

## Nitzavim - Eternal Bris with the Chosen Nation

כט (ט) אתם נצבים היום כלכם לפני ה' אלקיכם ראשיכם שבטיכם זקניכם ושטריכם כל איש ישראל: (י) טפכם נשיכם וגרך אשר בקרב מחניך מחטב עציך עד שאב מימך: (יא) לעברך בברית ה' אלקיך ובאלתו אשר ה' אלקיך כרת עמך היום: (יב) למען הקים אתך היום לו לעם והוא יהיה לך לאלקים כאשר דבר לך וכאשר נשבע לאבתיך לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב: (יג) ולא אתכם לבדכם אנכי כרת את הברית הזאת ואת האלה הזאת: (יד) כי את אשר ישנו פה עמנו עמד היום לפני ה' אלקינו ואת אשר איננו פה עמנו היום: ... (יז) פן יש בכם איש או אשה או משפחה או שבט אשר לבבו פנה היום מעם ה' אלקינו ללכת לעבד את אלהי הגוים ההם פן יש בכם שרש פרה ראש ולענה: (יח) והיה בשמעו את דברי האלה הזאת והתברך בלבבו לאמר שלום יהיה לי כי בשררות לבי אלך למען ספות הרוה את הצמאה: (יט) לא יאבה ה' סלח לו ... (כב) גפרית ומלח שרפה כל ארצה ... (כג) ואמרו כל הגוים על מה עשה ה' ככה לארץ הזאת.

This week's Parsha continues the themes of last week's Parsha, Parshas Ki Savo. Whereas Ki Savo dealt with issues of national identity and responsibility, Nitzavim expands these ideas by dealing with Teshuvah, the fact that the Torah is for every Jew and the idea of freedom of choice. Both Parshios come towards the end of the Torah and are the beginning of the final summing up of the Torah. Therefore, even the new Mitzvos which are brought in these Parshios relate to the very fundamentals of Judaism.

Parshas Ki Savo expresses these grand principles through two declarations: the declarations of Bikkurim and Maaser. As Rav Hirsch puts it, *the whole lawgiving concludes with two institutions, מקרא ביכורים and וידוי מעשר which together pronounce the acknowledgement of the fundamental facts of Jewish national history and the fundamental rules for the Jewish national task.* The declarations keep the ideas fresh, as do the mitzvos of Bikurim and Maaser themselves.

Now, in Parshas Nitzavim, close to the day of Moshe's death, Moshe Rabbeinu creates a final, binding covenant between G-d and the Jewish people<sup>1</sup>. Moshe gathers all the people - down to the babies - and includes them and all future generations in the covenant:

*You stand this day all of you before the L-rd your G-d; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel. Your little ones, your wives, and your stranger who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water; That you should enter into a covenant with the L-rd your G-d, and into His oath, which the L-rd your G-d makes with you this day; That He may establish you today for a people to Himself, and that He be a G-d to you, as He has said to you, and as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; And not with you alone will I make this covenant and this oath; But with him who stands here with us this day before the L-rd our G-d, and also with whomever is not here with us today.*

Rabbeinu Bechaya says that, from a covenantal perspective, what happened here was no less than another Maamad Har Sinai. Since the covenant at Har Sinai was

<sup>1</sup>רש"י כט (ט) אתם נצבים - מלמד שכינסם משה לפני הקב"ה ביום מותו להכניסם בברית: רמב"ן, שם: ויתכן שכרת עוד עמם ברית כברית הראשונה אשר כרת אתם בהר סיני (שמות כד ה-ח), שהקריב עליהם עולה ולקח חצי הדם לזרוק על המזבח וחצי הדם זרק על העם, אבל לא הוצרך להזכיר זה

broken by the sin of the Golden Calf, this latter covenant is the one which sustains us to this day<sup>1</sup>. We are again told the awful consequences of non-obedience. At the same time, G-d assures us that He will never destroy us<sup>2</sup>. G-d sees in advance when we are going to sin - He sees the good and the bad, and He reassures us that this covenant is good even at times when we sin<sup>3</sup>.

The Abarbanel<sup>4</sup> asks the obvious question: how could those who witnessed the Sinai events have obligated all future generations? He answers by saying that a man who takes a loan creates an obligation on his inheritors to pay it. Similarly, the Jewish nation was redeemed by G-d from Egypt, and by so doing, He acquired our bodies from our previous masters. We also committed our souls to G-d through the first of several covenants we made with Him at Sinai<sup>5</sup>.

The covenant in this Parsha is on the inheritance of the land. G-d informs the people that they will not acquire this land through their might and swords, but rather as a custodianship granted by G-d on the condition that they keep His Torah. So, there is a combination of factors creating an obligation, a loan, so to speak, that needs to be repaid in future generations. The obligation has been strengthened from every angle. It has been made in the form of a slave to a master, in the form of covenants, and in the form of the inheritance of the land. All three factors are inheritable, and therefore the obligation to keep the Torah is inherited<sup>6</sup>.

But why would G-d have made a covenant that is binding even when we rebel against Him? Why would He not allow for the possibility that another nation may arise in the future that would be more willing to be committed to the Torah than the Jews?

The answer lies in an old ditty:

*How odd of G-d to choose the Jews.  
It is not so odd, the Jews chose G-d.*

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<sup>1</sup> רבינו בחיי כ"ט ט: אתם נצבים היום כלכם לפני ה' אלקיכם ראשיכם שבטיכם זקניכם ושוטריכם כל איש ישראל - נתקבצו עתה בכאן כל ישראל בברית השני כשם שנתקבצו בברית הראשון במעמד הר סיני, ומפני שבטלו הברית הראשון שבסיני באמרם (שמות לב) אלה אליהי ישראל, לפיכך חזר כאן בארץ מואב לכרות עמהם ברית אחר וקבלוהו עליהם באלה ובשבועה, ומזה יאמר להם משה אתם נצבים היום כלכם לפני ה' אלקיכם, כלומר המעמד הזה שאתם בברית הזאת, נצבים כלכם לפני השי"ת כמו שהיו אבותיכם בהר סיני בברית הראשון, הוא שתכנסו בברית השי"ת ושתקבלו אותו עליכם באלה ובשבועה מה שלא נעשה בראשון.

<sup>2</sup> רבינו בחיי כ"ט ט: נצבים כלכם לפני השי"ת כמו שהיו אבותיכם בהר סיני בברית הראשון, הוא שתכנסו בברית השי"ת ושתקבלו אותו עליכם באלה ובשבועה מה שלא נעשה בראשון. ויתכן לומר כי נכללו בפסוק זה שתי הבטחות, האחת שיהיו ישראל קיימים ולא יתבטלו לעולם אבל יהיו דור אחרון ולעולם יעמדו, והשני שיהיו זוכין לחיי העוה"ב בקיום התורה. והוצרך להבטיח כן מפני שישראל היו ראויין להאבד לכובד התוכחות שהזכיר למעלה שעברו עליהם, ועל כן אמר שיהיו נצבים היום בעולם הזה, כלשון (תהלים קיט) לעולם ה' דברך נצב בשמים, ולא יאבדו מפני התוכחות הקשות אבל תהיינה להם מרוק עונות שבהן יזכו לחיי העוה"ב, והוא שאמר לפני ה' אלקיכם, כלשון (דברים ו) וצדקה תהיה לנו לפני ה' אלקינו, שהיא הבטחה בשכר העוה"ב, וזהו לשון כלכם, כלשון רז"ל שאמרו כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעוה"ב:

<sup>3</sup> מהר"ל, גבורות השם פ' כד: ויאמר אנכי אלקי אברהם וגו' ויאתר משה את פניו ויאמר ראה ראיתי וגו' דרשו רז"ל בכפל לשון דלא הוה למכתב ראה ראיתי, ובארו שהודיע למשה כי הוא יתברך רואה שתי ראיות, האחת שבאים לסיני ומקבלים תורת, ראיתי מעשה עגל. ורצו בזה שהקדוש ברוך הוא גלה קודם זה שהוא רואה שיחטאו לפניו, ולא יאמרו לא קבלם רק בשביל שיהיו צדיקים ועל תנאי הזה, ואם יחטאו אינו נזקק להם, ולפיכך הודיע למשה את דרכיו אף על גב שישראל חוטאים לפניו, אם הם קוראים אל הקדוש ברוך הוא באותה שעה הקדוש ברוך הוא מציל אותם

<sup>4</sup> בשם חכמי אראגון

<sup>5</sup> האברבנל הובא בהגות בפרשיות התורה עמ' 816 ע"ש

<sup>6</sup> האברבנל הובא בהגות בפרשיות התורה עמ' 816 ע"ש

Rabbeinu Bechaya, the Ramchal and others tell us that our forefathers were root souls. We are branches of those roots. We really are an extension of the same soul, and we are not a new spiritual reality. The obligation to keep the Torah is really a function of this spiritual continuity<sup>1</sup>. The root soul was completely purified by our ancestors, and therefore this core is unchangeable, for whatever reaches perfection lasts forever. We inherit a core which remains absolutely pure, and the covenant was made with this core<sup>2</sup>. The core is shared by the collective body of the Jewish people. The Bris was made with the collective body of the Jewish people rather than with a group of individuals.<sup>3</sup> This permanent covenant cannot be broken by any individual or any generation, for the Jewish people of the covenant lives on in ways not fully explicable by laws of history or sociology. What history tells us is that the Jews had every reason to disappear. Anti-Semitism alone should have wiped out the Jews. At other times, such as on American soil, the opportunity to assimilate should have done to the Jews what it did to the Italians, the British and every other nation – absorbed them to the point where the most they can say is that they are of Italian or British descent. And it almost did. But almost means that our remnant is here and will always be here as long as this earth exists.

In fact, our survival despite our small size<sup>4</sup> is in and of itself a miracle. Rav Yaakov Emden calls this a greater miracle than any of the miracles of the Exodus<sup>5</sup>. So is the fact of our dispersion. G-d promises us that, despite spreading our nation around the world, He will maintain a relationship with us there<sup>6</sup>. We had to move again and again, and each time there was a new testimony by the Jews that G-d exists. *You are My witnesses, says G-d<sup>7</sup>. For you are My children<sup>8</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> גם זה בהגות בפרשיות התורה

<sup>2</sup> שם בהגות: שפת אמת מפרש לפי בחינה זו דברי מדרש תנחומא בפרשתנו, המצטט את הנביא מיכה שאמר: אני ד' לא שניתי ואתם בני ישראל לא כליתם. חלק ד' עמו. לא תיתכן השתנות בכנסת ישראל. פנימיות הנקודה בכנסת ישראל לא תשתנה לעד. ועל כך נכרתה אתם הברית. כל פרט חייב להכליל עצמו בכלל ישראל, כדי שיהיה לו קשר לנקודה הפנימית של הכלל.

<sup>3</sup> מהר"ל

<sup>4</sup> דברים ז ז: אתם המעט מכל העמים

<sup>5</sup> הקדמה לסידורו, בית יעקב

Eliezer Berkowitz: "Half a billion Christians all over the world prove nothing about G-d's presence in history. They are too many, too influencing, and too pervasive. They are this worldly power ... The same is true of any of the other great world religions. ... Only a small people whose very existence is forever assailed by the forces of power in history and yet survives and has an impact on world history, completely out of proportion to its numbers and its material power ... testifies to G-d's ... guidance in the affairs of men." (The Hiding G-d of History)

<sup>6</sup> דברים ד: כז והפיץ ד' אתכם בעמים ונשאתם מתי מספר בגוים אשר ינהג ד' אתכם שמה

90% of the Jewish people have lived in their lands for no more than 50 or 60 years! (The Jewish Dispersion by Leschzinsky)

<sup>7</sup> ישעיה מגיב: ואתם עדי נאם ד' ואני קל

<sup>8</sup> דברים יד א (ראה): בנים אתם לד' אלקיכם ....

The Jews did not merely survive; they survived for the purpose of revealing G-d's Oneness in the world. The Jews very survival proves this to some extent. As Dr. Isaac Breuer put it: "And one who sees this ancient people today ... and does not fall on his face and exclaim 'G-d, the L-rd of Israel, He is G-d,' then no other miracle will help him."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the moment a Jew lost that sense of mission, he lost with it his gene for survival. The Jews as a whole survived. But not all Jews did. Most Jews intermarried, assimilated, converted or were killed. Others, like the Karaites, survived in small numbers, but only by completely denying that they were Jewish.<sup>2</sup> As Rav Yonasan Eibeschutz stated it: "Will the atheist not be embarrassed when he reflects on Jewish history? ..." and it will show so clearly the Providential nature of our past.

Anti-Semitism itself remains a mystery without explanation. No other hatred is as intense, spread over so many countries (even ones where Jews do not live), over so many centuries and with such persistent dedication<sup>3</sup>. Lloyd George stated in 1923: "Of all the extreme fanaticism which plays havoc in man's nature, there is not one as irrational as anti-Semitism. ... If the Jews are rich [these fanatics] are victims of theft. If they are poor, they are victims of ridicule. If they take sides in a war, it is because they wish to take advantage from the spilling of non-Jewish blood. If they espouse peace, it is because they are scared by their natures or traitors. If the Jew dwells in a foreign land he is persecuted and expelled. If he wishes to return to his own land, he is prevented from doing so." Nations dedicated enormous energies and resources to their hatred of Jews, sometimes even to the point of their own destruction. Hitler certainly framed his conflict with the Jews as a total conflict - win or die<sup>4</sup>. Ultimately, anti-

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<sup>1</sup> Both quotes in Gershon Alswang, The Final Resolution, pg. 191, see there for quotes in full as well as other quotes.

See also בראשית יח:יז-יט

<sup>2</sup>True, about 60,000 Karaites are still alive today. (About 40,000 in Israel and 20,000 elsewhere.) Ask a Karaite whether he is Jewish, and most will answer, "No, we are a Turkiyh based people who have our own, unique religion based on the Old Testament and nothing else."

This is remarkable, given that in the Middle Ages, Karaites prided themselves on being holier Jews than the mainstream "rabbinic" Jews. What caused the change? The classic explanation is that with a rise in anti-Semitism in the Russian empire the Karaites sought to distance themselves. "Eventually, they decided that it would be better not to be Semitic at all," says Kaplanov. So the Crimean Karaites started claiming they were descended from the Khazars, a Turkiyh tribe who converted to Judaism in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kaplanov adds, "to be religiously a Jew and not just ethnically was also quite embarrassing, so they started de-Judaizing their religion, not just their race."

During World War II the Nazis ruled that the Karaites were not Jews, which is why they were spared the Holocaust. In fact, Yevpatoria's *kenesa*, which had been closed by the Bolsheviks, was allowed to reopen in 1942 under the Nazis. To this day, Karaite families have brandished xeroxed – and in one case laminated – copies of the Nazi ruling as evidence of their non-Jewishness.

<sup>3</sup>*The Discovery Booklet* states that Anti-Semitism is unique in its:

- i - Universality
- ii - Intensity
- iii- Longevity
- iv - Apparent Irrationality

<sup>4</sup> Hitler definitely understood that the Jews represented the civilization energy which, if left to express itself, would sap the Nazis of their power:

Semitism can only be explained as resulting from the recognition which the nations of the world have that the Jews are indeed the Chosen People<sup>1</sup>. And, it can only wreak its destruction if G-d decides to lift, for even a moment, His iron-clad protection<sup>2</sup>.

T.S. Glover got it right when he asked: "The great matter is not "What happened?" but "Why did it happen?" Why does Judaism live?"

Again and again, when the Torah amply testifies to the mysterious rules of history by which the Jews have lived, it refers to them as an Am Segula<sup>3</sup>.

The word Segula means something whose underlying laws are mysterious<sup>4</sup> that cannot be explained by normal rules. There are several objective ways by which we can know that our claim to be the Chosen People is true. The very fact that we survived as a nation and a religion<sup>5</sup>, a tiny group of people spread throughout the

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"With the Jew, there is no coming to terms, but only the hard 'either-or'" (Mein Kampf, 1925, Volume 1, p. 225). This conflict was, he thought, going to lead to the destruction of the Jews. "If the international Jewish financiers, inside and outside Europe should succeed in once again plunging the nations into a world war, then the result will not be the victory of Jewry, but rather the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!" (Reichstag speech, January 30, 1939)

"We see clearly that this war could only end with the extermination of the Germanic peoples, or that Jewry must disappear from Europe. ... The result of this war will be the annihilation of Jewry. ... For once the ancient Jewish law will come into play: an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth." (Speech of January 30, 1942 as monitored by the Allied monitoring service)

<sup>1</sup>"How did the Christians historically explain the miraculous survival of the Jew? Only two possibilities - or G-d's chosen people - which they couldn't accept, or the work of the devil, which they proposed. A perverse recognition of Jewish uniqueness." (Eliezer Berkowitz - The Hiding G-d of History)

Nazi's hatred and fear of Jews: Totally unjustified in terms of material and political power. "It was a metaphysical fear of the true mystery of G-d's ...presence in history as revealed in the continued survival of Israel. ...The hiding G-d of history was a repudiation of everything Nazi Germany stood for." (Berkowitz, ibid.)

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Meiselman: At the time of Purim, Haman promulgated a decree against the Jewish people after having convinced Achashvarosh that the Jews had to be destroyed. In response Esther asked, מה זה ועל מה זה, which the Talmud interprets to mean: "What did we do wrong?" There was an immediate act of soul-searching. The Biblical basis for Esther's response is found in Sefer Devarim (soon after the Torah introduces the idea of hester panim). There in parshat האזינו, the verse says, לו חכמו ישכילו זאת, איכה ירדוף אחד אלף—בינו לאחריתם—How can one pursue a thousand and two a multitude? How was it possible that there was a Holocaust of six million Jews? How was it possible that the Jews didn't succeed at revolt? The Torah asked these questions three thousand years ago and responded: because God "sold us out" and "turned us in." Esther understood that if there was a decree against the Jewish people it was because God has "sold them out."

<sup>3</sup> שמות יט ה (יתרו): ... והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים ...  
דברים כו יח (כי תבא): וד' האמירך היום להיות לו לעם סגולה  
דברים יד ב (ראה): כי עם קדוש אתה לד' אלקיך ובך בחר ד' להיות לו לעם סגולה מכל העמים אשר על פני  
האדמה

<sup>4</sup> שו"ת הרשב"א

<sup>5</sup>T.R. Glover: No ancient people have had a stranger history than the Jews. ... The history of no ancient people should be so valuable, if we could only recover it and understand it. ... Stranger still, the ancient religion of the Jews survives, when all the religions of every ancient race of the pre-Christian world have disappeared ... Again it is strange that the living religions of the world all build on religious ideas derived from the Jews. .... The great matter is not

nations of the world, is totally mysterious and entirely unprecedented. (see note <sup>1</sup> for comparison with other peoples.) Paul Johnson stated it beautifully when he observed: "Above all, that the Jews should still survive when all those other ancient peoples were transmuted or vanished into the oubliettes of history was wholly predictable. How could it be otherwise? Providence decreed it and the Jews obeyed."<sup>2</sup>

Not only did the Jews survive, but, throughout this time, we have been enormously productive. Rather than survive as a shattered remnant, we have had such a powerful impact on the world that all great historians have felt a need to comment on this remarkable phenomenon. (see note <sup>3</sup> for a list of contributions.) More than

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"What happened?" but "Why did it happen?" Why does Judaism live? (The Ancient World, Penguin, pp. 184-191)

<sup>1</sup>Alswang: "The Chinese in China have always been the majority. The Kurdish people as well (within their own national geographic boundaries) were the majority until Turkish occupation in the sixteenth century. In contrast, for over eighteen hundred years, until the creation of the modern Jewish state in 1948, Jews were always a minority. The Chinese had no substantive interaction with Western or Middle Eastern culture up to the nineteenth century. The Kurds too had minimal interaction with the West, and, to this day, are in general a pastoral people living in tents. In comparison, the Jews have not only witnessed every Western and Near Eastern physical and cultural revolution over the past three thousand years, but have, more times than not, been an integral feature of non-Jewish society."

Mark Twain: "The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed; and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?" (from the article *Concerning the Jews*, Harpers (1899), see The Complete Essays of Mark Twain, Doubleday (1963) pg. 249).

<sup>2</sup>A History of the Jews, pg. 587

<sup>3</sup>In the Aish HaTorah seminar *World Perfect*, 6 values for an ideal world are suggested:

- 1) Value of Life, basic human rights and dignity
- 2) World peace, harmony and mutual respect
- 3) Justice and Equality  
All people, regardless of race, sex, or social status, have the right to be treated equally and fairly in the eyes of the law.
- 4) Education  
Everyone has the right to be functionally literate as a basic tool for personal advancement and the ability to attain knowledge.
- 5) Family  
A strong, stable family structure is necessary of the moral foundation for society.
- 6) Social Responsibility  
Individually and nationally, we are responsible for each other. This includes responsibility for disease, poverty, famine, crime, and drugs, as well as environmental problems and animal rights.

There seems to be a universal agreement of people from every race and continent that these six values are fundamental to building a perfect world.

The two civilizations, other than Judaism, which appear to have the greatest impact on the world, are Greece and Rome. There is hardly a philosophical thought which didn't originate with the Greeks.

Rome powerfully shaped Western law, government, administration and engineering. *World Perfect* shows that despite this, Greece and Rome were far from the six universal values of today. It then goes on to show how Judaism is, in fact, the source of these values.

anything else, the Jews have contributed the idea of Monotheism<sup>1</sup>, a fact that changed everything about the world, including the ability to understand science as we do today. The Jews contributed the Torah, the idea of universal education, the concept of the basic rights of man. We also gave the basic concepts of equality of opportunity, democracy, and the basic notions of justice. In the beautiful prose of a non-Jewish historian, Paul Johnson:

*"Certainly the world without the Jews would have been a radically different place. Humanity might eventually have stumbled upon all the Jewish insights. But we cannot be sure. All the great conceptual discoveries of the intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they have been revealed; but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time. The Jews had this gift. To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so for personal redemption; of the collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice...Above all, the Jews taught us...Monotheism<sup>2</sup>."*

This contribution, so disproportionate with our size, was made under the most difficult of circumstances when the Jews were under siege, spread out, being hounded and expelled. Other nations would have been pleased to just survive while the Jews did more for the world than any nation on earth<sup>3</sup>.

The fact that the laws of sociology and history cannot explain our survival does not mean that there is no deeper explanation. Klal Yisroel has survived against all odds because of its attachment to the Torah and through the Torah to G-d. Since Klal Yisroel is attached to things that are eternal, it becomes a part of that reality. Exile is not natural for the Jews, and all unnatural things have a limited life-span<sup>4</sup>.

One aspect of the nations' inability to destroy us has to do with the fact that the birth of our nation was not natural. The Imahos were all barren, and Sarah did not initially even have a womb<sup>5</sup>. This meant that the Jewish people should have

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<sup>1</sup>"Israel's great achievement, so apparent that mention of it is almost trite, was Monotheism. It was an achievement that transformed subsequent history...One may raise the question whether any other single contribution from whatever source since human culture emerged from the Stone Age has had the far reaching effect upon history that Israel in this regard has exerted both through the mediums of Christianity and Islam and directly through the world of Jewish thinkers themselves" (H. and H. A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Throkeld Jacobsen, William Irwin, The Intellectual Adventure of Modern Man.)

Carlyle B. Heynes: This one book (the Bible) ... has attracted to it, and had concentrated on it, vastly more thought and has called forth more works, explanatory, illustrative, apologetic, upon its text, its meaning, its geography, its theology, its chronology, its evidences, its inspiration, its origin, than all the rest of the literature of the world put together. An immense bulk of the world's literature owes its origin to this book. (in The Bible, Is it a True Book)

<sup>2</sup>Paul Johnson, A History of the Jews (See entire epilogue)

<sup>3</sup> John Adams: ... the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation.... (2nd President of USA, Discovery booklet pg. 50)

T. R. Glover: ... It is strange that the living religions of the world all build on religious ideas derived from the Jews. (The Ancient World, Penguin, pg. 184-191 in Discovery Booklet pg. 51)

<sup>4</sup> מהר"ל, נצח ישראל, פ"א: הגלות הוא שנוי ויציאה מן הסדר ... וכל הדברים כאשר הם יוצאים ממקום הטבעי והם חוץ למקומם ... הם חוזרים למקום הטבעיים.

<sup>5</sup> שרה:בראשית טו: ב-ג, טז: א, יז: טו -כב, יח: יא-יג  
רבקה: בראשית כה: כא

completely died out. Unlike other nations, our existence is a function of G-d's sustenance alone.

In Egypt, again, we were reduced to a situation where we were totally absorbed by the Egyptians. We were, as the Sages describe it, like a fetus in the womb of the mother – totally dependent on the Mother for all forms of sustenance, and totally identified with the body of the mother. The nature of the slave work we did was totally purposeless – the cities we built were destroyed again, so we did not even have the achievement of slaves. There was no part of humankind of which we could be said to be a part. We were left 'naked'; without any mitzvos and without any independent identity<sup>1</sup>, plucked out by G-d into a new reality with its own set of laws.<sup>2</sup> This is why everything had to be בחפזון, i.e., as total a negation of the existing מערכת הזמן as possible. This is why the first מצוה of כלא ישראלי was החדש הזה לכם: it represented our ability to create this new מערכת הזמן akin to creation of the first מערכת הזמן at the beginning of creation<sup>3</sup>.

Similarly, the אלשיך states that the אמהות were עקרות to show that they were not merely a continuation of previous דורות. Their children were born of a new מערכת . It is this connection of כלא ישראלי with this non-natural מערכת that allows us to escape the normal rise and fall patterns of other civilizations.

Therefore, since we exist on a totally different plane of reality from the nations, they cannot destroy us. That one sentence is the great key to unlocking the secret of our survival.

The גלות מצרים of כור הברזל was further entrenched by the נצחיות of כלא ישראלי.<sup>4</sup> Having purified our essence, it would now be easy for ד' to continue to correct any backsliding, since it would only be an expression of some surface phenomenon.<sup>5</sup>

All of this was finally consolidated at Sinai, which included not only our acceptance to the Torah but also the covenant that G-d made with us in the wake of that acceptance<sup>6</sup>. We were not permanently attached to the Torah - the sustaining Source behind the world - and hence to the most powerful link to He, the Most Eternal. But it was not only the Jews who chose to do this, as this implies that there was a possibility of rejection. The תורה was essential for the survival of the world, and therefore, although כלא ישראלי wanted to accept the תורה, at some level we had to accept the Torah (כפה עליהם הר כגיגית) or the entire world would have suffered the consequences. Having initiated a relationship with G-d, there was a level of attachment that was imposed on us by G-d, something which then became

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רחל: בראשית ל: א

<sup>1</sup> שם משמאל (הגדה של פסח ד"ה וירעו אותנו המצרים): שכל האומות יש להן מציאות בסדר המערכה ... אבל ישראל כל מציאתם הוא רק מהשי"ת לבדו ... שזהו הענין שהאבות היו עקרים כדי שבסדר המערכת לא תהיה אומה הישראלית ראויה להיות בעולם ... (ו)במצרים שהיו ישראל כעובר במעי בהמה ... וכל מציאותם היתה נמשכת להם מהמצריים ... וכשיצאו ממצרים היו ערום וער' בלי מציאות כלל ... (ולכן) היה צרך שתהיה עבודתם לא לתועלת כלל, כי אם היתה לתועלת היו חשובים מחלקי המציאות וחברת מן האנושי

<sup>2</sup> מהר"ל

<sup>3</sup> רב משה שפירא שליט"א

<sup>4</sup> מלכים א ח (ג) כי עמך ונחלתך הם אשר הוצאת ממצרים מתוך כור הברזל

<sup>5</sup> עיין מהר"ל -נצח ישראל פ"א; משך חכמה שמות פ"ג פסוק יט; תניא פי"ח

<sup>6</sup> שמות, כ ה-ו



fundamental, inevitable and eternal<sup>1</sup>. The כולל ישראל of נצחיות is also guaranteed by the fact that our destruction would mean the destruction of the world<sup>2</sup>.

There is another, more basic level of Torah-eternity which is attached to the Jews, for the Torah provided an exceptional system of internal vigor and spiritual energy. The non-Jewish historian, Paul Johnson, was able to see this as an outsider: "They did not lose their identity in the emergent Dark Age communities – like Romans and Hellenes, Gauls and Celts, or, indeed, like the millions of Diaspora Jews who became Christians. Judaism and the Jewish remnant were preserved in the amber of the תורה ... The Jews survived because the period of intense introspection enabled their intellectual leaders to enlarge the תורה into a system of moral theology of extraordinary coherence, logical consistency and moral strength."<sup>3</sup>

## APPENDIX – HOW THE JEWS CAME TO BE CHOSEN

Judaism would prefer that there be no distinctions. In the ideal, had the first Man and Woman not transgressed, there would not have been any concept of Jew or non-Jew - just man<sup>4</sup>. After the sin, the situation was still open for anyone to choose a life of core spirituality and to become the Jewish people<sup>5</sup>. Despite the passing of tens of generations, only Avraham and his descendants chose to dedicate themselves to this task. G-d did not simply accept their role as future recipients of the Torah, but He tested Avraham again and again<sup>6</sup>. He tested Yitzchak and Yaakov, then Yaakov's

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<sup>1</sup>מהר"ל אור חדש, הקדמה (דף מו): וא"כ התורה הוא מחויב והכרחי ומה בכך שהם קבלו התורה והקדימו נעשה לנשמע מ"מ נתנה לישראל התורה כמו שהיא בעצמה וכיון שהתורה בעצמה הכרחי כך נתינת תורה לישראל בהכרח ... ובמאנס כתיב (דברים כב כט) לא יוכל לשלחה כל ימיו וכן לא יפרד ישראל מן הש"י לעולם ... והטעם הוא כיון שהיה מאנס אותה א"כ הוא היה מכריח אותה אל החבור הזה שהוא הכרחי אין לזה סילוק כלל כיון שהיה החבור הכרחי

<sup>2</sup>ר' בחיי כד הקמח (ערך גאולה): וא"א שיכלה אותם מן העולם לפי שהם קיום העולם (וכן בנצח ישראל של המהר"ל)

<sup>3</sup>History of the Jews, pg. 149

<sup>4</sup>All of mankind would then have become a part of Klal Yisroel.

<sup>5</sup>Even at time of הפלגה each of 70 nations was given a distinct spiritual task.

מהר"ל אור חדש ח"א: יש לכל אומה ואומה מהות בפני עצמה...עד"ז מורה הכתב כי כל כתב הוא ציור הדבר... ר' צדוק, רסיסי לילה ס' לז: כל אומה יש לה כח מיוחד  
ע"ן דרך ה': חלק שני - פרק 4 - ס' ב' וס' ג (1st 3 paragraphs)

See Handbook of Jewish Thought: 4:12, 4:13, 4:16

Until the מבול, period of roots (= 70 nations). After then, period of branches. Commitment by "roots" to role of central spirituality would lead to branches playing that role as well because they would inherit intrinsic degree of innate spirituality. Because א"א = אב המון גוים therefore even during the period of the branches, possible to join central spirituality (although this became increasingly difficult).

<sup>6</sup>Avraham was given 10 tests (ר' יונה אבות ה:ד lists them); "Never in history had an unaided individual made such a complete break with his environment, overcoming all obstacles for a yet unknown faith." (A. Kaplan - 4.15)

דרך חיים (מהר"ל) אבות ה ג הקב"ה היה מנסה את אברהם בעשר נסיונות שיהיה אברהם מנוסה בכל מיני נסיונות שהם מחולקים [וכמו עשר המכות ועשרה מאמרות של מעשה בראשית]

children and their children<sup>1</sup>. The nation had to pass the horrific and miserable experience of Egypt, but they still stood fast, ready to commit themselves to G-d's Torah. Therefore, it was only because the Jews consistently and doggedly chose G-d that G-d ultimately chose the Jews<sup>2</sup>.

Even at this late stage, other nations could also have accepted the Torah. The Torah was in fact offered to everyone. When, however, only the Jews responded, the nations of the world could no longer, as a nation, accept the Torah. Any individual non-Jew could convert, however, and become a part of the Torah-keeping nation. Non-Jews have more spiritual options than Jews, as they can remain as they are and receive a portion in the World to Come by keeping the Seven Noachide Laws. (These are very basic laws of minimum civilized standards like killing, stealing and not being cruel to animals.) Furthermore, if a non-Jew so desires, he can commit to a higher standard of spirituality by converting. Jews have no such choice; their only choice is how they will respond to the incontrovertible fact of their Jewishness.

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<sup>1</sup>Only after 3 generations and after all Yaakov's children followed in his way was the term Israel first used; (The other names for the Jewish people, ישראל & יהודים were used only after his children in turn.)

<sup>2</sup>ברכות ו. אמר להם הקב"ה לישראל אתם עשיתוני חטיבה אחת בעולם ואני אעשה אתכם חטיבה אחת בעולם (עיי"ש)