

The Specialness of a Jew

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January 30, 2019



For thousands of years, the Jews have irked the nations of the world by proclaiming ourselves the Chosen People. The idea of us being called by this extraordinary title stirs up their jealousy and challenges their self-worth. “Why are you so special?” they ask. “What makes you any better than us?” Interestingly, these questions are actually indicative of why they were not chosen in the first place.

Our nation traces its roots back to Abraham. At the age of three, Abraham began to reject the idol-worship of those around him as he discovered the one true God. Despite an attempt on his life, Abraham set out to spread this awareness throughout the world. His tent was open on all sides, inviting all to enter and learn Torah. After seeing Abraham’s self-sacrifice and absolute pursuit of truth, God sealed an everlasting covenant with him.

One may think that at this point, Abraham had the right to feel good about himself. After all, wasn’t he chosen because he was so worthy? But the Torah tells us the exact opposite:

Abraham declared, "I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). Rashi explains that Abraham was saying, "I was already fit to be dust at the hands of the kings (whom he fought with), and ashes at the hands of Nimrod (who threw him into the fiery furnace)." In other words, Abraham was looking at his Divine salvation and feeling that he was saved undeservedly—despite the fact that he had put himself in those situations for the sake of God Himself!

Fast forward to the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Standing at the foot of the mountain, the Jewish people make their own incredible declaration: "All that God has said, we will do and then we will understand" (Exodus 24:7). Our Sages greatly praise the Jews for enthusiastically embracing God's commandments even before knowing what they were (Shabbat 88a). But how could they accept something if they didn't know what it was? On the other hand, the verse begins "All that God has said." This seems to imply that God did state what was asked. If so, what great attitude did our Sages laud?

The answer is that the Jews indeed heard the words and knew what they were commanded to do, but they didn't ask or analyze the meaning behind the commandments. Rather, they acted enthusiastically to fulfill God's word. Why and how? Because they had inherited the attitude of Abraham. They knew they were not really worthy of God's salvation, but that everything was an underserved gift from Heaven. Their attitude was: "We will do with absolute sincerity and happiness the commandments of God, and we will be blessed with whatever deep knowledge and insight God grants us."

As Jews, that's what makes us special and unique. Sometimes we are fortunate and feel a burst of spirituality, but we must never become self-absorbed and think that that was coming to us. Yes, it's nice when we feel a deep and special spiritual insight, but that's purely an underserved gift from Above. Instead, we must serve God with humbleness and faith, and feel an incredible happiness that we were chosen to fulfill this

role. It is precisely this quality that God finds so special and wholesome in us – this is our pintele yid. This was the reason that God chose Abraham and revealed Himself to him. And this is the reason that God will choose each and every one of us, and bless us with our own unique Torah revelation.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Nefilas Apayim 4:13