

Jews & non-Jews: Dual Roles...

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Jews & non-Jews: Dual Roles in Preparing the World for Moshiach

In this age of egalitarian and liberal thinking, how can Jews still promote what is to many intellectuals a shameful and vainglorious sentiment of being the chosen nation? How can Jews preach to the world that they are better than everyone else?

Understanding the concept of chosen nation as arrogant behavior on the part of the Jews is a gross misrepresentation. On the contrary: it is a humbling motif. The Jews were not merely chosen as G-d's special people, as if the Almighty was playing favorites. They were chosen for a mission. And that mission was to spread the knowledge of the creator and His expectations of man to all nations. Thus, G-d's choosing the Jewish people was a calling that would forever remind them that alone they are insufficient. If the Jews wanted to believe for even a moment that so long as they served G-d justly and lovingly, G-d would be satisfied, He made the purpose of their being on this earth to tell the other nations that they are important, too. G-d is not satisfied with the contribution of the Jews alone, but desires the service and participation of all nations.

This is what being chosen means and the responsibility it entails. Can anyone think of a greater humbling device than a

nation whose whole existence is dedicated to teaching the other nations that G-d loves and needs them, too?

It is for this reason that Judaism discourages Gentile converts. It is not because Jews feel they are part of an elite club and no outsiders are allowed. Quite the contrary! Judaism does not invite converts because it is a fallacy to believe that one need be a Jew in order to enjoy closeness to G-d or lead a fulfilled life. The way G-d created each and every one of us is the way in which He wanted us to serve Him. For a Gentile to believe that he must be Jewish in order to "upgrade" his existence is not only erroneous, but it can be extremely damaging. By becoming a Jew, he might neglect to make the contributions to society in the way in which he was meant to do! The world needs him the way he is, which is why G-d created him that way. What G-d does expect, however, is that he develop his inner potential for what he is within the divine scheme of things, to his greatest potential. In this way, Jews and Gentiles alike can benefit from what he makes of himself within the parameters of G-d's will.

What is it about the human mind that it cannot accept differences as a blessing, but a curse? Why is it that even when one speaks of "tolerating" differences, the tolerance is spoken of as a necessary evil?

To our great misfortune, we live in an age which not only does not appreciate differences, but actively seeks to obliterate them. On the contrary, equality in today's society seems to mean that there must be an indistinguishable, homogenous mass where all things are equal by virtue of their being similar. Pluralism and multiculturalism are difficult to achieve. While most decent societies promote the concept, those who have to live being different still feel like outcasts. This is due to two factors.

This first is a weakness of identity on the part of the minority groups. At the end of the day if an individual is not

strong about what he is, what he represents, and why it is important that he continue, then even in the most tolerant of societies he will want to acculturate and he like everyone else.

The other reason for the failure of true multiculturalism is that modern society does not like differences. In Judaism the word holy actually means "distinct" or "removed." Something is holy by virtue of it being dissimilar to something else. Thus, a human being becomes holy when he acts differently than animals. Instead of eating whenever, however, and whatever he likes, a Jew eats kosher food, and not by sticking his head into a bowl. When a person does eat without human etiquette, we say that he behaves like an animal. Human beings are holy by virtue of their being different.

Similarly, G-d is holy because He is not like man. He has no body, limitations, or other corporal description. Shabbat is holy because it is different than the other days of the week. To treat it like any other day of the week is to deny its holiness. Judaism teaches man to be sensitive and appreciative of differences.

But in modern society, man is increasingly obliterating all differences. New-age thought teaches that all men are Gods. Stores are open seven days a week so that there is no day of rest. Men and women are encouraged to believe that aside from physiological variations, there are no real differences. And science today has taught man that for all practical purposes he is no different than other animals.

It can be appreciated that with this kind of thinking rampant, the differences between nations and peoples are also being obliterated. The Jewish people are gradually disintegrating through intermarriage, and many young people even feel repulsed by parents who try to encourage them to marry within the faith. They do not believe that they are different and are frightened of the very thought.

One of the reasons people are reluctant to accept or admit to existing differences is because many nations have been downtrodden and abused because they were different, by other nations who felt themselves to be superior. But if one can encourage a world-view that acknowledges every nation's, indeed every person's, ability to benefit from diversity and multiformity, that cannot happen. It is only arrogance that allows us to believe that we are sufficient on our own.

The belief that from everything in this world something positive can be extracted, even those things that appear negative at first, has always been a cornerstone of Judaism. One of the greatest examples of the implementation of this outlook on life was Maimonides. In his celebrated philosophical treatise, *Guide to the Perplexed*, Maimonides writes that what people usually refer to as "the evil inclination" is not essentially evil. Rather, it is an impulse, an undirected impulse. He saw the evil inclination as an intensity of energy so potent that it could overtake man's sense of forward direction and goodness, and lead him astray. But energy is precisely what man requires to rise to the challenge of worthy achievement. So, instead of viewing man's propensity for evil as negative and distancing oneself from it, one should look to manipulate and cultivate it-put a harness on it and thrive on its immense energy.

Hasidism developed this concept further by describing man's evil inclination as "the animalistic soul," in contradistinction to the good and "G-dly soul." While the good soul may be G-dly, it is not as energetic or as driven as the animal soul, which, like its name implies, possesses the raw power of a beast. Using the analogy of an ox, which the Talmud says "can churn out and plough much wheat" so long as it is harnessed, man must use his intellectual faculties to saddle his animal soul. If he is successful, it will be the animal soul dragging the G-dly soul to the service of G-d, and not the reverse.

Maimonides saw a divine purpose in Christianity and Islam. He wrote how both of these religions had brought the knowledge of G-d and the Messiah to distant isles so that there is now a universal familiarity with the concept of the messianic era. Where before in the history of religious debate has any theologian of universal renown written of the divine purpose played by other religions? Maimonides saw in every historical occurrence a way forward toward a better time that would be shared and enjoyed by all peoples.

It was also Maimonides who wrote in his celebrated Laws of Repentance that every individual should always picture the world as if on a scale, teetering between guilty and virtuous. If the individual should do one positive act, he saves the entire world; one wrong move, and the world has had it. One should never underestimate the power of a single good deed, and never overlook every individual's ability to bring salvation to mankind, Jew and Gentile alike.

Of course, all of the ideas laid out thus far can only work within a sound, moral framework. Otherwise, who is to say that the thief, the bigot, or the Nazi don't make a positive contribution to their environments. Ultimately, it is the Al-mighty alone Who can determine which contributions lead to the enhancement of society and which to its collapse. It was He who created all nations ethnically different, and it is He alone Who knows what serves the public good.

The world cannot be run at human whim. It needs an ultimate plan and a regulator who can determine whether it is progressing or regressing. This is the role of the Torah, the divine law, which puts each of one's contributions into perspective. It teaches that while contributions of compassion and justice by all peoples lead to the betterment of civilization, murder and bigotry lead to its destruction.

It also teaches that different people have different roles. Jews have the commandments of the Torah to observe. Non Jews

have the seven Noachide laws to observe, among which are the prohibitions of theft, murder, adultery, cruelty to animals, blasphemy, and the precept to establish courts of justice. The same Torah teaches that the failure of the non Jew to keep his commandments is equally as detrimental as the failure of the Jew to keep his. Both are indispensable. Both need not assume the other's role to be deemed worthy. Through the contributions of both the world maintains a healthy balance and equanimity.

This idea of dual roles in creation is exclusive to Judaism. No other group is so adamant of the inclusive right of one group to the truth. The only one with a copyright on truth is the Almighty, and He spelled out different routes for different groups to attain it. He even set out different avenues for men and women to realize their full potential and made it clear that it is harmful for women to choose men for their role model. He went as far as giving women specific commandments that would serve to enhance their precious gifts of femininity.

For the entire world to be just male, or just female, would be insufferable. The same would apply if the entire world had been only Jews or Gentiles, or if all people looked the same or had only the same ideas. By using each other as role models of what we should be in place of learning from each other's virtue, we deny the world the perfection it could attain through diversity.

What the world needs in order to achieve a higher degree of perfection is Jewish Jews and non-Jewish non Jews, meaning that each group should adhere to the disparate codes of conduct designated for them by the Almighty.

This is the beginning of a messianic world, a world in which contention, jealousy, and war can never play a part for each nation. Each individual would see G-d's wisdom in creation and, by extension, the perfection that exists in the whole of

creation. A messianic world is one where all the people of the earth, while retaining their intrinsic identities, come together to create a better world. This is radically different from the homogeneity usually found within the doctrines of secularist utopian states. Marx and Stalin had visions of the workers of the world uniting to create a fairer, more just world. Hitler tried to achieve the same utopia through other means. But both argued for a single race, a single class. It seems that perfecting the world always seems to necessitate everyone becoming the same. The result of those doctrines, though, was a far cry from utopia. They ended with Auschwitz and the Gulag Archipelago.

The reason is simple. The epoch of the Messiah is a time when the unity of G-d will be seen in our world. The world that G-d created will once again be reclaimed as His. But in Judaism, unity never means homogeneity. Rather, unity means taking different parts and demonstrating how they all comprise a greater whole. Unity in marriage is not when a husband puts on his wife's dress, or when a wife tries to please her husband by joining him in a night out with the boys. Rather, unity in marriage means that people who are essentially different, as different as male and female, come together and through loving one another prove that essentially they are one. Thus, when they have a child together, their unity is demonstrated in the form of a single, indivisible, entity, which makes for an incredible equation of unity: $1 + 1 = 1$.

This is the equation that sums up the messianic era. Many different 1's, in the form of nations, people, and ideas focusing together to serve and reunify the ultimate 1-G-d Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, whose infinite power and essence is reflected in the great diversity in creation, which all emanates from Him. The manifestation of that unity is the goal of the messianic era.