree with a great teacher like Hillel on some things and still consider him a great teacher?
 3. This chapter ends with the famous dictum: “It is not your obligation to complete the task [of perfecting the world], but neither are you free to desist [from doing your part]” (p. 198). How are we “doing our part” to “complete the task of perfecting the world”? How are we doing so as Jews? As a society as a whole? What does it mean to “perfect the world,” and how close can we ever realistically hope to get to this ideal? Is this best achieved by incremental change, by radical social upheaval, or does the answer to this question depend upon the current circumstances?
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15. Why Remain Jewish?

1. What are we to make of the apparent moral of this story, “follow the majority?” Do you think this is what Jewish tradition in fact teaches? If so, is it a good rule of thumb for contemporary Jews? How do you interpret the rabbi’s statement that “we Jews have no doubts about where we are in the world”? Is this a compelling reason for Jews to remain Jewish, in your opinion?
2. Looking back on the entire volume *Humanist Readings in Jewish Folklore*, what do you think of the Judaism represented here – is it familiar or foreign? Do most Jews today follow most of the values? Do you have favorite Jewish stories with a Humanistic message that did not appear in this collection – if so, what are they?