

ונברכו ברך כל משפחות האדמה *The Meaning of Chosenness*

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From Albert Einstein to Jonas Salk to Sergei Brin, Jewish people have made seminal contributions over the last century to the advancement of humanity at large. Of course, these more recent examples are merely the latest chapters in the millennia long legacy of Jewish contribution to general civilization. The legacy is a proud one which traces its roots back to our patriarch Abraham himself, whose twin contribution of monotheism and social justice continue to form the cornerstone of modern civilization.

In point of fact, a careful reading of the opening verses of this week's *sedrah* reveals that this legacy of advancement and contribution was an essential aspect of Hashem's initial selection of Abraham. As Hashem promises to Abraham, at the very inception of his mission, **ונברכו ברך כל משפחות האדמה**, 'through you, all the families of the Earth will be blessed¹.'

In other words, Abraham and those of his descendents that carry his spiritual legacy, namely the Jewish people², were selected by Hashem as a vehicle through which profound blessings would be brought to all of humanity.

It is through this lens of Divine Providence, as opposed to the chauvinistic talk of racial superiority, that we must perceive the truly astounding advances that the Jewish people have brought to the world. Within the internal Jewish sphere, the Kohanim from the tribe of Levi have been mandated to bless the Jewish people, so too, the Jewish people in its entirety, who have been described in the Torah as a **ממלכת כהנים**, an entire nation of Kohanim, have been mandated to bless the entire world.

As Jewish people, we are indeed greatly privileged to have been chosen for this mission of service, empowered and enabled to marshal all of our talents and spiritual resources to bring blessing to the world over. Thus, that which is so crucial for us to internalize, and what has sadly eluded so many from our own ranks, is that implicit in the Almighty's selection of a specific people *for the purpose of bringing blessing to the world* is that the state of the world, well beyond the fate of the Jewish people alone, is of great importance to the Almighty.

As the beginning of our *sedrah* unequivocally teaches, the selection of Abraham and his descendents as the Chosen People is not indicative of Divine abandonment or disinterest in the rest of civilization, but is apparently Hashem's preferred method for conveying blessing to all of humanity.

¹ Onkelos' rendering is slightly different, **בדילך**, on your account.

² This narrowing first occurred in the selection of Yitzchak, **כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע**.

Simply put, it would have been utterly absurd for Hashem to choose us, Avraham's descendents, for the specific purpose of channeling blessings to the world if He is ultimately unconcerned with the many recipients of those blessings.

With *imitatio dei* as the perpetual polestar of our collective moral compass, the imperative for us to be deeply concerned, in deed and in creed, with all of humanity, כל יושבי תבל, is nothing short of axiomatic.

Recent events, in which this sacred mandate to model morality and concern for our neighbors was not honored, to say the very least, compel those of us who continue to identify with Avraham's timeless mission to redouble our efforts. We must do so with the knowledge that today's events will be scrutinized, without exaggeration, for generations to come.