The unique relationship between God and the Jewish people is a basic principle that permeates the Bible and Talmud. We greet Shabbat with the words, “He chose us and sanctified us from amongst the nations,” and Shabbat closes with the words, “He distinguished between Israel and the nations.” Thus, in the Amidah of the High Holy days we look forward to the time when all of mankind “will form one union to practice Your will with a perfect heart.” And, in the Aleinu prayer, recited three times daily, we anticipate the time when the nations of the world is its neshamah—its national essence.

At the same time, our literature expresses God’s concern for the fate of all of mankind. Thus, in the Amida of the High Holy days we look forward to the time when all of mankind “will form one union to practice Your will with a perfect heart.” And, in the Aleinu prayer, recited three times daily, we anticipate the time when all of mankind “will form one union to practice Your will with a perfect heart.”

Obviously, both motifs are central to Judaism’s worldview. Unfortunately, different individuals and groups stress one of the motifs without giving proper weight to the other. We frequently encounter confusion and provincialism in discussions of this fundamental, sensitive and critical subject.

We have therefore asked a diverse group of thinkers to explore and explain the profound meaning of the choseness of Israel. It is remarkable in that spite of the rampant anti-Semitism pervading the contemporary world, our contributors are able to look ahead to the time when the nations will finally recognize and appreciate the mission of the Jewish people in fulfilling the ultimate purpose of man.

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<th>JEWISH ACTION</th>
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“**You Have Chosen Us from Amongst the Nations**”

By Jonathan Blass

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If we know our greatness, then we know ourselves, and if we forget our greatness, we forget ourselves.

(‘Delve again and again into the Torah, since everything is contained within it’ [Pirkei Avot 5:1])? Doesn’t Rav Kook negate this universality by identifying the Torah and the will of God with the national identity of a single nation—‘Am Yisrael—and by expressly the opposite reason (Divrei Chayim 5:22; Chadashot Agudot Avodah Zarah 2b; Gevurat Hashem 42). The nations of the world refused to accept the Torah precisely because it is universal. Chazal write, for example, that the nations descending from Yisrael and Esvai rejected the Torah because it prohibits theft and murder (Sifri, parashat Vezot Haberachah). These rejections were not indications of the Torah’s lack of universality, but rather of the fundamental inutility of the nations of Yisrael and Esvai to identify with the totality of the Torah’s universal truth. While Israel is universal and identified with the universality and will and mind of God, not limited by any particularistic inclination, the Gentiles are particularistic. Rav Kook follows in this tradition when he teaches that “Israel’s history is the epitome of world history; there is nothing among any of the nations that does not have its parallel in Israel. Its faith is small and low, and forgetting who we are means forgetting our greatness” (Orot Hayyim 1:1).

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rael’s role, writes Rav Kook, requires it to be ‘both a nation that dwells alone and also a nation to the nations’ (Orot Yisrael 5:3). Israel carries out this role, not by blurring the distinctions between itself and the other nations, but by achieving a full national expression of its identity, “by being who we need to be” (Orot Yisrael 5:3). “A kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6) are not limited by any particularistic inclination, the Gentiles who we need to be” (Orot Yisrael 4:5). “Loving man” does not mean loving evil men or Man’s evil, but rather it means loving those universal Divine qualities in each man that make him a man.

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av Kook was aware of the reluctance on the part of many Jews to acknowledge the uniqueness and greatness of their national character (as opposed to most Americans who—certain of the universality of their national values and unafraid that these are imparted by ethnocentrism—believe that the superiority of the United States over all other nations, past and present, is self-evident). Rav Kook argues that this is a mistake: It is a fundamental error to shrink from our preeminence, to cease acknowledging “You have chosen us” (“Atah behacharatamu”). We are not only different from all other nations—different and separate by virtue of our extraordinary history that is unparalleled by that of any other nations—we are also better and greater than any nation. If we know our greatness, then we know ourselves, and if we forget our greatness, we forget ourselves; and a nation that forgets itself must be small and low. Only through forgetting who we are do we remain small and low, and forgetting who we are means forgetting our greatness (Orot Hayyim 5:1). Because of the Divine, and hence universal, nature of Israel’s identity, the uniqueness of the Jewish national character does not negate the universal role the people of Israel play in history. Israel’s sanctity is an open expression of the sanctity of Man, a sanctity which is hidden and dormant in all people (Habadolah Hakdalit 13) and which gives life to the particular character and culture of every nation, linking each of them to God. Because a kaplan is a man at his ideal, love of Israel, asserts Rav Kook, does not engender a hatred of all others but rather the opposite: “Love of Israel [abhat Yisroel] requires loving Man” (Orot Yisrael 4:5). “Loving man” does not mean loving evil men or Man’s evil, but rather it means loving those universal Divine qualities in each man that make him a man.

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“Segullah”: Privilege or Purpose?

A palpable awkwardness almost inevitably obfuscates any discussion of our perceived identity as the “Am Segullah”—usually rendered as God’s exclusive, special treasure among the nations. At best, regarding ourselves as “chosen” smacks of a chauvinistic sense of self-endowment; at worst, it evokes comparisons to Nietzsche’s “Terroristen” or Dostoyevsky’s Raskolnikov. If construed as conferring inborn privileges, such a doctrine’s corollaries can include pervasive xenophobia and outright bigotry. Yet, “segullah” elsewhere in the Bible denotes accumulated royal property, provided with designated purpose, not prerogatives. Explains Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, “Segullah … does not mean that God does not belong to any other people, but that this people must belong to no other god, must not acknowledge any other being as a god.” Thus, we read the Divine promise, “to set you high—est above all the nations that He made, for praise and for renown and for glory,” as not a gift but a summons. Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno comments, “And to set you highest—to understand and to instruct [all the nations]…” For praise and for renown and for glory—of God, may He be Blessed.” Similarly, Rabbi Hirsch observes that the “praise,” “renown” and “glory” are what we respectively offer, so to speak, to God: by serving historically as a demonstration of Divine providence and the supremacy of God’s dominion in human destiny, by bearing the Torah that renders God’s will renowned as the source of our spiritual mission and vitality, and by faithfully fulfilling that Torah and thus glorifying God and spreading His light throughout the world. In this ven, he stresses, “The spiritual and moral impact on human consciousness … is the ultimate purpose of [its] historic mission in the world.”

Recognition of this responsibility permeates Scripture. “I, God, have called you into righteousness and shall hold your hand, and I shall provide you for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations…I have given you as a light of the nations, that My salvation may be to the end of the earth.” And nations will go by your light, and kings by the gleam of your shining.” Rabbi Kindschim of Laskow (Haklali 5:18) explains, “The nations will go by the light of Yisrael—they and their kings and officers.” Furthermore, notes Rabbi David Altschuler, this promise obligates us: “They will learn from you the ways of God, and you will illuminate their eyes.”

In this light, we can appreciate the implications of Rabbi Yehudah Halevi’s famous simile, “Yisrael among the nations is like the heart among the organs [of the body].” While a body becomes a heart only when it is transplanted into a body is equally pointless. The body can only function properly and attain its goals when, as an organic whole, it is complete—comprising both a heart and a full complement of organs. Perhaps alluding to this critical interdependence, the Bible explicitly links Yisrael among the nations to the kohanim (priests) within Yisrael. God stippedated at Sinai, “And you shall be to me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation,” a role the prophet Yeshayahu envisioned actualized in the future. We should consider the implications of both these metaphors in elucidating Yisrael’s unique role in the world.

The Kohanim and Yisrael, The Heart and The Body

The analogy of the priesthood is especially illuminating. The primary duty of the kohanim was pedagogical—to instruct the children of Yisrael concerning all the laws that God told them through Moshe.” Thus, the prophets likewise portray their mandate. In practice, apart from relatively brief几百s for the kohanim (and by extension, the Levites and others drawn to the task), were charged with teaching and guiding the nation. The necessity of a sanctified caste, consecrated to spirituality and education, is clear. Yisrael is bidden to function as a priestly nation, and by faithfully fulfilling that Torah and thus glorifying God and spreading His light throughout the world. In this ven, he stresses, “The spiritual and moral impact on human consciousness … is the ultimate purpose of [its] historic mission in the world.”

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of the nation. Rambam explains, “[The tribe of] Levi did not merit the inheritance of [land in] Eretz Yisrael and its spoils with its brethren, because it was separated to serve God and to minister to Him and to teach His upright ways and righteous laws to the multitudes” (see note 13). Like the heart, pumping life-giving blood throughout the body’s extremities, the kohanim and their associates mediate the connection that spiritually vivifies the nation’s periphery. As such, “kohanim are diligent”; one conscious of his role as heart is never quiescent. Similarly, kohanim are notoriously irascible; being so intimately bonded to the essence of humanity and bringing them close to the Torah.”

On this note, Rabbi Ovadia Seforno comments, “You shall be My saggalim from among all peoples—Even though all mankind is more precious to Me than all the rest of terrestrial creatures…you will be ‘My saggalim from among all of them.’ For all the world is Mine—Like the heart is to the body, and the pious of the nations of the world are precious to Me without doubt.”

Moreover, Rabbi Hirsch explains “for all the world is Mine” as part of the mission: “The relationship that you are to establish now between you and Me…initiates the renewal of the normal relationship that should exist between ‘all the world’ and Me. After all, by their destiny, all people and all peoples are Mine, and I am dedicating them to Be Mine.” Yisrael’s designation as God’s “firstborn,” he observes, means that Yisrael is God’s child; and so, too, all the world. As the diverse characters and divergent interests of the nations, Yisrael must lead all the other peoples on the road back to God and to His Law, by serving, on behalf of all of humanity, “as a manifest example, a warning, a model, an education.”

In summation, “Yisrael has no other task than to bring the heart of the nation, ‘all to call in God’s Name [and] to serve Him in every mouth and the example of his deeds.’ And, communally, its role as heart is never quiescent. Similarly, the righteous among all the world’s nations, as [Zecheriah] said of the Mashiah, ‘And he will speak peace unto the nations’; and [Yeshayahu] said, ‘And [He will] rebuke many peoples; and they will beat their swords into plowshares, et cetera.’ And the second is that because of Yisrael’s status as ‘kohanei Hashem’ [the seven Noahide] laws and go and on the way of goodness; as in, ‘He will instruct us of His ways, and we will go in His paths,’ et cetera. ‘Like the heart among the organs,’ on both levels, Yisrael is spiritually and vitally to reign supreme over the entire world. Furthermore, apropos of the role of the kohanim mediating peace within Yisrael, we should consider the prerequisite of world peace envisioned by the prophets: ‘And many peoples will go and say, ‘Come and let us ascend to the mountain of God, to the house of the God of Yaakov, and He will instruct us of His ways, and we will go in His paths’; for from Tzion shall go forth Torah and the word of God from Yerushalayim.”

Rabbi Hirsch comments on this verse that “the teachings of right and social justice, of rightousness and love, shall one day become part of the life of all mankind, without exception.” In the wake of that universal recognition, “And He will judge among the nations and rebuke many peoples; and they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” True peace among nations is possible only once all they accept their diverse characters and ostensibly divergent interests and abilities as complementary means for actualizing the same sacred objectives. As in the microcosm of the nation of Yisrael, such a realization renders strife absurd. The “Isaiah Wall” adjacent to the UN head-quarters testifies to international submission to this utopian vision of the prophets, but the world has yet to appreciate that its fulfillment depends on the preceding verse.

**The Sarim of the Nations**

More fundamentally, though, to relate properly to the diverse characters and divergent interests of the nations of the world, we must invoke an additional, elusive concept. As articulated explicitly in Daniel’s visions and reiterating continually throughout Talmudic and Midrashic literature, each archetypal nation has a “sar”—so-called Divine Officer—an attendant, unduplicated role in realizing the world’s destiny, the loss of any nation is calamitous. Beyond the personal tragedies involved, such a loss not only deals a mortal blow to the cultural heritage of the world’s nations—and thereby the means through which each nation leaves its indelible mark on the vast tapestry of existence. It is no wonder, then, that we find the prophet Yechezkel lamenting the destruction of heaven nations who were not even our friends. Likewise, the Talmud relates that even the unavoidable destructtion of the Egyptians at the splitting of the sea elicited, so to speak, Divine mercy. After all, if every archetypal nation was endowed with an original character and an attendant, unduplicated role in realizing the world’s destiny, the loss of any nation is calamitous. Beyond the personal tragedies involved, such a loss not only deals a mortal blow to the national heritage of the world’s nations—and thereby the means through which each nation leaves its indelible mark on the vast tapestry of existence. It is no wonder, then, that we find the prophet Yechezkel lamenting the destruction of heaven nations who were not even our friends. Likewise, the Talmud relates that even the unavoidable destruction of the Egyptians at the splitting of the sea elicited, so to speak, Divine mercy. After all, if every archetypal nation was endowed with an original character and an attendant, unduplicated role in realizing the world’s destiny, the loss of any nation is calamitous. Beyond the personal tragedies involved, such a loss not only deals a mortal blow to the national heritage of the world’s nations—and thereby the means through which each nation leaves its indelible mark on the vast tapestry of existence. It is no wonder, then, that we find the prophet Yechezkel lamenting the destruction of heaven nations who were not even our friends. Likewise, the Talmud relates that even the unavoidable destruction of the Egyptians at the splitting of the sea elicited, so to speak, Divine mercy. After all, if every archetypal nation was endowed with an original character and an attendant, unduplicated role in realizing the world’s destiny, the loss of any nation is calamitous. Beyond the personal tragedies involved, such a loss not only deals a mortal blow to the national heritage of the world’s nations—and thereby the means through which each nation leaves its indelible mark on the vast tapestry of existence. It is no wonder, then, that we find the prophet Yechezkel lamenting the destruction of heaven nations who were not even our friends. Likewise, the Talmud relates that even the unavoidable destruction of the Egyptians at the splitting of the sea elici...
Yisrael’s Role among the Nations

We can clarify Yisrael’s “own way” in this context based upon our earlier analogies. Like the kohanim among us and “the heart among the organs,” Yisrael singularly lacks the sort of particularized niche epitomized by the range of sarim. The role of Yisrael, on this hierarchy was “apportioned to… all the nations beneath all the heavens… God took you, and brought you out of the iron crucible, out of Egypt, to be His heritage, people as you are….”

More expressly, “God’s portion is His people; Yaakov is the lot of His heritage… God alone guides it, and there is with Him no alien power.” The sar of the nation of Yisrael exercises neither guidance nor governance, which God, so to speak, retains directly. “Indeed, this sar is to be directed to Divine will.”

Moreover, the bestowal of Eretz Yisrael reflects the same dynamism that applies to Am Yisrael. The Midrash observes, “The Holy One Blessed be He… when He created the world, apportioned the lands to the sarim of the nations solely; and He, in addition to that, apportioned the Land of Yisrael, too, has contributed to this end, in its own way.”

Yisrael’s dereliction of its responsibilities affected both it and the world. The Talmud relates cryptically that “the Holy One Blessed be He exiled Yisrael among the nations solely so proselytes would be added to them.” It seems odd to regard such laudable conversions as a consequence of Yisrael’s sins and most dire punishment. We should, however, contrast this dynamism with the God-given ideal, Yisrael, as a sovereign state in its land, was to serve as a role model, instilling Godliness in all nations, as the latter continue engaging in their particular national pursuits, all of them means to perfecting God’s world.

Varying the metaphor, the objectiv e was not unison but harmony and distinction. For here God wanted bodies that complement rather than compete with—another one. In this portrayal, Yisrael is the orchestral conductor, charged with ensuring that every player is properly synchronized, to contribute to the best of the world’s great, emergent symphony. When Yisrael, as a sovereign state in its land, forsook its divine role, it forfeited its right to the land that is “designated for the rectification of the entire world.” Exiled and of the wilderness, Yisrael can expect to establish an autonomous state, a model state permeated with true holiness, to illumine the Entire World.

Perfecting—and Redeeming—the Entire World

In this sorry state, the world still approaches its destination, albeit circuitously. Thus, Christianity and Islam have functioned historically as our proxies—withstanding the unspeakable atrocities perpetrated by many of their adherents in disfiguring the basics of God’s Torah and advancing the world toward its final goal. Rabbi Yehudah Halevi describes them as “the preparation and prelude to the awaited Masbiach, who is the [world’s] fruition.”

More explicitly, Rambam asserts, “All these matters of Jesus the Nazorei and of [Mohammed] the Yishmaeli, who arose after him, are solely to straighten the way for the King of Kings and Messiah.”

Yisrael will dwell apart from the nations.… From it, the blessed and redemptive crucible, out of Egypt, as you are, to epitomize personal righteousness, which may stimulate all of humanity. As God chose us to be the heart, so they have chosen to be the hands and lands, to appoint delegates [for them]. Yet, no angel other controls the Land of Yisrael; rather, He bestows a “special endowment—and its attendant infinitesimal goodness.” Thus, Am Yisrael can render international strife an anachronistic absurdity. The Temple of Yisrael will be “a house of prayer for all the peoples.” Indeed, the Midrash relates that, “had the nations of the world known what good the Temple was for them, they would have surrounded it with fortifications to safeguard it.”

The redemption we seek is not only ours. Our objective, reiterated at the culmination of all our prayers, is “to perfect the world through the reign of the Almighty” (see note 33). Still, some will regard this perspective—or any that reaffirms Yisrael’s assertion that Yisrael is “chosen” to disproportionately challenge nationalism on behalf of the nations among us, the “heart among the organs,” is not a paltry substitute for the national ideal. The conductor, denied his baton, can yet train additional conductors—but, while the whole, the orchestra remains conducted, producing cacophony and no music.

Rabbi Hirsch challenges, “Does this spell enmity? Or pride? As if God were not the Lord of all creatures, men!”

In practice, our mission nonetheless dictates that, presently, perform, “Yisrael dwells alone.” But, Rabbi Hirsch asks: “Is it fitting to put an end to the hatred of the religions for each other?” The antitode to such xenophobia, however, is not denying our historic role—rather, appreciating the premise of worldwide fraternity that underlies it. Those who ask: “Is it not a wondrous thing, that a “chosen” people, who was created with the [Divine] essence” applies to both Jew and non-Jew. Likewise, regarding all humankind, it teaches, “Man was created singly … so a person would not say to his fellow [My] father is greater than your father.”

Rabbi Hirsch, “And it shall be at the end of the days, the mountain of the house of God will be established on the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills, and all the nations will stream to it.” Rather than being “once criminals cease.” Nonetheless, people continue “all the nations” (see note 28) toward the peak” bearing its distinct ideological and cultural heritage, house; to God’s house, to which, in the end, each realizes its unique legacy is dedicated. Rabbi Hirsch notes that the “hoped-for return” of “all human beings to God is not … a mass conversion of all men to Judaism” (see note 33). The Midrash reaffirms the Torah’s asser tion that Yisrael is “chosen”—as its ex ceptional sensitivity.46 Thus, Amos warns Yisrael, “And the enemy shall call Yisrael in its own language.49

Still, this special endowment—and its attendant intimacy with God—is “special endowment” and its attendant infinitesimal goodness. Thus, Am Yisrael can render international strife an anachronistic absurdity. Likewise, Yehushuah envisions God bringing the stranger together; as it is said, “For then I shall change to a clear name of the Entire World.” Exiled and of the wilderness, Yisrael can expect to establish an autonomous state, a model state permeated with pure holiness, to illumine the Entire World.

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nation, and will unite toward God.66 Still, most crucially, this future we crave must guide our attitude even now. Rabbi Kook explains, “I love everything.” I cannot refrain from loving all creatures, all peoples. With all the depths of my heart, I desire the glory of all, the perfection of all. My love for Yisrael is more passionate, more profound; however, the inner yearning spreads by the might of its love over everything.67 Only thus, can we aspire to realize the prophet’s vision: “None shall hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain; for the world will be filled with knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea. And on that day, nations shall seek the root of Yisrael, which stands as a balm to all peoples, and his resting place shall be glo-rious.”68 So may we merit fulfilling it, speedily, in our days.

Notes
7. Radak and Metzadav David commentary on yedios 60:3.
8. Sefer HaKuzari 2:56. The same similar in Zeebor 3:22, 221b.
11. Yevak 5:10. See also Devarim 33:10.
16. Shabbat 20a and 114b.
17. See Bava Bata 16:1 and Sanhedrin 11:2a, and see Maimon, Choshen Hagedi Aggadot on Sanhedrin, loc. cit.
18. Avo 1:12.
27. Ibid., 2:3.
32. See Berachot 10a.
33. Aleinu.
34. See Rabbi Trajek Haelhem, Reshit Lallei, ch. 58, p. 171.

By Yaakov Feitman

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Rabbi Chaim Segal, z”l, the veteran memreal of Ma’avak Matzav, Rabbi Chaim Segal, z”l, said that he once asked the rabbi yeshivah, Rav Yitzchak Hurter, z”l, “What is the single most important teaching to transmit to the new generation of American students?” His reply was terse and immediate: “That we are the Am Hannischar.”

So while it is clear that this topic was of the utmost importance to Rabbi Hurter, there is not one published ma’al- mar or even a word-mouth tradition from him on this subject. It would therefore be presumptuous to claim any comparison to the definitive Rav Hurter position on the election of Israel.

However, Rav Hurter did speak a great deal about the uniqueness of Israel. The “rosh yeshivah spent much time defining what he generally referred to as Kneses Yisrael. He also explored deeply the purpose of Am Yisrael. Perhaps most importantly to this topic, he spoke and wrote much about hayadus—the dissolution of Israel from the nations. From the thoroughness of his views on this cognate subject, we may come to appreciate his understanding of the concept of Am Hannischar.

The Creation of Am Yisrael

Although Kiddush Yisrael was brought forth in the year 2448 after Creation, our Sages make it clear that the very first word of Genesis—Bereishis—suggests the Midrashic explanation “because of Israel who is called Reishbi or ‘First.’” The implication of this teaching is that the nation of Israel’s existence was predestined and necessary to the world, which is the nature of this ‘necessity’. One aspect, based upon the teachings of the Gaon of Vila, relates to the name of God mentioned in the beginning of Creation: “In the beginning Elokim created.” As Rashi points out, Elokim is the name associated with din or judgment (1:1). Only later in Creation is the name YHVH added (2:4). The reason is that “in the beginning God created to know the world with din alone. When He saw that the world could not exist in such a condition, He added the trait of mercy.”

The Gaon uses this midrash to explain another well-known Chazal: “When Moshe Rabbeinu saw Rabbi Akiva being tortured to death, He asked, ‘is this the reward for such devotion to Torah?’ Hashem replied: ‘This was my original intention’ (Menachos 259b). According to the Gra, ‘original intention’ refers to the world of Elokim, the cosmos of absolute justice. Rav Hurter explains that one of the distinctions between Am Yisrael and the nations is that as a people we are able to survive in the rarefied atmosphere of pure din. It is not only Rabbi Akiva who was able to live and die on that level but the nation itself (Vayikra Yitzchak, [Jerusalem, 1963], 4). Is that relationship changes and uplifts us, even as it sometimes subjects us to unparalleled
As a people, we are able to survive in the rarefied atmosphere of pure din.

Rav Huna notes that both Christianity and Islam’s contributions to the awareness of Mashiach were developed in the homes of the Ave. Both Yishmael and Eav, despite their denseness, retained some shred of understanding of the truth from the house of Avraham. Even the role they have to play in eternity flows from their connection to Am Yisrael. Being chosen, far from leading to rewards in this world, confirms only the status of spiritual pioneer. Israel’s role as the Chosen People is a threat to no one. On the contrary, it allows the nations of the world to discover their place in the infinite scheme. Hashem will, indeed, turn to all the nations, but their teachers and guides will be those who have suffered through Crusades, pogroms and holocausts, whereas Yisrael enjoys the noble title. At the end of time, Israel will lead all back to Hashem. The climax of all history, the resolution of all troubles and the achievement of all noble goals will flow from the Chosen Nation to all who have learned the poignent lessons of that long journey.

Veromemanu mikol lashon, v ekideshanu bemitzvotav, (Who selected us from among all the peoples and gave us His Torah?); in the Kiddush for Yom Tov we say “Acher hachar bane mikol amanimanu bine milchak lashon, vekechad shakrimo bemitzvot” (Who has chosen us from every people, exalted us above every tongue and sanctified us with His commandments, and in the Birkat Keryit Shema of Shachat, after a tribute to the Torah, we say “Uznu sacharot bane mikol veelashon,” “You have chosen us from among every people and tongues.” It was the acceptance of the Torah and mitzvot that created the status of chosenness for the Jewish people.

Our chosenness is, in effect, a direct consequence of our contract with God, a consequence of our forefathers’ acceptance of the Torah in a binding, enduring and non-negotiable manner; in Rav Aharon Lichtenstein’s words from the 1966 symposium, the result of “activ submision to a divinely ordered discipline.” Indeed the prophets’ view of the relationship between God and the Jewish people is commonly formulated in terms of a marriage, a relationship in which mutual obligations and responsibilities are defined by a contract. However, our contract is distinct from a marriage contract in that it is exclusive and eternal. Our failure to uphold our end of the deal neither nullifies the contract nor alters our obligation, though it may have other consequences: “Behold, the Lord’s name is upon you as a seal,封印 upon all of the families of the earth; therefore I will visit you all of your inequities.” Amos 3:2. More critical for our understanding of chosenness, neither does non-adorance on our part alter God’s obligations to the Jewish people. Just as the prophet Hosea was obligated to take back his wayward wife, God remains, waiting for the Jewish people despite their straying. This then is the nature of chosenness—the eternal, mutual relationship between the Jewish people and God, who cannot shirk His obligation to us to redeem us when we fulfill our obligations to Him. May that happen speedily in our days.
The idea that holocausts are natural sounds very reasonable when all you have is a university education behind you and a beautifully tended ravine in front of you. Neither conveys the details of Jewish survival, there is no floor. When you are betrothed to the Almighty, your theory was that Jewry had lost its fortune—its Jewish boys like Daniel Pearl and Nicholas Berg. Not that the world's feelings toward the Jewish State are significant in this regard. In modern times, Israel is “The Jew,” and the world now relates to the Jewish State the way it has always related to individual members of our people. The European Union recently called Israel the “greater threat to the Middle East.” North Korea, despite its explicit nuclear threats to the West and wholesale export of uranium to Libya et al. Not Russia, who has been providing nuclear technology to Iran and other rogue states. Not Iran or Syria who sponsor terror organizations on the Arab continent. Israel. The United Nations General Assembly a micromos of mankind, has issued more condemnation of the only democracy in the Middle East than it has against any other nation on the planet. The General Assembly has not yet critiqued Sudan for punishing shoplifters with cross-amputation, China for harvesting organs from political prisoners or Saudi Arabia for banning the practice of any religion besides Islam, but it has devoted 60 percent of its emergency sessions to the purported misdeeds of Israel—including crimes like Israel’s preemptive attack on Egypt in 1973 and its recent construction of a fence to keep suicide bombers out of Jewish population centers.

Strangely, the General Assembly has never passed a resolution condemning anti-Semitism. When, in 1964-65, the American delegation tried to include a reference to anti-Semitism in the UN’s International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, our delegation recognized a widespread proton at the UN that anti-Semitism was a question not of race but of religion; and in 2003, when the UN drafted its Resolution on Religious Intolerance, the term anti-Semitism was left out because, as the Irish delegate explained with a straight face, “It is more properly consid ered under the rubric of race.” While Daniel Bernard, the French ambassador to England, at a London dinner party criticized Israel for its continuing presence in Gaza and the West Bank, calling the Jewish State “a . . . little country,” the Zionist philosopher Hillel Halkin reacted with shock. “Who at London dinner parties makes such nonsense about Palestine?” Halkin, a man who put all his faith in Theodore Herzl’s promise that having our own state would restore the Jews to human dignity, concluded that Zionism’s political failure “is a bitter reality to accept.” The State has not normalized Jewish existence. If anything, it has just become a convenient and visible target for a destructive force that throughout history has defined rational explanation.

Instead of caring for other people, or even other animals, we are our generation’s form of entertainment. At some point I had to recognize that anti-Semitism is a natural phenomenon, another ordinary hatred—rings hollow when the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Instead of caring for other people, or even other animals, we are our generation’s form of entertainment. At some point I had to recognize that anti-Semitism is a natural phenomenon, another ordinary hatred—rings hollow when the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Instead of caring for other people, our generation has no floor. When you are betrothed to the Almighty, national extermination centers; neither were they made by international extermination centers; neither were they made by international extermination centers. Not Russia, who has been providing nuclear technology to Iran and other rogue states. Not Iran or Syria who sponsor terror organizations on the Arab continent. Israel. The United Nations General Assembly a micromos of mankind, has issued more condemnation of the only democracy in the Middle East than it has against any other nation on the planet. The General Assembly has not yet critiqued Sudan for punishing shoplifters with cross-amputation, China for harvesting organs from political prisoners or Saudi Arabia for banning the practice of any religion besides Islam, but it has

Just as there is nothing natural about the details of Jewish survival, there is nothing natural about the details of Jewish destruction.
The doctrine of am hanisiyot—the election or chosenness of Israel—has been glorified and condemned, but mostly misunderstood, for the greater part of our history. Some have dismissed it with contempt and others, when compared to it the Nazi idea of the Herrenvolk, others have exagerrated its particularity as thoroughly genetic in nature; and yet others have diluted it to just about the point of making the notion both pointless and meaningless. Few have understood it, major principles of Judaism, have been subjected to such distortion.

The comparison to the ideal role of Aryan racial superiority is a vicious canard that has been with us since the Enlightenment, but ratcheted up since the appearance of mass anti-Semitism in the twentieth century. The non-ideological discomfort that some modern Jews feel is more of a social nature; “what will my non-Jewish neighbors think of me/us when they hear of this boast?” underlies a good deal of the embarrassment with the am hanisiyot idea. And not far removed from this concern is its enemblet and eventual excision by many liberal-modernist Jewish groups. Equally fallacious, if somewhat less deplorable, is the interpretation of chosenness in some Charedi or other circles, namely, that Jews are religiously and spiritually superior to the rest of mankind and that this pre-eminence is genetically determined. Placing the concept on a biological basis is good for the collective ego but is poor scholarship and is untrue to our sacred texts. A critique of all these views will explicitly become evident in the following paragraphs.

The doctrine of election is accepted by all great Jewish thinkers but not necessarily to the same degree. Thus, for instance, Rambam and a number of other Sephardic scholars of the Middle Ages accepted it, but did not give it the prominence accorded it by other Jewish thinkers. Rambam does not include it in his Thirteen Principles of Faith, the Am Maanim. Other prominent sages, from Yehudah Halevi to the Maharal to Rav Avraham Avinu, however, exagerrated its special privileges other than observing the Torah and the mitzvot. On the contrary, chosenness implies a commitment to serve Him and thus to become the teachers—willingly or unwillingly—to the rest of humankind. In addition to declaring us a “holy nation,” we were simultaneously commissioned to “a kingdom of priests,” a goy kedosh—a term which implies, as Yechezkel would later announce (22:26), that as a priestly people we were to teach the world the difference “between the holy and the profane, the pure and the impure.” The best term to describe this Divine mission is nobility. God loves all humans and therefore provided a single people to undertake the noble and historic task of bringing God to them and to God.

Who chose whom at Sinai? The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 22a) lists the conditions of the giving of the Torah. One has the Almighty offering the Torah to various ancient peoples, all of whom objected to certain commandments; only Israel accepted the Torah in toto. The Kook, expressing the common view that God coerced Israel to accept by threatening to bury three under the falling moon. The difference between them is this: The first tells us that the Jews chose the God; the second, that God chose the Jews.

I believe that both versions must be read together; both, paradoxically, speak of God as the lover and humanity as the beloved. For this reason, we praise our God and the Bridegroom in one single song, “am yidchenu ve-am Yisrael.” The way we are, we are inducted into the Covenant of Abraham and considered as members of the Chosen People—whether we like it or not. We are the chosen, not the choosers. But as we learn and mature, we come into our role not by coercion but by will and love and grace. We who reject the “yoke of Israel” are condemned to being the subject of Divine durees. They are—no matter how much they try—Jews by birth only. They often suffer from their Jewish identity—anti-Semitism and confusion about the State of Israel and spiritual rootlessness—and do not taste of the glory of Jewishness. Only when we turn anew and accept upon ourselves His Torah, as our own free will, will we experience the dignity and delight of being Jewish. Our choosing God is as important as His choosing us.

Finally, “Israel” is not described anywhere as a racial-genetic group, thus excluding all the rest of mankind from the opportunity to serve Him as part of the “holy nations” and “kingdom of priests.” Were this so, we would never be permitted to accept proselytes from other nations. Those who advocate such a narrow view must explain why, according to the Midrash, Avraham and Sarah were the first to enlist pagans as gerim, and why the Tradition affirms that the souls of proselytes of all generations were present at the Revelation—“those who are here standing with us this day … and those who are not with us here this day” (Devarim 29:14)—a phrase that intends not only future generations of Jews from birth but also true proselytes (Tofura, Satah 7:5).

What binds the generations of Jews together is not biolo- gy but a culture of faith that is passed on not by genes but by a shared history and a shared destiny, a faith of commitment to live and act in a manner that will yield holiness. Those bonds are powerful, but they are not impenetrable to those who yearn to accept upon themselves the mitzvot—and the noblesse oblige.

A few decades ago a scholar wrote a dissertation in which he conclusively demonstrated that, amongst the Tannaim, the more a Tanna emphasized the “doctrine of election,” the more pronounced was his universalism. Not only was there no conflict between the two, but chosenness affirmed universalism.

The more Jewish you are, the more do you—and should you—care for the rest of the world.

By Moshe Lichtenstein

Beshert Yisrael, the unique kedushah bestowed upon Am Yisrael by Hakadosh Baruch Hu, is not only an important theological issue worthy of our attention, but, more importantly, it is also a central motif in our religious experience that runs like a thread throughout our life cycle. Every morning as we approach Hakadosh Baruch Hu in prayer, we praise and thank Him in two central parts of the selihah (Birkat HaTorah and Birkat Keriyat Shema) for His choosing us from amongst the nations; every Shabbat we take note of our uniqueness in His eyes, and every Yom Tov, as the holiday begins, we sanctify it with the ringing proclamation of “Ani lechaim ve-am Yisrael.” What is the meaning of this chosenness (election)? Is it compatible with our deeply held belief that the Ribono shel Olam concerns and involves Himself with the needs of all humankind, and how do we reconcile it with our abhorrence of a racist ideology? To pose the question in a softer manner, what is the relationship between particularism and universalism in Judaism? Can the two ideals coexist, or must we choose sides?

Any serious attempt to relate to these issues must proceed along a dual path: A. An analysis of the man-God relationship and B. Interpretation of the sources in Tanach that relate to the topic of bechirat Yisrael. However, the medium of a popular magazine article and the amount of space allocated to us preclude a lengthy discussion and the presentation of a close textual reading. Therefore we shall attempt to provide the basics of an analysis in the hope that the reader will be able to refer to the primary sources and apply the theory outlined here to them, within the broader context of the religious experience.

The imagaries employed by Tanach to express the concept of bechirat Yisrael are often drawn from the area of family relationships. The famous statement that Hakadosh Baruch Hu made to Moshe Rabbahvi in the beginning of Shemot (4:22) defines us as His chosen child: “beni becbeiri Yisrael,” “My firstborn son is Israel.” Many such verses appear throughout Tanach, each emphasizing our status as God’s Child. The notion of election—employed often by Yehushuah and other prophets and that, according to many interpretations, is the entire point of Shir Hashirim—utilizes the marital relationship to express our connection with God. He is the lover, we are the beloved; He is the groom, we are the bride. Although there are basic differences between these relationships, for our purpose, the crucial point is what they have in common, namely, that the metaphor of a marital relationship expresses the concept of bechirat Yisrael as a relationship. The ramifications of this are crucial for our topic, but to better understand them, let us begin with an analysis of the metaphor.
firstly before applying it to the subject of bechintat Yisrael. We all do our best to relate to others with dignity, respect and empathy; we try to help others when they are in need, to understand and support them in times of happiness and to rejoice with them in times of happiness and achievement. Nevertheless, for family we reserve special treatment. The relationship we have with family—our sense of identification with and our willingness to help them—is qualitatively different than that with strangers.

Were someone to accuse us of having a discriminatory attitude towards non-family members, we would reply that we are not discriminating against strangers by denying them their proper due as human beings, rather it is our relatives who are being singled out for extraordinary treatment because of our intimacy with them. It is not that we are doing less for others, it is that we are doing more for mishpachah (family).

The reason for this is that our connection to family is rooted in an I-Thou relationship—as the very use of the word "relatives" to designate family implies—that exists between us as persons rooted in a common existential and social situation and not in a legal formula or moral imperative. Chazal's dictum to treat others as we would like to treat them, "Ma'as desan echad bechakruchato lo n什anu," the obligation to act truthfully and honestly in our dealings with fellow human beings and other ethical standards that we abide by are rooted in the realm of reason and obligation. As such, they are universal codes of behavior that must be observed towards all, without exception—friend and foe, neighbor and stranger, Jew and non-Jew. Our relationships with our friends and family, though, are due to an interpersonal connection that reflects an emotional bond. It is not the rule of the mind but the affinity of the heart that is the focal point of these relationships.

Therefore, we do not relate to mere acquaintances as we do to close associates and relatives; we do not acquire acquaintances expect us to relate to them as if they were the latter groups. Fairness and respect of all human beings as created in His image are our universal obligations, but the special relationship that exists between kin—and that is often expressed in—and hence entails duties and obligations—towards non-Jews and in our relationships with them. It is our expectation that non-Jews recognize Hakadosh Baruch Hu, worship Him and obey the dictates that relate to them (be it the Noahide laws or natural law and morality), and it is our obligation to treat them with respect, dignity and honor for their rank in the universe as creations created in the Divine image and substrates to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. What we cannot grant them is the status of having Am Yisrael's intimate relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This is a special relationship that is limited to members of Am Yisrael alone.

Thus, it is evident from this analysis that there are absolutely no grounds for discriminating against non-Jews as human beings, but there is legitimacy to deny their participation in our special relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Our obligations towards them should be analogous to our obligations towards a stranger who must be treated with respect and fairness but need not receive the special treatment we reserve for family. Practically, this means that anything inherent to the human condition that is not a function of our special relationship, such as engaging in work, worship, et cetera, is a racial position that is counter to the Torah's values. Moreover, there is a recognition on our part of a common human condition vis-a-vis God, if manifested in varying degrees of obligation. This is what a zukerin (a non-Jewish friend of Jewish thinkers and writers who reflect upon the human condition and the universal religious experience. However, values and mitzvat that are a function of the unique Jewish fraternity need not be extended to non-Jews. Thus, the ha'batot that the Torah imposed upon us as a supra-moral obligation is a conditional obligation to assist fellow Jews as members of a common brotherhood (for example, rabbin, charging interest for a loan, hashvat mishkatot, returning lost items; et cetera) do not apply to non-Jews, while the prohibitions that are rooted in their rights as human beings (for example, theft, murder, et cetera) relate to them as well. In a similar manner, we exclude non-Jews from experiences that are a function of our special relationship, such as engaging in Torah Shebe'elat Peh, while granting recognition to universal expressions of man's position in the world, such as refilah and korhavat (sacrifices) that apply to all of humankind.

The metaphor of bride and groom as an expression of man's involvement with the Almighty was understood by Rambam as the quest of the individual soul that longs for the intimated and intimate love of the Ribbono shel Olam (family).

We have a dialectical relationship with the Ribono shel Olam that is rooted both in the nous of mittaḥ yashar and the intimate love of mittaḥ halahavot (the attribute of love). There is a basic behavioral difference between the two. The former is a universal claim that the Lord of the Universe imposes upon all of mankind, since it is rooted in a condition that is common to both Jew and non-Jew. From the transcendental perspective, all humans are a drop in the bucket and are totally subordinate to the Master, regardless of race, creed or gender. However, this is not so regarding the latter; it is an existential relationship that is not rooted in a universal claim based upon the objective status of man but is a subjective relationship between two entities that retains the particular nature unique to each subject. Therefore, from the viewpoint of relationships and their legitimate particularism, disparity between different groups is possible. It is this effect that enables the concept of bechintat Yisrael to be valid while remaining consistent with God's mercy and justice vis-a-vis human kind.

The metaphor of bride and groom as an expression of man's involvement with the Almighty was understood by Rambam as the quest of the individual soul that longs for the intimate and intimate love of the Ribbono shel Olam (family). A nation, the idea of a special relationship with the Ribono shel Olam is what lies at the roots of the bond with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. As a nation, the idea of a special relationship with the Ribono shel Olam is what is rooted in the realm of reason and obligation. As such, they are universal codes of behavior that must be observed towards all, without exception—friend and foe, neighbor and stranger, Jew and non-Jew. Our relationships with our friends and family, though, are due to an interpersonal connection that reflects an emotional bond. It is not the rule of the mind but the affinity of the heart that is the focal point of these relationships.

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