

## Perspectives on the Chosenness of the Jewish People: Pt 1

### Source 1a) Blessing over the learning of Torah

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בְּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן  
לָנו אֶת־תּוֹרָתוֹ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

### 1b) Kiddush for Yom Tov

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בְּנוּ מִכָּל־עַם וְרוֹמַמְנוּ  
מִכָּל־לְשׁוֹן וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו. וַתִּתֵּן לָנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מוֹעֲדִים לְשִׂמְחָה  
חֲגִים וְזִמְנִים לְשִׂשׁוֹן....

### Source 2: Bereishit Ch. 12

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לְדַלֵּךְ מֵאֶרֶץךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ  
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶךָ:

The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

### Source 3: Ramban's commentary on the Torah

Now this portion of Scripture is not completely elucidated. What reason was there that the Holy One, blessed be He, should say to Abraham, "Leave your country, and I will do you good in a completely unprecedented measure," without first stating that Abraham worshipped G-d or that he was *a righteous man, [and] perfect?*<sup>24</sup> Above, 6:9. As was the case with Noah. Or it should state as a reason for his leaving the country that the very journey to another land constituted an act of seeking *the nearness of*

*G-d.*<sup>25</sup> Psalms 73:28. This may indeed be an illuminating personal remark shedding light on Ramban's journey, towards the end of his life, to the Land of Israel; the very journey constituted to him a religious experience of "seeking the nearness of G-d." The custom of Scripture is to state, "Walk before Me,"<sup>26</sup> Genesis 17:1. and hearken to My voice, and I will do good unto you," as is the case with David<sup>27</sup> See *I Kings 2:4.* and Solomon,<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:13-14. as well as throughout the Torah: *If ye walk in My statute;*<sup>29</sup> *Leviticus 26:3. And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Eternal thy*

והנה זאת הפרשה לא בארה כל הענין, כי מה טעם שיאמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא עזוב ארצך ואיטיבה עמך טובה שלא היתה כמוהו בעולם, מבלי שיקדים שהיה אברהם עובד אלהים או צדיק תמים, או שיאמר טעם לעזיבת הארץ, שיהיה בהליכתו אל ארץ אחרת קרבת אלהים. ומנהג הכתוב לאמר התהלך לפני ותשמע בקולי ואיטיבה עמך כאשר בדוד ובשלמה, וכענין התורה כולה אם בחוקותי תלכו (ויקרא כו ג), אם שמע תשמע בקול ה' אלהיך (דברים כח א). וביצחק אמר בעבור אברהם עבדי

G-d.<sup>30</sup>Deuteronomy 28:1. And in the case of Isaac, it says, *For My servant Abraham's sake*.<sup>31</sup>Genesis 26:24. But there is no reason for G-d to promise [Abraham a reward merely] for his leaving the country.

However, the reason [for G-d's promising Abraham this reward] is that the people of Ur of the Chaldees did him much evil on account of his belief in the Holy One, blessed be He, and he fled from them to go to the land of Canaan, tarrying for a time at Haran, whereupon the Eternal told him to leave these places as well and to fulfill his original intention that his worship be dedicated to Him alone and that he call upon people [for the worship of] the Name of the Eternal in the Chosen Land. There He would make his name great, and these nations would bless themselves by him, not as they treated him in Ur of the Chaldees, where they abused and cursed him, put him in prison or in the fiery furnace. He further told Abraham that He will bless those who bless him, and if some individual will curse him, he will be cursed in turn. This then is the meaning of this portion of Scripture. **The Torah, however, did not want to deal at length with the opinions of idol worshippers and explain the matter between him and the Chaldeans in the subject of faith, just as it dealt briefly with the matter of the generation of Enosh<sup>32</sup>Above, 4:26. See also above in Seder Noach, Note 280. and their thesis concerning the idol-worship which they instituted.**

(להלן כו כד). אבל להבטיחו בעבור יציאת הארץ אין בו טעם : אבל הטעם, מפני שעשו אנשי אור כשדים עמו רעות רבות על אמונתו בהקב"ה, והוא ברח מהם ללכת ארצה כנען ונתעכב בחרן, אמר לו לעזוב גם אלו ולעשות כאשר חשב מתחלה, שתהיה עבודתו לו וקריאת בני האדם לשם ה' בארץ הנבחרת, ושם יגדל שמו ויתברכו בו הגוים ההם, לא כאשר עשו עמו באור כשדים שהיו מבזין ומקללים אותו, ושמו אותו בבור או בכבשן האש. ואמר לו שיברך מברכיו ואם יחיד מקללו יואר, וזה טעם הפרשה. **אבל התורה לא תרצה להאריך בדעות עובדי עבודה זרה ולפרש הענין שהיה בינו ובין הכשדים באמונה, כאשר קצרה בענין דור אנוש וסברתם בעבודה זרה שחדשו:**

#### Source 4: Sefat Emet's commentary on the Torah – Lech-Lecha

רמב"ן הקשה שנאמר לך לך בלי שנזכר מקודם חיבתו. ובזוה"ק נראה כי זה עצמו השבח ששמע זה המאמר לך לך שנאמר מהשי"ת לכל האנשים תמיד כמ"ש וי לאינון דשינתא בחוריהון ואאע"ה שמע וקיבל. וממילא נקרא רק הדיבור אליו כי הלא לא נמצא מיוחד לשמוע. רק הוא אבל בודאי זה השבח בעצמו שה"י מוכן לקבל המאמר :

#### Source 5: R. Yehuda Halevi, The Kuzari

The Khazar king: If this be so, then your belief is confined to yourselves?

The Rabbi: Yes; but any Gentile who joins us unconditionally shares our good fortune... If the Law were binding on us only because God created us, the white and the black man would be equal, since He created them all. But the Law was given to us because He led us out of Egypt, and remained attached to us, because we are the pick of mankind. (I, 26-27)

#### Source 6: Jewish virtual library

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 antisemitic 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".

In light of these attacks, it is not surprising that some Jews have wanted to do away with the belief in Jewish chosenness. The most noted effort to do so was undertaken by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the small but influential Reconstructionist movement. Kaplan advocated dropping chosenness for two reasons: to undercut accusations of the sort made by Shaw that the Chosen People idea was the model for racist ideologies, and because it went against modern thinking to see the Jews as a divinely chosen people.

### Source 7: Rambam, Laws of Servants 9:8

Cruelty is frequently to be found only among heathen who worship idols. The progeny of our father Abraham, however, the people of Israel upon whom God bestowed the goodness of the Torah, commanding them to keep the laws of goodness, are merciful toward all creatures. So too, in speaking of the divine attributes, which he has commanded us to imitate, the psalmist says: "His mercy is over all his works" ([Psalm 145:9](#)). Whoever is merciful will receive mercy, as it is written: "He will be merciful and compassionate to you and multiply you" ([Deuteronomy 13:18](#)).

וְאִין הָאֲכֻזְרִיּוֹת וְהַעֲזוֹת מְצוּיָה אֶלָּא בְּעַכּוּ"ם  
עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה אֲבָל זָרְעוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ  
וְהֵם יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁהִשְׁפִּיעַ לָהֶם הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא  
טוֹבֵת הַתּוֹרָה וְצוּהָ אוֹתָם בְּחֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים  
צְדִיקִים רַחֲמָנִים הֵם עַל הַכֹּל. וְכֵן בְּמִדּוֹתָיו שֶׁל  
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁצָּנְנוּ לְהַדְמוֹת בְּהֵם הוּא  
אוֹמֵר **תְּהִלִּים קמ"ח ט'** וְרַחֲמָיו עַל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו."  
וְכָל הַמְּרַחֵם מְרַחֲמִין עָלָיו שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר **דְּבָרִים יג יח**  
"וְנָתַן לָךְ רַחֲמִים וְרַחֲמִיךָ וְהִרְבָּה:"

### Source 8: Rambam, Laws of Idolatry 2:1

As soon as this giant was weaned he commenced to busy his mind, in his infancy he commenced to think by day and by night, and would encounter this enigma: How is it possible that this planet should continuously be in motion and have no leader—and who, indeed, causes it to revolve, it being impossible that it should revolve itself? Moreover, he neither had a teacher nor one to impart aught to him, for he was sunk in Ur of the Chaldeans among the foolish worshipers of stars, and his father, and his mother, like all the people, worshiped stars, and he, although following them in their worship, busies his heart and reflects until he attains the path of truth, and, by his correct thinking, he understood when he finally saw the line of righteousness. He knew that there is One God; He leads the planet; He created everything; and in all that is there is no god save He. He knew that the whole world was in error, and that the thing which caused them to err was, that their worshiping the stars and the images brought about the loss of the truth from their consciousness. And, when Abraham was forty years old he recognized his Creator. After he came to this comprehension and knowledge he started to confute the sons of Ur of the Chaldeans, and to organize disputations with

כִּינּוֹן שֶׁנֶּגְמַל אֵיתָן זֶה הַתְּחִיל לְשׁוֹטֵט  
בְּדַעְתּוֹ וְהוּא קָטָן וְהַתְּחִיל לַחֲשֹׁב בַּיּוֹם  
וּבַלַּיְלָה וְהָיָה תַמְהָה הַיָּאֵד אֲפֹשֶׁר שִׁיחָהּ  
הַגְּלִגְל הַזֶּה נוֹהֵג תַמִּיד וְלֹא יֵחָהּ לוֹ  
מִנְהִיג וּמִי יִסְבֵּב אוֹתוֹ. כִּי אֵי אֲפֹשֶׁר  
שִׁיִּסְבֵּב אֶת עַצְמוֹ. וְלֹא יֵחָהּ לוֹ מִלְּמַד וְלֹא  
מוֹדִיעַ דְּבָר אֶלָּא מִשְׁקַע בְּאוֹר כְּשֵׁדִים בֵּין  
עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים הַטֹּפְשִׁים וְאֲבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְכָל  
הָעָם עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים וְהוּא עוֹבֵד עִמָּהֶם  
וְלִבּוֹ מְשׁוֹטֵט וּמִבֵּין עַד שֶׁהִשִּׁיג דְּרָךְ  
הָאֱמֶת וְהִבִּין קוֹ הַצֶּדֶק מִתְּבוֹנָתוֹ  
הַנְּכוֹנָה. וַיֵּדַע שֶׁיֵּשׁ שֵׁם אֱלֹהִים אֶחָד וְהוּא  
מִנְהִיג הַגְּלִגְל וְהוּא בָּרָא הַכֹּל וְאִין בְּכָל  
הַנִּמְצָא אֱלֹהִים חוּץ מִמֶּנּוּ. וַיֵּדַע שֶׁכָּל  
הָעוֹלָם טוֹעִים וְדָבָר שֶׁגָּרַם לָהֶם לְטֹעוֹת  
זֶה שֶׁעוֹבְדִים אֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים וְאֶת הַצּוּרוֹת  
עַד שֶׁאֵבַד הָאֱמֶת מִדַּעְתָּם. וּבֶן אַרְבָּעִים  
שָׁנָה הִפִּיר אַבְרָהָם אֶת בּוֹרְאוֹ. כִּינּוֹן  
שֶׁהִפִּיר וַיֵּדַע הַתְּחִיל לְהַשִּׁיב תְּשׁוּבוֹת עַל  
בְּנֵי אוֹר כְּשֵׁדִים וְלַעֲרֹךְ דִּין עִמָּהֶם וְלוֹמַר

them, cautioning them, saying: "This is not the true path that you are following", and he destroyed the images, and commenced preaching to the people warning them that it is not right to worship any save the God of the universe, and unto Him alone it is right to bow down, to offer sacrifices, and compound offerings, so that the creatures of the future shall recognize Him. Moreover, it is right to destroy and break in pieces all of the images, so that the whole population of the future be not led to an error like unto these who imagine that there is no God save these images. When he had them subdued by his well supported contentions, the king tried to put him to death, but he was saved by a miracle, and went hence to Haran. There he stood up anew and called out in a great voice to the whole world, to let them know that there is One God for the whole universe, and unto Him it is proper to render service. And thus he went onward with his proclamations from city to city, and from government to government, until he attained the land of Canaan amidst his outcry, even as it is said: "And called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God" (Gen. 21.33). When the people who congregated about him asked him concerning his preachments, he replied by imparting knowledge to each and every one according to his mentality, to the end that he was able to turn him to the path of truth, until there congregated about him thousands, even tens of thousands, and they became the people of Abraham's household, in whose heart he implanted this great cause, concerning which he compiled books, and which he imparted to his son Isaac.<sup>3</sup>*Nedarim, 32a. C.* Isaac, from his seat of learning, gave instructions and admonitions. And Isaac, in turn, imparted it to Jacob and appointed him head master, who, at his seat of learning, gave instructions and supported all who flocked to him. And Jacob our father instructed all his sons, but separated Levi and appointed him head master, and established him in a seat of learning where to instruct in the path of the Name and in the observance of the charges of Abraham. He, moreover, commanded his sons not to interrupt the succession of the sons of Levi to the presidency of the school so that the learning be not forgotten. So did the movement advance intensely among the sons of Jacob and their followers that the world saw a God-knowing nation called into existence, until Israel spent a long time in Egypt, when they turned to be instructed in their practice and to worship the stars as they did, save only the tribe of Levi, which remained faithful to their ancestral charge; for the tribe of Levi at no time worshiped stars. Verily, in but a short space of time, the root which Abraham had planted would have been uprooted, and the sons of Jacob would have turned to the universal error and wandering; save because of the Lord's love for us, and because He observes the oath of covenant with Abraham our father, He appointed Moses our Master lord of all prophets, and made him His messenger. After Moses our Master was

שָׁאִין זֶה דְּרֹךְ הָאֱמֶת שְׂאֵתֶם הוֹלְכִים בָּהּ וְשֹׁבֵר הַצְּלָמִים וְהַתְּחִיל לְהוֹדִיעַ לְעַם שְׂאִין רְאוּי לְעַבֵּד אֱלֹהִים וְלֹא לְעוֹלָם וְלוֹ רְאוּי לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת וְלִהְקַרֵּב וּלְנַסֵּךְ כְּדִי שְׂיִפְרֹוּהוּ כָּל הַבְּרֹאִים הַבָּאִים. וְרְאוּי לְאֵבֶד וּלְשַׁבֵּר כָּל הַצְּרוּרוֹת כְּדִי שֶׁלֹא יִטְעוּ בָּהֶן כָּל הָעַם כְּמוֹ אֵלֹהִים מְדַמִּים שְׂאִין שֵׁם אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים אֵלֹהִים. כִּיִּן שְׂגִבֵר עֲלֵיהֶם בְּרִאיוֹתָיו בְּקֶשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַרְגוֹ וְנַעֲשֶׂה לוֹ נֶס וְיִצֵּא לְחָרָן. וְהַתְּחִיל לְעַמֵּד וְלִקְרֹא בְּקוֹל גְּדוֹל לְכָל הָעוֹלָם וְלִהְוֹדִיעַם שֵׁם אֱלֹהִים אֶחָד לְכָל הָעוֹלָם וְלוֹ רְאוּי לְעַבֵּד. וְהָיָה מִהֲלֵךְ וְקוֹרֵא וּמְקַבֵּץ הָעַם מֵעִיר לְעִיר וּמִמַּמְלָכָה לְמַמְלָכָה עַד שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְאַרְצָא כְּנָעַן וְהָיָה קוֹרֵא שְׂנַאֲמַר **בְּרֵאשִׁית כֹּא לֹג'** וְיִקְרֹא שֵׁם בְּשֵׁם ה' אֵל עוֹלָם". וְכִיִּן שֶׁהָיָה הָעַם מִתְקַבְּצִין אֵלָיו וְשׂוֹאֲלִין לוֹ עַל דְּבָרָיו הָיָה מוֹדִיעַ לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד כְּפִי דַעְתּוֹ עַד שְׂיַחְזִירָהוּ לְדֶרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת עַד שֶׁנִּתְקַבְּצוּ אֵלָיו אֲלָפִים וּרְבֻבוֹת וְהֵם אֲנָשֵׁי בֵּית אַבְרָהָם וְשִׁתַּל בְּלִבָּם הָעֵקֶר הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה וְחִבֵּר בּוֹ סִפְרִים וְהוֹדִיעוּ לְיִצְחָק בְּנוֹ. וְיָשָׁב יִצְחָק מִלְּמַד וּמִזְהִיר. וְיִצְחָק הוֹדִיעַ לְיַעֲקֹב וּמִנְהוּ לְלַמֵּד וְיָשָׁב מִלְּמַד וּמִחְזִיק כָּל הַנְּלוּיִם אֵלָיו. וְיַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ לְמַד בְּנָיו כָּלֶם וְהַבְּדִיל לָיו וּמִנְהוּ רֹאשׁ וְהוֹשִׁיבּוּ בִישִׁיבָה לְלַמֵּד דְּרֹךְ הַשֵּׁם וְלִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹת אַבְרָהָם. וְצָוָה אֶת בְּנָיו שֶׁלֹא יִפְסִיקוּ מִבְּנֵי לָיו מִמְנָה אַחַר מִמְנָה כְּדִי שֶׁלֹא תִשְׁכַּח הַלְמוּד. וְהָיָה הַדְּבָר הוֹלֵךְ וּמִתְגַּבֵּר בְּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב וּבְנִלוּיִם עֲלֵיהֶם וְנַעֲשִׂית בְּעוֹלָם אִמָּה שֶׁהָיָה יוֹדַעַת אֶת ה'. עַד שֶׁאַרְכוּ הַיָּמִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם וְחִזְרוּ לְלַמֵּד מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן וְלַעֲבֹד כּוֹכָבִים כְּמוֹתֵן חוּץ מִשְׁבֵּט לָיו שֶׁעַמֵּד בְּמִצְוֹת אָבוֹת. וּמִעוֹלָם לֹא עָבַד שָׁבֵט לָיו עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים. וְכַמְעַט קֵט הָיָה הָעֵקֶר שֶׁשִּׁתַּל אַבְרָהָם יַעֲקֹב וְחִזְרוּ בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב לְטַעוֹת הָעוֹלָם וְתַעֲוִיתוּ. וּמֵאֲהַבַת ה' אוֹתָנוּ וּמִשְׁמֹרוֹ אֶת הַשְּׁבוּעָה לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָשָׂה מִשָּׁה רַבְּנוּ רַבֵּן שֶׁל כָּל הַנְּבִיאִים וּשְׁלָחוּ. כִּיִּן שֶׁנִּתְנַבְּא מִשָּׁה רַבְּנוּ וּבָחַר ה' יִשְׂרָאֵל לְנַחֲלָה הַכְּתִירָן בְּמִצְוֹת וְהוֹדִיעַם דְּרֹךְ עֲבוֹדָתוֹ וּמָה יְהִיָה מִשְׁפֵּט עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים וְכָל הַטּוֹעִים אַחֲרָיָהּ:



endowed with prophecy and the Lord chose Israel as an inheritance, He crowned them with commandments, and made known to them the way to serve Him, and what will be the judgment rendered against idolatry and all its erring devotees.<sup>3</sup>

### Source 9: Alan Kadish, President of Touro College: Chosenness and Bias in the Jewish Community

The long-debated notion of our chosenness remains alive in the minds of contemporary scholars. In 1966, the editors of *Commentary* asked 50 scholars to respond to a number of theological questions. One such query read: "In what sense do you believe that the Jewish people are the chosen nation of God, and how do you answer the charge that this doctrine is the model from which the various theories of national and racial superiority have been derived?"

One of the respondents was Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein. He explained that the concept of Israel's chosen status is substantially different from the theories of racial and national superiority written about by others. "Chosenness," he wrote, "as we understand it, resides in our covenantal relationship with God, rather than in any inherent superiority. We are both burdened and privileged to represent Hashem and Torah." Rabbi Lichtenstein continued:

It is of course quite conceivable that the doctrine of Israel's national election has indeed served as the model for these theories (of superiority). I am not historian enough to judge. It should be clear however, that there is no real analogy. We do not boast of our prowess. We lay no claim to aboriginal merit. Rather, we humbly thank God for assigning us a unique destiny, and we strive to fulfill the responsibilities of the covenant which He proffered and we accepted.

### Source 10: Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, the Kuzari

95. The Rabbi: Bear with me a little while that I show the lofty station of the people. For me it is sufficient that God chose them as His people from all nations of the world, and allowed His influence to rest on all of them, and that they nearly approached being addressed by Him. It even descended on their women, among whom were prophetesses, whilst since Adam only isolated individuals had been inspired till then. Adam was perfection itself, because no flaw could be found in a work of a wise and Almighty Creator, wrought from a substance chosen by Him, and fashioned according to His own design. There was no restraining influence, no fear of atavism, no

צה. אמר החבר: הרפה לי מעט, עד שאבאר אצרך גדולת העם, ודי לי לעד, שהשם בחרם לעם ולאומה מבין אומות העולם, וחול הענין האלהי על המונם עד שהגיעו כלם אל מעלת הדבור, ועבר הענין אל נשיהם והיו מהן נביאות, אחר שלא היה חל הענין האלהי כי אם ביחידים מבני אדם אחר אדם הראשון, כי אדם היה שלם מבלתי תנאי, כי אין טענה בשלמות מעשה, מעושה חכם יכול, מחומר בחרו לצורה אשר חפץ בה, ולא

question of nutrition or education during the years of childhood and growth; neither was there the influence of climate, water, or soil to consider. For He created him in the form of an adolescent, perfect in body and mind. The soul with which he was endowed was perfect; his intellect was the loftiest which it is possible for a human being to possess, and beyond this he was gifted with the divine power of such high rank, that it brought him into connection with beings divine and spiritual, and enabled him, with slight reflection, to comprehend the great truths without instruction. We call him God's son, and we call all those who were like him also sons of God. He left many children, of whom the only one capable of taking his place was Abel, because he alone was like him. After he had been slain by Kain through jealousy of this privilege, it passed to his brother Seth, who also was like Adam, being [as it were] his essence and heart, whilst the others were like husks and rotten fruit. The essence of Seth, then, passed to Enosh, and in this way the divine influence was inherited by isolated individuals down to Noah. They are compared to the heart; they resembled Adam, and were styled sons of God. They were perfect outwardly and inwardly, their lives, knowledge and ability being likewise faultless. Their lives fix the chronology from Adam to Noah, as well as from Noah to Abraham. There were some, however, among them who did not come under divine influence, as Terah, but his son Abraham was the disciple of his grandfather Eber, and was born in the lifetime of Noah. Thus the divine spirit descended from the grandfather to the grandchildren. Abraham represented the essence of Eber, being his disciple, and for this reason he was called Ibri. Eber represented the essence of Shem, the latter that of Noah. He inherited the temperate zone, the centre and principal part of which is Palestine, the land of prophecy. Japheth turned towards north, and Ham towards south. The essence of Abraham passed over to Isaac, to the exclusion of the other sons who were all removed from the land, the special inheritance of Isaac. The prerogative of Isaac descended on Jacob, whilst Esau was sent from the land which belonged to Jacob. The sons of the latter were all worthy of the divine influence, as well as of the country distinguished by the divine spirit. This is the first instance

מנע מונע ממזג שכבת זרע האב ולא מדם האם ולא מהמזונות וההנהגה בשני הגדול והינקות והתחלפות האויר והמים והארץ, כי יצרו כמגיע לתכלית ימי הבחורות השלם ביצירותיו ובמדותיו, והוא אשר קבל הנפש על תומה, והשכל על תכלית מה שביכולת האנושי, והכח האלהי אחר השכל, ר"ל המעלה אשר בה ידבק באלהים וברוחניים, וידע האמתות מבלי למוד, אבל במחשבה קלה, וכבר נקרא אצלנו בן אלהים, וכל הדומים לו מזרעו בני אלהים, והוליד בנים רבים ולא היה מהם ראוי להיות במקום אדם אלא הבל, כי הוא היה דומה לו, וכאשר הרגו קין אחיו מפני קנאתו בו על המעלה הזאת, נתן לו תחתיו שת, והיה דומה לאדם, והיה סגולה ולב וזולתו כקליפה. וסגולת שת אנוש. וכן הגיע הענין עד נח ביחידים היו לבבות, דומים לאדם ונקראים בני אלהים, שלמים בבריאתם ובמדותם ובאריכות הימים ובחכמות וביכולת, ובימיהם אנו מונים מאדם ועד נח וכן מנח ועד אברהם. ואפשר שהיה מהם מי שלא דבק בו הענין האלהי כתרח, אבל אברהם בנו היה תלמיד לאבי אביו עבר, ועוד שהשיג נח בעצמו. והיה הענין האלהי דבק בהם מאבות אבותם אל בני בנים. ואברהם סגולת עבר ותלמידו ועל כן נקרא עברי, ועבר היה סגולת שם ושם היה סגולת נח, מפני שהוא יורש האקלימים השונים אשר אמצעיתם וחמדתם ארץ כנען אדמת הנבואה, ויצא יפת אל צפון וחם אל דרום. וסגולת אברהם מכל בניו יצחק, והרחיק כל בניו מהארץ הזאת המסוגלת כדי שתהיה מיוחדת ליצחק, וסגולת יצחק יעקב, ונדחה עשו אחיו מפני שזכה יעקב בארץ ההיא, ובני יעקב כלם סגולה, כלם ראויים לענין האלהי, והיה להם המקום ההוא המיוחד בענין האלהי, וזה היה תחלת חול

of the divine influence descending on a number of people, whereas it had previously only been vouchsafed to isolated individuals. Then God tended them in Egypt, multiplied and aggrandized them, as a tree with a sound root grows until it produces perfect fruit, resembling the first fruit from which it was planted, viz. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brethren. The seed further produced Moses, Aaron and Miriam, Bezaleel, Oholiab, and the chiefs of the tribes, the seventy Elders, who were all endowed with the spirit of prophecy; then Joshua, Kaleb, Hur, and many others. Then they became worthy of having the divine light and providence made visible to them. If disobedient men existed among them, they were hated, but remained, without doubt, of the essence inasmuch as they were part of it on account of their descent and nature, and begat children who were of the same stamp. An ungodly man received consideration in proportion to the minuteness of the essence with which he was endowed, for it reappeared in his children and grandchildren according to the purity of their lineage. This is how we regard Terah and others in whom the divine afflatus was not visible, though, to a certain extent, it underlay his natural disposition, so that he begat a descendant filled with the essence, which was not the case with all the posterity of Ham and Japhet. We perceive a similar phenomenon in nature at large. Many people do not resemble their father, but take after their grand-fathers. There cannot, consequently, be any doubt that this nature and resemblance was hidden in the father, although it did not become visible outwardly, as was the nature of Eber in his children, until it reappeared in Abraham

הענין האלהי על קהל, אחרי אשר לא היה נמצא כי אם ביחידים. וישמרם האלהים ויפרם וירבם ויגדלם במצרים, כאשר יגדל האילן, אשר שרשו טוב עד שהוציאם פרי שלם דומה לפרי הראשון אשר נוטע ממנו, רצוני לומר אברהם יצחק ויעקב ויוסף ואחיו, והיה מן הפרי משה ואהרן ומרים, וכמו בצלאל ואהליאב וכמו ראשי המטות ושבעים הזקנים אשר היו ראויים לנבואה מתמדת, וכיהושע וכלב וחור וזולתם רבים. ואז היו ראויים להראות האור עליהם וההשגחה ההיא חרבונית, ואם היו ביניהם ממרים היו נגעלים, אך הם בלי ספק סגולה, כאשר הם בתולדתם וטבעם מן הסגולה ויולידו מי שהיה סגולה ונזהרים באב הממרה בעבור מה שיתערב בו מן הסגולה אשר תראה בבנו או בבן בנו כפי מה שתזדכך הטפה, כמו שאמרנו בתרח וזולתו ממי שלא נדבק בו הענין האלהי אך בשורש תולדתו שיוליד סגולה, מה שלא היה כן בתולדת כל הנולד מחם ויפת. ונראה כזה בענין הטבעי כי כמה יש מבני האדם שאינם דומה לאב כלל אך הוא דומה לאבי אביו, ואין ספק כי הטבע ההוא והדמיון ההוא היה צפון באב ואף על פי שלא נראה להרגשה, כאשר היה צפון טבע עבר בבניו עד שנראה באברהם.

### Source 11: Rav Tamir Granot – The Election of Israel – Letter 44

In other words, He “Who chooses His nation Israel” did not establish Israel’s uniqueness through an act of election – not through His calling to Avraham and not through the Exodus from Egypt. Rather, He merely made known what was already present in the very nature of the nation. The concept of “*segula*” as developed by Rihal means that Israel is essentially different, that the difference between them and the gentiles is a natural difference.

**The position of Rihal contrasts with the view of the Rambam and, to a certain degree, of R. Sa’adia Ga’on as well. They saw the election of Israel as a historical act that established Israel’s special status. According to the historical view, defining the difference between Jew and gentile is expressed in terms of assignment of a role, exclusive covenantal relationships, and so forth. Rihal, for his part, maintains that the natural difference lies in Israel’s, and only Israel’s, spiritual readiness to receive theophany, that is, to attain prophecy, the holy spirit, and individual providence, an ability that Rihal categorically denies gentiles.**

*Rav Granot explains the basis of R. Yehuda Halevi’s idea as consistent with classical monotheism, and therefore offers the following critique:*

Rihal’s view, simply stated, is difficult from a theological perspective as well. **A conception of Divinity as being connected to the world through Israel alone implies viewing all other expressions of reality, human or natural, as expressions external to God.** Such a view is possible within the worldview of classical monotheism, which distinguishes between the existence of the world and the entire universe from Divine existence. According to this system, Divinity is separate from and completely other than the world, and the connection between the world and the transcendent Divine occurs through intermediary entities - the Active Intellect, the Divine Presence, etc., and, in our context, though Israel and its prophets.

Rav Kook’s theology is, of course, different...**In a nutshell, Rav Kook’s worldview is absolutely monistic: all existence is a singularity, and that singularity is Divinity. In other words, all existence, with all of its expressions, should be seen as various manifestations of God’s singularity.** *That being the case, it is impossible to say that the Divinity is essentially connected with Israel alone, not with other nations, since “there is nothing other than Divinity and no place is devoid of Him,”* and this holds true, at least in potential, regarding the gentile nations as well. This leads to the conclusion that the definition of Israel’s uniqueness should not be sought in static metaphysical terms, since any positive metaphysical definition of Israel’s character necessarily implies its negation with respect to gentiles, thus entailing an element of Divine limitation.