

CHOSEN NATION

JEWISH PEOPLE - CHOSEN NATION

The Jewish people have been called many names throughout history. One title in particular, "the Chosen Nation," seems unexpected. Let's explore what that means and how it impacts our lives.

➤ WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PART OF THE CHOSEN NATION?

CHOSEN PEOPLE - IS THAT RACIST?

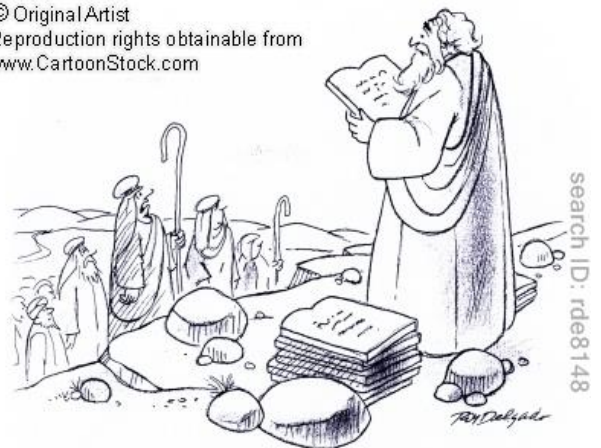
The Jewish nation is often referred to as "the Chosen People."

Many people (including Jews) are uncomfortable with this idea. They perceive the concept of a "Chosen People" as racist and mindful of the Nazi concept of a supreme "Aryan" nation. It appears to contradict the accepted Western ideal of all people being equal before God.

In the 1930s, as the Nazis were tightening the noose around the necks of German Jews, George Bernard Shaw remarked that if the Nazis would only realize how Jewish their notion of Aryan superiority was, they would drop it immediately. In 1973, in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, Yakov Malik, the Soviet ambassador to the United Nations, said: "The Zionists have come forward with the theory of the Chosen People, an absurd ideology. That is religious racism." Indeed, the most damaging anti-Semitic document in history, the forgery known as The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, is based on the idea of an international conspiracy to rule the world by the "Chosen People."

Is the Jewish concept of chosenness racist?

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" Chosen people ? - That sounds like racial profiling to me ! "

THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA

Deuteronomy 14:2	דברים יד:ב
For you [the Jewish people] are a holy people to HaShem your God, and HaShem has chosen you to be His own treasure out of all nations on the face of the earth.	כי עם קדוש אתה, לה' אלקיך; ובך בחר ה', להיות לו לעם סגולה, מכל העמים, אשר על-פני האדמה.

- ❖ HOW DOES IT FEEL TO KNOW THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN YOU?
WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO BE CHOSEN BY GOD?
- ❖ WHAT MAKES THE JEWISH PEOPLE DESERVING OF BEING
“CHOSEN”?
- ❖ WHY WOULD GOD, WHO CREATED THE ENTIRE WORLD AND
CARES ABOUT ALL HIS CREATURES, CHOOSE ONLY ONE NATION
TO BE HIS “TREASURE”?



CHOSEN FOR WHAT?

Exodus 19:5-6	שְׁמוֹת יֵט: ה-ו
<p>Now, if you will listen to My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be my treasure from among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine;</p> <p>And You shall be for Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'</p>	<p>וְעַתָּה, אִם-שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי, וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם, אֶת-בְּרִיתִי--וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֻגְלָה מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים, כִּי-לִי כָל-הָאָרֶץ.</p> <p>וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ-לִי מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים, וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ: אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים, אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבַּר, אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.</p>
Seforno	ספורנו
<p>“And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests.” In this fashion you will be the treasure of them all by being a kingdom of priests to understand and teach the entire human race that all shall call in the Name of Hashem and serve Him.</p>	<p>”וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים. ” וּבִזֶה תִּהְיוּ סֻגְלָה מִכֹּלֶם כִּי תִהְיוּ מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים לְהַבִּין וְלַהוֹרֹת לְכָל הָעַמִּין הָאוֹנוֹשִׁי לְקַרֹּא כֹלֶם בְּשֵׁם ה'.</p>

Sforno understands that “Kingdom of Priests” means we are teachers and role models:

- ❖ DO YOU HAVE TO BE “CHOSEN” TO BE A TEACHER OR
ROLE MODEL?
- ❖ HOW MIGHT BEING CHOSEN HELP?

CHOSEN FOR REPSONSIBILITY

Dry Bones THE PASSOVER DEAL



R' Norman Lamm - President of Yeshiva University

(quoted in Commentary Magazine, August 1996)

The chosenness of Israel relates exclusively to its spiritual vocation embodied in the Torah; the doctrine, indeed, was announced at Sinai. Whenever it is mentioned in our liturgy - such as the blessing immediately preceding the Shema...it is always related to Torah or Mitzvot (commandments). This spiritual vocation consists of two complementary functions, described as "Goy Kadosh", that of a holy nation, and "Mamleket Kohanim", that of a kingdom of priests. The first term denotes the development of communal separateness or differences in order to achieve a collective self-transcendence... The second term implies the obligation of this brotherhood of the spiritual elite toward the rest of mankind; **priesthood is defined by the prophets as fundamentally a teaching vocation.**

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- ❖ WHAT DO YOU THINK THE "EXTRA LOVE" CONSISTS OF? DOES THIS HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH WHY WE WERE CHOSEN?
 - ❖ DOES THIS IMPLY THAT OUR CHOSENNESS WAS BECAUSE OF OUR INNATE VALUE OR BECAUSE OF THE INNATE VALUE FOUND IN THIS EXTRA LOVE BESTOWED UPON US?
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CHOSEN TO INSPIRE POSITIVE DIVERSITY

Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

In his book *The Dignity of Difference*, Rabbi Sacks asserts that there is nothing worse than elevating one's own mode of being into the universal norm and thereby denying the humanity of those whose customs are foreign to us or who sport a different skin color. **Being chosen does not mean an elevated status or worth, above the rest of humanity; it means an elevated responsibility towards humanity.** Diversity must therefore be ceaselessly defended against ethnocentric arrogance. Any attempt to impose an artificial uniformity in the name of single culture or faith, reflects a tragic misunderstanding of what it takes for a system to flourish. Because we are different, we each have something unique to contribute and every contribution counts.



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- ❖ HOW DOES RABBI SACKS ANSWER THE ACCUSATION THAT THE CHOSEN PEOPLE IS A RACIST CONCEPT?
 - ❖ HOW DO YOU DEMONSTRATE YOUR OWN PERSONAL DIVERSITY AND INDIVIDUALITY?
 - ❖ WHAT DO YOU DO AS AN INDIVIDUAL THAT CONTRIBUTES TO THE WORLD?
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CHOSEN AS “FIRSTBORNS”





After Moses has finally acquiesced to God's demand to return to Egypt to liberate the Israelites, God instructs Moses as follows:

Exodus 22	שמות כב: כב-כג
And you shall say to Pharaoh, so says God-Israel is my son, My firstborn.	וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל פַּרְעֹה כֹּה אָמַר יי בְּנִי בְכֹרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל
And I am saying to you, send my people and they will serve me and if you refuse to send them, behold I will kill your son, your firstborn.	וְאָמַר אֵלַיךְ שְׁלַח אֶת בְּנֵי וְיַעֲבֹדְנִי וְתִמְאַן לְשִׁלְחוֹ הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי הֹרֵג אֶת בְּנֶךְ בְּכֹרֶךָ

Rabbi Shmuel Hain “Beni Bekhori Yisrael” Reflections on the Doctrine of Chosenness: Kol Hamavaser

This description of the Jewish People as *beni bekhori Yisrael* indicates that all nations are considered God’s children and part of God’s family. Jew and gentile alike receive “Divine love”, with the Jewish people representing the firstborn child. **Being the firstborn does not mean that God showers more love on the Jewish People;** no parent should love their firstborn or any other child in a preferential way. **Nevertheless, the oldest child does play a unique role in the family dynamic.** The oldest sets the tone for the rest of the children; how he or she acts has an inordinate influence on the behavior of all the other children. As such, parents naturally demand and expect greater responsibility on the part of the oldest child; thus, a singular bond exists between the oldest child and the parents. So too, in the family of all humanity, **the Jewish people are charged with a teaching role. Jews set the tone for, and influence the values, ideals and behavior of, the rest of Mankind.** This is the message that God told Moses to convey to Pharaoh. The Jewish People need to be redeemed so that they can take their proper place as the firstborn child, directing all of humanity to achieve the universal goals of Creation. The *beni bekhori Yisrael* model establishes that the Jewish People do enjoy a familial bond with God; but it is a bond that is shared by all of humanity and which makes the Jewish People responsible for all of humanity.

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- ❖ ARE YOU A FIRSTBORN IN YOUR FAMILY? DOES ANY OF THIS FEEL FAMILIAR?
 - ❖ WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE THE FIRST BORN? CAN YOU GIVE EXAMPLES FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES?
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FIRST BORN	MIDDLE BORN	LAST BORN	THE ONLY CHILD
			
<p>responsible motivated conscientious controlling cautious reliable perfectionist achiever leader bossy</p>	<p>feels left out peacemaker social adaptable people-pleaser can be rebellious independent go-between</p>	<p>uncomplicated manipulative seeks attention self-centered fun social charming outgoing</p>	<p>seeks approval sensitive leader confident center of attention mature for their age conscientious responsible perfectionist</p>

WHO CHOSE WHO?

Midrash Sifri, VeZot HaBerachah	מדרש ספרי וזאת הברכה
<p>When God came to give the Torah to Israel, He did not only reveal Himself to Israel, but to all the nations. Initially He went to the sons of Eisav (Esau) and said to them, "Will you accept the Torah?" They replied, "What is written in it?" He replied, "Do not murder." They replied, "Master of the universe, the entire essence of our forefather was to be a murderer!" As it says, "The hands are the hands of Eisav" (Bereishit 27:22); and his father promised him about this, as it says, "You will live by your sword" (Bereishit 27:40).</p> <p>God went to the descendants of Amon and Moav and said to them, "Will you accept the Torah?" They replied, "What is written in it?" He said to them, "Do not commit adultery." They replied, "Master of the universe, our entire essence is one of sexual immorality," as it says, "And the two daughters of Lot conceived from their father" (Bereishit 19:36). He went and found the sons of Yishmael and said to them, "Will you accept the Torah?" They replied, "What is written in it?" He said to them, "Do not steal." They replied, "Master of the universe, the entire essence of our forefather was to be a bandit."</p> <p>The nations of the world cannot say that God did not go and speak, and knock at their doors and ask them if they wanted to accept the Torah.</p>	<p>כשנגלה המקום ליתן תורה לישראל לא על ישראל בלבד הוא נגלה אלא על כל האומות בתחילה הלך אצל בני עשו ואמר להם מקבלים אתם את התורה אמרו לו מה כתוב בה אמר להם לא תרצח אמרו רבשי"ע כל עצמו של אותו אביהם רוצח הוא שני והידיים ידי עשו ועל כך הבטיחו אביו שנאמר בראשית כז על חרבך תחיה.</p> <p>הלך לו אצל בני עמון ומואב ואמ' להם מקבלים אתם את התורה אמרו לו מה כתוב בו אמר להם לא תנאף אמרו לפניו רבשי"ע עצמה של ערוה להם היא שני ותהרן שתי בנות לוט מאביהם. הלך ומצא בני ישמעאל אמר להם מקבלים אתם את התורה אמרו לו מה כתוב בה אמר להם לא תגנוב אמרו לפניו רבשי"ע כל עצמו אביהם לסטים היה שנא' והוא יהיה פרא אדם.</p> <p>לא היתה אומר באומות שלא הלך ודבר ודפק על פתחים מה ירצו ויקבלו את התורה.</p>

- ❖ HOW DOES THIS SOURCE EXPLAIN WHAT THE CONCEPT OF CHOSEN PEOPLE MEANS?
- ❖ HOW DOES THE DISCUSSION CHANGE IF WE KNOW THAT EVERYONE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE CHOSEN?



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The idea of the Chosen people being a racist concept is based on misconceptions of what “chosen” means. Being chosen is an opportunity!

The 3 proposed solutions and ideas we discussed are:

- ❖ Chosen for extra responsibility
- ❖ Chosen to emphasize the importance of diversity and uniqueness
- ❖ Chosen as “firstborns”

IF YOU HAD TO EXPLAIN WHAT THE CHOSEN PEOPLE MEANS TO A NON JEWISH FRIEND, WHICH OF THE ABOVE IDEAS WOULD YOU USE AND WHY?

TRY AND EXPLAIN IT TO THE GROUP IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

