

Parashat Ki Tavo 5777, 2017:

On Being the Chosen People

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains a verse which underscores the unique relationship that obtains between Hashem and the Jewish people when we are loyal to His holy Torah:

And it will be if you obey the L-rd, your G-d, to observe to fulfill all His commandments that I command you this day, that the L-rd, your G-d, will place you supreme above all the nations of the earth. (*Sefer Devarim* 28:1, translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Herein we are given a promise that is conditional upon our fulfillment of the Torah: “the L-rd, your G-d, will place you supreme above all the nations of the earth.” Since this assurance is from Hashem, it takes on the character of an absolute guarantee. Yet, what is its content, and how is it to be authentically understood?

The Midrash helps us answer our question in a very profound manner, and in so doing, sheds light upon the concept of the Chosen People:

The Holy One blessed be He said to the Jewish people: “I have never loved a nation greater than you. Therefore, I have placed you [for My honor in this world] above the other nations [in regards to the singular connection that we share,] just like I [G-d] am above all of mankind.” As the text states: “Yours, Hashem, is the greatness, the strength, the splendor, the triumph and the glory, even everything in heaven and earth. Yours, Hashem, is the kingdom, and the sovereignty over every leader.” (*Sefer Divrei Hayamim* I:29:11, translation, *The Artscroll Tanach*). Therefore, I have placed you [the Jewish people, for My honor in this world] above all other nations...as the text states [in our *parasha*]: “the L-rd, your G-d, will place you supreme above all the nations of the earth.”

(*Midrash Tanchuma, Sefer Bamidbar, Parashat Bamidbar VIII*, translation and brackets my own)

As the Midrash makes quite clear, our status as Hashem's Chosen People serves one purpose and one purpose only, namely, to bring honor to our Creator. In my estimation, the former Chief Rabbi of England, Sir Jonathan Sacks, offers one of the best modern presentations of this concept. He notes that many people are misled into believing that this idea is tantamount to G-d rejecting all the other nations and, consequently, connotes arrogance and elitism. In stark contrast, Rav Sacks suggests that nothing could be further from the truth: "Do not think that G-d choosing one people means He rejects every other people. Absolutely not! That was never our way. And that is why, again and again and again, G-d, the prophets say, is not our G-d only." (Public lecture: "Jewish Identity - The Concept of a Chosen People," May 8, 2001) In addition, Rav Sacks maintains that our election enables us to bring Hashem's message to the world: "... the Jewish story, in its unique particularity, is the human story in its universality. If we would have been everyone in general, we would never have been somebody in particular. And if we hadn't been somebody in particular, we would never have a message for humanity in general."

In sum, our chosen stature mandates us to share G-d's message of hope and everlasting peace with the nations of the world. Moreover, every nation has its unique role to play in the drama we call "life," and has its own intrinsic value and inherent worth. As such, we must ever recognize that all people are created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in G-d's Divine image. This thought was given powerful voice in a famous statement of Rabbi Akiva: "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to him that he was created in the image, as it says, 'For in the

image of G-d, He made man.”” (*Sefer Bereishit* 9:6; *Pirkei Avot* 3:14, translation, Rabbi Yosef Marcus) Thus, while we are Hashem’s uniquely chosen people, all humanity has the potential to pursue holiness and thereby serve the Almighty in their own distinctive manner, for they, too, are beloved before Him.

May the time come soon, and in our days, when all the nations of the world will stand shoulder to shoulder in the recognition of Hashem’s sovereignty and glory. Moreover, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to witness the fulfillment of the prophet Zechariah’s stirring words: “And the L-rd shall become King over all the earth; on that day shall the L-rd be one, and His name one.” (14:9) *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Megillat Esther* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik’s](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.