HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

SERIES 3: 65 - NON-JEWS, JEWS & MITZVOT

PART 3: BRIT NOACH~BRIT AVOT~BRIT SINAI

OU ISRAEL/BEIT KNESSET HANASI - FALL 2026

• In Part 1 of this series we looked at the outline of the 7 Noachide laws and how they impact on non-Jews. In Part 2 we moved to the Avot and looked at whether they were non-Jews, proto-Jews or full Jews and in what sense they kept the mitzvot. In this final part, we will look at the residual effect of Brit Noach on our mitzvot and the active interplay of Brit Avot and Brit Sinai.

A] JEWS AND BRIT NOACH - ARE WE STILL BOUND BY THE 7 NOACHIDE LAWS?

A1] MAYBE WE ARE AND BRIT SINAI IS **ADDITIONAL** TO BRIT NOACH

1. על ששה דברים נצטווה אדם הראשון: על ע"ז, ועל ברכת השם, ועל שפיכות דמים, ועל גילוי עריות, ועל הגזל, ועל הדינים. אף על פי שכולן הן קבלה בידינו ממשה רבינו, והדעת נוטה להן, מכלל דברי תורה יראה שעל אלו נצטוה. **הוסיף** לנח אבר מן החי שנאמר (בראשית ט:ד) *אַךְ־בָּשָׂר בְּנַפְשׁוֹ דָמוֹ לֹא תֹאכֵלוּ*. נמצאו שבע מצות. וכן היה הדבר בכל העולם עד אברהם. בא אברהם **ונצטוה יתר** על אלו במילה, והוא התפלל שחרית. ויצחק הפריש מעשר **והוסיף** תפלה אחרת לפנות היום. ויעקב **הוסיף** גיד הנשה והתפלל ערבית. ובמצרים נצטוה עמרם **במצות יתירות**. עד שבא משה רבינו **ונשלמה תורה** על ידו.

רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק ט הלכה א

The implication of the Rambam in Mishne Torah is the that revelation of mitzvot was <u>cumulative</u> - 6 to Adam, a 7th to Noach, more to Avraham, more to Yitzchak, then Yaakov[1], then Amram, until Moshe completed the set!

2. ודעת רבינו שכל אלו המצות מעצמם עשאום, ולכן לא הזכיר נצטוה רק במילה. וענין התפלות האלו שתקנו האבות כך מפורש בברייתא ר"פ תפלת השחר (כו:). ממנס מ"ש ובמצרים נצטוה עמרם ל"ע היכי מייתי לה?

כסף משנה הלכות מלכים פרק ט הלכה א

The Kesef Mishne questions where the Rambam learnt the idea that Amram was given certain mitzvot!

3. **ובמצרים נצטוה עמרם במצות יתירות.** ל"ע .... ואם נאמר שמלת רבינו סוס תוספתא או ברייתא שכתב בה שהיא במצרים נצטוה עמרם, למה תפס בהיא עיקר? הרי כתב הרמ"ם ז"ל דכל ברייתא או תוספתא שלא הובא בתלמוד אין לסמוך עליה .... י"ל בהיא ברייתא דקתני עשר מצוות נצטוו במרה – לאו דווקא עשר. דטובא איכא דהא מזמן עמרם נצטוו קודם מרה אלא הכי עשר דקא חשיב בעי למימר עשר שהם שב ואל תעשה.

גופי הלכות הלכות מלכים פרק ט הלכה א

Some commentators (here R. Shlomo b. Abraham AlGhazi - 17C Turkey) understand that the mitzvot given at Mara are in fact a much larger group than normally understood, and many of these were given to Amram[2] in Egypt. This may form part of a 'Brit Mitzrayim' which preceded Brit Sinai - see the Appendix below for Rav Soloveitchik's explanation of this.

4. (ישעיהו ה:ב) *וַיְעַזְּקֵהוּ וַיְסַקְּלֵהוּ וַיִּטָּעֵהוּ שׂוֹרֵק* - 'שורק' בגימטרייא <u>שש מאות ושש מצות</u>. ושבע מצות שקיבלו עליהם בני נח כבר קודם מתן תורה - הרי לך תרי"ג מצות.

מחזור ויטרי סימן רפז

Machzor Vitry understands that 606[3] mitzvot were given to the Jews at Sinai. This supplemented the 7 Noachide laws to make 613.

1. Interestingly, the Rambam includes Shacharit, Mincha and Maariv, even though these are certainly Rabbinic in obligation. This may indicate that this is not a technical account of the actual origins of the 613 mitzvot.
2. Other mefarshim understand that Amram was given the mitzvot of marriage and divorce - hence Chazal's discussion of his divorce and re-marriage to Yocheved. However, this conflicts with those commentators who justify his marriage to his aunt on the basis that there was no kiddushin before Matan Torah - see Part 2.
3. This is hinted to by the gematria attributed to the Vilna Gaon - that Rut = 606 because she accepted 606 mitzvot, being already bound by 7. (606 was also an important Gematria to the Gaon in terms of the Redemption and Kol HaTor, written by R. Hillel Rivlin of Shklov and kept by the Rivlin family since.)

• Even those opinions which understand Jews to be bound by the 7 Noachide laws will agree that the relevant halachot of these mitzvot changed for Jews after Sinai. For instance:

- ever min hachai: is potentially stricter for non-Jews eg a shechted but twitching animal, eggs.
- murder: is potentially stricter for non-Jews eg abortion.
- idolatry: is less strict for non-Jews eg 'shituf' may be permitted.

A2] WE ARE NOT! BRIT SINAI **REPLACES** BRIT NOACH FOR JEWS

5. כן את מוצא תרי"ג אותיות יש מן *אנכי* עד *אשר לרעך* - כנגד תרי"ג מצות. וז' יתירות - כנגד ז' ימי בראשית. ללמדך שכל העולם לא נברא אלא בזכות התורה.

במדבר רבה (וילנא) פרשת נשא פרשה יג סימן טו

The Midrash reads the 620 letters of the Aseret HaDibrot as 613 + 7, which correspond to the days of Creation.

6. עשרת הדברות ..... [ו]יש בהם תר"כ אותיות כנגד תרי"ג מצות (במד"ר יג:טז) ושבע מצות של בני נח.

בעל הטורים שמות כ:יד

The Bal HaTurim reads this Midrash as a reference to the 613 + 7 Noachide laws. This means that the 613 Mitzvot given to the Jewish people are INDEPENDENT of the 7 Noachide laws.

7. אמר רבי אסי: כל שאמו טמאה לידה - נימול לשמונה, וכל שאין אמו טמאה לידה - אין נימול לשמנה. שנאמר (ויקרא יב:ב-ג) *אִשָּׁה כִּי תַזְרִיעַ וְיָלְדָה זָכָר וְטָמְאָה* וגו' *וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתוֹ*. אמר ליה אביי: דורות הראשונים יוכיחו, שאין אמו טמאה לידה ונימול לשמנה! אמר ליה: **נתנה תורה ונתחדשה הלכה**.

שבת קלה.

The Gemara states that we may not bring halachic proofs for mitzvot from the generations prior to Matan Torah since the Torah was renewed at Sinai - נתנה תורה ונתחדשה הלכה.

8. נוהג בטהורה ואינו נוהג בטמאה. רבי יהודה אומר אף בטמאה. אמר רבי יהודה והלא מבני יעקב נאסר גיד הנשה ועדיין בהמה טמאה מותרת להן! אמרו לו **בסיני נאמר אלא שנכתב במקומו**. **(רש"י** – פסוק זה שכזכירו עליו בסיני נאמר, ועד סיני לא כוזכרו הלא שנכתב במקומו. לאחר שנאמר בסיני וכתב וסידר משה את התורה כתב המקרא הזה על המעשה – על כן הוזכרו בני ישראל אחרי כן שלא יאכלו גיד.)

משנה מסכת חולין פרק ז משנה ו, ורש"י שם

The Mishna in Chulin discusses whether we can learn details of the mitzva of gid hanashe from before Sinai. Rabbi Yehuda suggests that we can but the Rabbis respond that gid hanashe was actually only given after Sinai but was referenced in the Chumash in connection with Yaakov Avinu.

9. [ו] .... ושים לבך לכלל הגדול הזה המופלא במשנה זו .... שאתה צריך לדעת שכל מה שאנו מזכירים ממנו או עושים אותו היום אין אנו עושים זאת אלא מפני ציווי ה' על ידי משה, לא מפני שה' ציוה בכך לנביאים שקדמוהו. דוגמת לכך, אין אנו אוכלים אחר מן החי לא מפני שה' אסר על בני נח אחר מן החי, אלא מפני שמשה אסר עלינו אחר מן החי במה שנאמור אחר מן החי אסור. וכן אין אנו מלים בגלל שאברהם מל את עצמו ואנשי ביתו, אלא מפני שה' ציונו על ידי משה להמול כמו שמל אברהם עליו השלום. וכן גיד הנשה – אין אנו נמשכים בו אחרי אסור יעקב אבינו אלא ציווי משה רבינו. הלא תראה אמרם שם מאות ושלש עשרה מצות נאמרו לו למשה בסיני, וכל אלה מכלל המצות.

פירוש המשנה לרמב"ם מסכת חולין פרק ז משנה ו

The Rambam learns from this Mishna a central principle of mitzvot - that all mitzvot have their authority rooted in Sinai and not in the fact that the Avot may have kept them as individuals beforehand. We do not learn the obligation in mitzvot[4] from before Matan Torah.

10. ... בירושלמי משני דאין למידין מקודם מתן תורה

תוספות מועד קטן כ. ד"ה מה חג שבעה

Tosafot learn this principle from the Yerushalmi - we may not learn mitzvot from before Sinai.

4. We do however learn certain details in mitzvot and hashkafot in mitzvot - eg from the hachnasat orchim of Avraham.

11. מצות עשה להתאבל על הקרובים, שנאמר (ויקרא י:יט)וְאָכַלְתִּי חַטָּאת הַיּוֹם הַייטַב בְּעֵינֵי ה'. ואין אבילות מן התורה אלא ביום ראשון בלבד שהוא יום המיתה ויום הקבורה, אבל שאר השבעה ימים אינו דין תורה. אף על פי שנאמר בתורה (בראשית נ:י) וַיַּעַשׂ לְאָבִיו אֵבֶל שִׁבְעַת יָמִים **ניתנה תורה ונתחדשה הלכה**. ומשה רבינו תקן להם לישראל שבעת ימי אבלות ושבעת ימי המשתה.

רמב"ם הלכות אבל פרק א הלכה א

The Rambam brings another example from the laws of mourning. Even though we see mourning for 7 days for Yaakov in Egypt, nevertheless our laws of aveilut are re-given after Sinai. For the Rambam, this means 1 day of mourning on a Torah level on the day of burial if that is also the day of death, and 7 days of shiva on a Rabbinic level[5].

B] BRIT AVOT - RAV SOLOVEITCHIK ON COVENANTAL ETHICS

• Rav Soloveitchik expands on this in Chapter 6 of Kol Dodi Dofek - The Covenants of Sinai and Egypt[6]. In that section, he contrasts these two covenants and their ongoing impact on the Jewish people. This section is set out in full in the Appendix below.

12. It should be borne in mind that meticulous observance of halakhic norms does not exhaust the meaning of Jewish piety. Halakhah merely provides the foundation; it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the attainment of religious ideals. As Rabbi Soloveitchik put it, "Halakhah is not a ceiling but a floor"

Ethics of Responsibility: Pluralistic Approaches to Covenantal Ethics, Rabbi Walter S. Wurzburger p 32

13. Jewish piety involves more than meticulous adherence to the various rules and norms of religious law; it also demands the cultivation of an ethical personality ... We are commanded to engage in a never-ending quest for moral perfection, which transcends the requirements of an 'ethics of obedience'.... [The] halakhic system serves merely as the foundation of Jewish piety ....

Ethics of Responsibility: Pluralistic Approaches to Covenantal Ethics, Rabbi Walter S. Wurzburger p 3

14. ..... because mere obedience to a set of formal rules as specified by the Torah is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition of ethical propriety, another source of moral authority must be found.

Ethics of Responsibility: Pluralistic Approaches to Covenantal Ethics, Rabbi Walter S. Wurzburger p 28

15. " .... the Bible records a variety of covenants that do not mandate obedience to specific norms but establish a unique relationship between God and man ..... Jewish ethics encompasses not only outright halakhic rules governing the area of morality, but also intuitive moral responses arising from the Covenantal relationship with God, which provides the matrix for forming ethical ideals not necessarily patterned after legal models ..... (1) experiencing a sense of kinship and solidarity with fellow Jews with whom we share a common "Covenant of Fate" as well as the awareness of a singular spiritual destiny and value system, and (2) acknowledging the unique and preeminent position of the Land of Israel as the central arena for the fulfillment of Jewish destiny. It should also be noted that, at times, Rabbi Soloveitchik expanded his analysis of the meaning of the Covenant of Abraham to include in it the additional extra-legal requirement (3) to strive for religious experiences, in which God is encountered.

Ethics of Responsibility: Pluralistic Approaches to Covenantal Ethics, Rabbi Walter S. Wurzburger p 14-15

• Our connection to Torah is founded on BOTH Brit Avot AND Brit Sinai. The interaction between these two is complex and raises many important questions concerning Covenantal Ethics, revealed and natural morality, and the importance of developing both perspectives in our Avodat Hashem.

• Rabbi Judah Goldberg[7] summarizes the fundamental contents of Brit Avot as follows:

1. Sociopolitical – commitment to a Jewish nation with its own, unique destiny.
2. Geographical – attachment to the Land of Israel as the Jewish homeland.

5. The Rabbinic mitzvot of shiva and sheva berachot were traditionally instituted by Moshe, as a rabbinic takanot, rather than as mitzvot through nevua.
6. Elsewhere R. Soloveitchik terms this the Patriarchal Covenant - see R. Reuven Zeigler's comments in Majesty and Humility p 283 n1.
7. Rabbi Goldberg has 7 shiurim on the relationship of Brit Avot and Brit Sinai which can be found, as part of a series of 23 shiurim on Jewish Values and Laws Before Sinai at https://www.etzion.org.il/en/topics/sinai-jewish-values-and-jewish-laws

3. Ethical – commitment to the values of generosity and justice.
4. Theological – belief in a single, omnipotent God and pursuit of a personal relationship with Him.

R. Goldberg goes on to outline the following distinctions between Brit Avot and Brit Sinai:

BRIT AVOT	BRIT SINAI
Non-contingent	Contingent - "if you listen to Hashem your God diligently ...."[8]
Covenant - outlines expectations	Contract - sets terms
Values - flexible	Laws - rigid
Values - pluralistic	Laws - hierarchical
Responsibilities - subjective	Duties - objective

• Consider for instance the Jewish position on marrying a non-Jewish woman[9] or living in the Land of Israel. Whilst the Torah itself includes both of these as halachic concepts and mitzvot, both are intensely stressed in the lives of the Avot as core Jewish values and responsibilities.

B1] BEYOND-HALACHIC MAN

16. ... the issues resolves itself, in turn, into the problem, both historical and analytic, of the relation between the pre- and post-Sinai orders. ..... On another level, however, we are confronted by an issue of far wider scope. The question is not what vestiges of natural morality continue to bind the Jews, or to what extent receiving the Torah abrogated any antecedent ethic. It is, rather, whether the demands or guidelines of Halakhah, quite apart from the ground common to natural and halakhic morality, are both so definitive and so comprehensive as to preclude the necessity for - and therefore, in a sense, the legitimacy of - any other ethic.[10]

R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "Does Judaism Recognize an Ethic Independent of Halakhah?" Leaves of Faith Vol 2 pp 36-37

17. דאמר רבי יוחנן: לא חרבה ירושלים אלא על שדנו בה דין תורה. אלא דיני דמגיזתא לדיינו!? אלא אימא: שהעמידו דיניהם על דין תורה, ולא עבדו לפנים משורת הדין.

בבא מציעא ל:

Chazal state that Yerushalayim was destroyed because the halachic system was run on the basis of din - the strict letter of the law, as opposed to 'lifnim mishurat hadin' - going beyond the letter of the law.

18. וְעָשִׂיתָ הַיָּשָׁר וְהַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵי ה' לְמַעַן יִיטַב לָךְ וּבָאתָ וְיָרַשְׁתָּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לַאֲבֹתֶיךָ:

דברים ו:יח

One of the mitzvot is to do what is 'upright and good'. Why is this a separate mitzvah - aren't all of the mitzvot meant to be yashar and tov? How are we to judge whether our idea of what is straight and good is in accordance with God's?

19. ולרבותינו זכר מדרש יפה – אמרו 'זו פשרה ולפנים משורת הדין'. והכוונה בזה, כי מתחלה אמר שתשמור חקותיו ועדותיו אשר צוך, ועתה יאמר גם באשר לא צוך תן דעתך לעשות הטוב והישר בעיניו, כי הוא אוהב הטוב והישר. וזה ענין גדול, לפי שאי אפשר להזכיר בתורה כל הנהגות האדם עם שכניו ורעיו וכל משאו ומתנו ותקוני הישוב והמדינות כלם. אבל אחרי שהזכיר מהם הרבה, כגון לא תלך רכיל, לא תקום ולא תטור, ולא תעמוד על דם רעך, לא תקלל חרש, מפני שיבה תקום וכיוצא בהן, חזר לומר בדרך כלל שיעשה הטוב והישר בכל דבר, עד שיכנס בזה הפשרה ולפנים משורת הדין.

רמב"ן שם

The Ramban explains that, although the Torah includes hundreds of mitzvot and thousands of details, it could not possibly legislate specifically for every case in every time and place. It therefore includes this general mitzvah bein adam lechavero which requires us to be fair and honest and use our moral and ethical judgement in all circumstances.

• The Ramban famously expresses similar ideas on the mitzva of 'Kedoshim Tihiyu', and the dangers that a person committed to the letter of the halacha can nevertheless become a 'naval bireshut haTorah' - a "scoundrel with Torah licence".

8. See Shemot 15:25, 19:5, Vayikra 26:3, Devarim 7:12, 8:19-20, 28:1-2
9. See Rambam Hilchot Isurei Biah 12:1,6,7. The Vilna Gaon (commentary on Shulchan Aruch EH 16:8) cites a verse in Bereishit (17:7) as a key source!
10. See also Rabbi J David Bleich - *Is There an Ethic Beyond Halakha?* The Philosophical Quest Chap 7 p 125-141. Rabbi Bleich is less open to the existence of an independent ethic beyond halacha than is R. Lichtenstein, and certainly far less than R. Wurzburger.

20. If, however, we equate Halakhah with the din, if we mean that everything can be looked up, every moral dilemma resolved by reference to code or canon, the notion is both palpably naïve and patently false. . . . Which of us has not, at times, been made painfully aware of the ethical paucity of his legal resources? Who has not found that fulfillment of explicit halakhic duty could fall well short of exhausting clearly felt moral responsibility?

R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "Does Judaism Recognize an Ethic Independent of Halakhah?" Leaves of Faith Vol 2 pp 38-39

21. Just how independent of Halakha is the ethic that ennobles us above the 'scoundrel with Torah licence'? If we regard *din* and Halakhah as coextensive, very independent. If, however, we recognize that Halakhah is multiplanar and many-dimensional; that, properly conceived, it includes much more than is explicitly required or permitted by specific rules, we shall realize that the ethical moment we are seeking is itself an aspect of Halakhah. The demand or, if you will, the impetus for transcending the din is itself part of the halakhic corpus.

R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "Does Judaism Recognize an Ethic Independent of Halakhah?" Leaves of Faith p 40

22. .... ואין האכזריות והעזות מצויה אלא בעכו"ם עובדי ע"ז. אבל <u>זרעו של אברהם אבינו והם ישראל</u> שהשפיע להם הקדוש ברוך הוא טובת התורה וצוה אותם בחקים ומשפטים צדיקים - רחמנים הם על הכל.

רמב"ם הלכות עבדים פרק ט הלכה ח

In some halachic principles - here in the imperative to mercy and kindness - the Rambam draws on the connection with Avraham[11] in explaining the practical law.

• The ongoing reality of Brit Avot leads to a number of important ethical/moral/halachic dilemmas. One the one hand, Brit Avot can never justify contradicting the halacha of Brit Sinai. But consider also the concept of Aveira Lishma.

22. It would be the height of arrogance to challenge the validity of an explicit divine imperative on the ground that it runs counter to our own ethical intuitions. Indeed, to permit humanistic considerations to override divinely revealed commandments amounts to a desecration of the Divine Name. In the event of conflict with explicit halakhic requirements, all ethical, aesthetic, intellectual or prudential considerations must be set aside.

Ethics of Responsibility: Pluralistic Approaches to Covenantal Ethics, Rabbi Walter S. Wurzburger p 28

C] <u>RABBI SACKS - CHAZAL AND THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA</u>

24. Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?"

Euthyphro 10a, Plato

In classical thought, this question of Socrates to Euthyphro is the statement of a fundamental dilemma. Is God's command the source of all morality or is there an a priori natural morality which is encoded into our existence, and which God commands us to follow.

• In our terms - Are Mitzvot worthy because they are good and holy in and of themselves, or are they worthy because we are answering God's command?
• The Avot keep the Torah, not because they are commanded but because it was the right thing to do. We now keep the Torah BOTH because of this reason (Brit Avot) and also because of it being God's command (Brit Sinai).

11. The Rambam references Avraham over 50 times in the Mishne Torah.

25.

Plato's dilemma is elegant because it forces us to make a choice between two invidious possibilities: religion is either opposed to ethics or superfluous to it. In fact, however, Plato's dilemma belongs to a particular time and place, Athens in the fourth century BCE. The culture of Plato's day was mythic and polytheistic. The gods fought and committed appalling crimes. Kronos castrates his father Uranus, only to be murdered by his son Zeus in turn. Greek myth is amoral or pre-moral, and what Plato represents is one of the earliest attempts to think morally by breaking free from the mythological past. Looking back with the hindsight of history, we can see that for Plato, to be moral was to liberate yourself from the world of myth – much as Abraham, in Jewish tradition, could only arrive at truth by breaking his father's idols. In their different ways, Abraham and Plato were both iconoclasts.

In Judaism, the Euthyphro dilemma does not exist.[7] God commands the good because it is good. Without this assumption, Abraham's challenge over the fate of Sodom – 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice?' – would be incomprehensible. God and humans are equally answerable to the claims of justice. But the good is what God commands because God-the-lawgiver is also God-the-creator-and-redeemer. Morality mirrors the deep structure of the universe that God made and called good. Plato's challenge arises because the Greek gods were not creators. Matter was eternal. The gods had no special authority except for the fact that they were held to be powerful. Plato was therefore correct to challenge the popular cults of his day by, in effect, drawing a principled distinction between might and right. The gods may be strong, but that is no reason to invest them with moral authority. For the Bible, however, God who teaches us how to act in the world is also the maker of the world in which we act. This means that in monotheism, morality means going with, not against, the grain of the cosmos and history. God himself empowers his prophets to challenge kings – even himself – in the name of justice or mercy. To be sure, there are occasions – most famously, the binding of Isaac – in which God seems to demand pure obedience; but this itself suggests that the story may be more subtle than it seems.[8] Taken as a whole, Judaism embodies divine faith in the moral capacity and literacy of humankind.

...to be moral,

To Heal a Fractured World, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks p164-5

26. According to this view, which zealously tries to defend the honor of the Torah, there is no connection between God, Creator of man, and God, Giver of the Torah, as if that which God implanted in man's heart does not belong to God.

R. Yehuda Amital - Jewish Values in a Changing World, p23

27. It seems obvious to me that God does not want man to eat human flesh. The Torah fails to mention that the eating of human flesh is forbidden, not because it is permitted, but because certain things are so obvious that it is unnecessary for the Torah to state them.

R. Yehuda Amital - Jewish Values in a Changing World, p39

D] RAV KOOK - SEGULA AND BECHIRA

• Rav Kook expresses this idea (Igrot HaRa'ayah 555) as the distinction between the 'Segula' of the Jewish people, based on Brit Avot, and the 'Bechira' of the Jewish people, based on Brit Sinai. He recognizes that many Jews in our contemporary world have disconnected from Brit Sinai and do not keep mitzvot, but their Segula and connection to the Avot is very strong!

28.

יַדַּע הַדֶּרֶת גְּאוֹנוֹ, שֶׁשְּׁנֵי דְּבָרִים **עִקָּרִיִּים** יֶשְׁנָם שֶׁהֵם יַחַד בּוֹנִים קְדֻשַּׁת-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִתְקַשְּׁרוּת הסג
הָאֱלֹהִית עִמָּהֶם.

הָאֶחָד הוּא סְגֻלָּה, כְּלוֹמַר טֶבַע הַקְּדֻשָּׁה שֶׁבִּנְשִׁמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִירוּשַּׁת אָבוֹת, כָּאָמוּר: "לֹא בְצִדְקָתְךָ וגו'" (דברים ט, ה), "רַק בַּאֲבֹתֶיךָ חָשַׁק ד' לְאַהֲבָה אוֹתָם וַיִּבְחַר בְּזַרְעָם אַחֲרֵיהֶם" (שם י, טו), "וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סְגֻלָּה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים" (שמות יט, ה); וְהַסְּגֻלָּה הוּא כֹּחַ קָדוֹשׁ פְּנִימִי מְנֻחָ בְּטֶבַע-הַנֶּפֶשׁ בְּרָצוֹן ד', כְּמוֹ טֶבַע כָּל דָּבָר מֵהַמְצִיאוּת, שֶׁאִי-אֶפְשָׁר לוֹ לְהִשְׁתַּנּוֹת כְּלָל, "כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיֶּהִי" (תהלים לג, ה), "וַיַּעֲמִידֵם לָעַד לְעוֹלָם" (שם קמח, ו).

וְהַשֵּׁנִי הוּא עִנְיַן-בְּחִירָה, זֶה תָּלוּי **בְּמַעֲשֶׂה** הַטּוֹב וּבְתַלְמוּד-תּוֹרָה.

הַחֵלֶק שֶׁל הַסְּגֻלָּה הוּא הַרְבֵּה, בְּאֵין עֵרוֹךְ כְּלָל°, יוֹתֵר גָּדוֹל וְקָדוֹשׁ מֵהַחֵלֶק הַתָּלוּי בַּבְּחִירָה, אֲלָא שֶׁבְּרִית כְּרוּתָה° הִיא, שֶׁהַסְּגֻלָּה הַפְּנִימִית לֹא תִתְגַּלֶּה בִּזְמַן הַזֶּה כִּי אִם לְפִי אוֹתָהּ הַמִּדָּה שֶׁהַבְּחִירָה מְסַיַּעַת אֶת גִּלּוּיָהּ, עַל כֵּן הַכֹּל תָּלוּי לְפִי רֹב הַמַּעֲשֶׂה וּקְדֻשַּׁת הָאֱמוּנָה וְתַלְמוּד-תּוֹרָה.

וה' יִתְבָּרַךְ, הַנּוֹהֵג בְּחַסְדּוֹ בְּכָל דּוֹר, **מְסַדֵּר** הוּא אֶת סִדְרֵי הַנְּשָׁמוֹת הַצְּרִיכוֹת לְהוֹפִיעַ בָּעוֹלָם: לִפְעָמִים כֹּחַ-הַבְּחִירָה מִתְגַּבֵּר וְכֹחַ-הַסְּגֻלָּה עוֹמֵד בְּמַצָּב הַהֶעְלֵם וְאֵינוֹ נִכָּר, וְלִפְעָמִים כֹּחַ-הַסְּגֻלָּה מִתְגַּבֵּר וְכֹחַ הַבְּחִירָה עוֹמֵד בְּמַצָּב הַנַּעֲלָם.

וְכָל עִקָּרָהּ שֶׁל בְּרִית-אָבוֹת, שֶׁאֵינָנוּ פּוֹסֵק° אֲפִלּוּ כְּשֶׁתַּמָּה כְּבָר זְכוּת-אָבוֹת°, הוּא בָּא° מִצַּד כֹּחַ-הַסְּגֻלָּה, וּבְעִקְבָא-דְמִשִׁיחָא° מִתְגַּבֵּר בְּיוֹתֵר כֹּחַ-הַסְּגֻלָּה•, שֶׁהוּא תֹּכֶן "זוֹכֵר חַסְדֵי אָבוֹת וּמֵבִיא גּוֹאֵל לִבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה", כְּלוֹמַר לֹא מִצַּד הַבְּחִירָה° שֶׁהִיא בָּאָה מִצַּד הַמַּעֲשִׂים הַטּוֹבִים שֶׁבַּבָּנִים וּמִצַּד הַתְּשׁוּבָה, אֶלָּא לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ°, הַמִּתְגַּלֶּה עַל יְדֵי זְכִירַת חַסְדֵי אָבוֹת°.

(אגרות הראיה, אגרת תקנה)

אֲמְנָם לִפְעָמִים מִתְגַּבֵּר חֹשֶׁךְ כָּזֶה שֶׁמַּפְסִיק אֶת הוֹפָעַת הַסְּגֻלָּה גַּם כֵּן. אֲבָל זֶה אִי-אֶפְשָׁר כִּי אִם בְּמֵי שֶׁבָּא לְמִדָּה זוֹ לִהְיוֹת חַס וְשָׁלוֹם שׁוֹנֵא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְדוֹרֵשׁ רָעָה לָהֶם בְּפֹעַל וּבְצִפִּית-הַלֵּב, כְּמוֹ הַמִּינִים° שֶׁמְּפָרֵשׁ הָרַמְבָּ"ם בְּהִלְכוֹת תְּפִלָּה שֶׁהָיוּ מְצָרִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל (הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים ב, א), וְגַם זֶה הָיָה קָשֶׁה לַחֲכָמִים° מְאֹד לְתַקֵּן, עַל כֵּן הִכְרִיז רַבָּן גַּמְלִיאֵל: "כְּלוֹם יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁיּוֹדֵעַ לְתַקֵּן בִּרְכַּת הַמִּינִים" (ברכות כח:), וְהֶצְרֵךְ לְתַקָּנָה דַּוְקָא שְׁמוּאֵל הַקָּטָן, שֶׁהָיָה נָקִי מִכָּל מִדָּה שֶׁל שִׂנְאָה כְּמוֹ שֶׁהָיָה מֻרְגָּלָא בְּפוּמֵיהּ°: "בִּנְפֹל אוֹיִבְךָ אַל תִּשְׂמָח" (משלי כד, יז; אבות ד, יט), כְּדֵי שֶׁיְּכַוֵּן בִּיסוֹד הַבְּרָכָה דַּוְקָא עַל אוֹתָם שֶׁכָּבָר אִבְּדוּ אֶת הַסְּגֻלָּה כְּלָל.

וּבְדוֹרֵנוּ נִתְרַבּוּ נְשָׁמוֹת רַבּוֹת שֶׁאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁהֵן שְׁפָלוֹת מְאֹד בְּעִנְיַן הַבְּחִירָה, וְעַל כֵּן הֵם נְגוּעִים בְּמַעֲשִׂים רָעִים רַבִּים וּבְדֵעוֹת רָעוֹת מְאֹד ד' יִשְׁמְרֵנוּ, מִכָּל מָקוֹם אוֹר-הַסְּגֻלָּה מֵאִיר בָּהֶם•, וְעַל כֵּן הֵם מְחַבְּבִים° מְאֹד אֶת כְּלָלוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְחוֹשְׁקִים בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּבְכַמָּה דְּבָרִים טוֹבִים וְיקָרִים מֵהַמִּדּוֹת שֶׁהֵם בָּאִים מִסְּגֻלַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטֶבַע-נַפְשָׁם הֵם מְצֻיָּנִים בָּהֶם. וּנְשָׁמוֹת כָּאֵלּוּ, אִם יְזַדַּקֵּק לְקָרֵב אוֹתָם מִי שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ דַּעַת עֶמְקָה שֶׁל טְבִיעַת-עַיִן לְדַעַת לְחַלֵּק בֵּין הַצַּד הַסְּגֻלִּי הַפְּנִימִי הַקָּדוֹשׁ שֶׁבָּהֶם, וּבֵין הַצַּד הַבְּחִירִי הַמְקֻלְקָל שֶׁבָּהֶם, שֶׁהוּא מַקִּיף אֶת נַפְשָׁם כְּחוֹחִים וְקוֹצִים הַסּוֹבְבִים שׁוֹשַׁנָּה, הוּא יוּכַל לְהִתְקַלְקֵל הַרְבֵּה חַס וְשָׁלוֹם, וְלִלְמֹד מִמַּעֲשֵׂיהֶם, וּלְהִדָּבֵק בְּצַד הָרַע שֶׁבָּהֶם וְהוּא מְחַיֵּב לְהִתְרַחֵק מֵהֶם, וַה' יִתְבָּרַךְ נוֹתֵן בְּלִבּוֹ רָצוֹן זֶה וּמַחְשָׁבָה זוֹ שֶׁל שִׂנְאָה וְשֶׁל הִתְרַחֲקוּת, כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִבָּלַע לוֹ°.

אֲבָל מִי שֶׁהוּא תָּמִיד שָׁקוּעַ בְּרַעְיוֹנוֹ° בְּהִסְתַּכְּלוּת פְּנִימִית, בְּאוֹר תּוֹרָה וּקְדֻשָּׁה וְיִרְאָה עִלָּאָה°, מִצַּד רוֹמְמוּת רִבּוֹן כָּל הָעוֹלָמִים חַיֵּי הַחַיִּים בָּרוּךְ הוּא, וְלֹא חַס וְשָׁלוֹם בְּיִרְאָה תַּתָּאָה° לְבַדָּהּ מִצַּד עָנְשֵׁי עוֹלָם הַזֶּה אוֹ עָנְשֵׁי עוֹלָם הַבָּא - שֶׁהִיא יִרְאָה חִיצוֹנִית, שֶׁאָסוּר לְתַלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים הָעוֹסְקִים בְּרָזֵי-תוֹרָה בַּהֲבָנָה פְּנִימִית לְהִרְבּוֹת בָּהּ, רַק לְקַחַת מִמֶּנָּהּ מְעַט, כְּדֵי לְיַסֵּד אֶת הַגּוּף וּנְטִיּוֹתָיו הַגַּסּוֹת, בְּמִדּוֹת רָעוֹת וּתְכוּנוֹת מְגֻנּוֹת חַס וְשָׁלוֹם, אֲבָל הָעִקָּר צָרִיךְ לִהְיוֹת הַלֵּב מָלֵא אַהֲבָה קְדוֹשָׁה, וְיִרְאָה עֶלְיוֹנָה, מְסוּד קְדוֹשִׁים, כְּיִרְאַת מַלְאֲכֵי-מַעְלָה "גִּבּוֹרֵי-כֹחַ עוֹשֵׂי דְבָרוֹ" (תהלים קג, כ) - תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים כָּאֵלֶּה° הֵנָּם מַכִּירִים בְּטִבְעָם אֶת טֶבַע הַסְּגֻלָּה הַפְּנִימִית, וְיוֹדְעִים לְהַפְרִיד מַמָּנָּהּ בְּדִבֻּקוּת-מַחֲשַׁבְתָּם אֶת הַקִּלְפָּה הַבְּחִירִית, וְהֵם חַיָּבִים וּמְזֻהָרִים עַל זֶה לְקָרֵב פּוֹשְׁעִים כָּאֵלֶּה שֶׁסְּגֻלָּה פְּנִימִית יֵשׁ לָהֶם, כְּדֵי לְעוֹרֵר יוֹתֵר וְיוֹתֵר אֶת כֹּחַ הַטּוֹב הַצָּפוּן בָּהֶם, עַד שֶׁיִּתְגַּבֵּר לְגַמְרֵי עַל הָרַע הַבְּחִירִי וְיַכְנִיעַ אוֹתוֹ.

וּפְעָלַת חֲכָמִים לוֹקְחֵי נְפָשׁוֹת כָּאֵלֶּה אֵינָהּ חוֹזֶרֶת רֵיקָם בְּשׁוּם פַּעַם; לִפְעָמִים פְּעֻלּוֹתֵיהֶם נִרְאוֹת בְּגָלוּי, עַל יְדֵי מַה שֶּׁהַמְקֹרָבִים מֵהֶם מֵיטִיבִים אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, וּמְיַשְּׁרִים אֶת דֵּעוֹתֵיהֶם יוֹתֵר בְּפֹעַל, וְלִפְעָמִים נִכְנָס רַק גַּרְעִין פְּנִימִי בָּהֶם, וְכָבָר בְּטוּחִים הֵם שֶׁלֹּא יִפְטְרוּ מִן הָעוֹלָם בְּלֹא תְּשׁוּבָה, וַאֲפִלּוּ אִם חֲלִילָה יִהְיֶה הַמִּשְׁפָּע כָּל כָּךְ גָּרוּעַ עַד שֶׁהוּא בְּעַצְמוֹ לֹא יִזְכֶּה לָשׁוּב בִּתְשׁוּבָה, יִפְעֹל כֹּחַ הַגַּרְעִין הַזֶּה עַל טֶבַע-נַפְשׁוֹ, וְנָפִיק מִינֵיהּ זַרְעָא מְעַלְיָא°, שֶׁיָּשׁוּב בִּתְשׁוּבָה, וְיִתְקַן גַּם כֵּן אֶת נַפְשׁ אֲבִיו, כְּדִין "בְּרָא מְזַכֵּא אַבָּא°" (סנהדרין קד.).

וה' יִתְבָּרַךְ יוֹדֵעַ, שֶׁלֹּא אֶת כָּל הַפּוֹשְׁעִים אֲנִי מְקָרֵב, כִּי אִם אוֹתָם שֶׁאֲנִי מַרְגִּישׁ. שֶׁכֹּחַ סְגֻלִּי גָּדוֹל מָנַח בְּפְנִימִיּוּתָם, וּדְרָכִים רַבִּים יְשָׁנָם לִידִיעָה זוֹ, וְסִפְרִים גְּדוֹלִים צְרִיכִים לִכְתֹּב בָּזֶה כְּדֵי לְבָאֵר גַּם רַק סְתָם מֵהַדָּבָר הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה. וְעַל אוֹתָם שֶׁכָּבָר אִבְּדוּ גַּם אֶת הַסְּגֻלָּה הַפְּנִימִית שֶׁלָּהֶם לְגַמְרֵי, אָמַר דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם: "הֲלֹא מְשַׂנְאֶיךָ ד' אֶשְׂנָא" (תהלים קלט, כא). וּבְדֶרֶךְ כְּלָלוּת מָסְרוּ לָנוּ חַז"ל סִימָנִין° עַל-זֶה. וְהַמִּינִים וְהַמּוֹסְרִים עַל פִּי רֹב אִבְּדוּ גַּם אֶת הַסְּגֻלָּה הַפְּנִימִית.

(אגרות הראיה, אגרת תקנה)

To download more source sheets and audio shiurim visit www.rabbimanning.com

APPENDIX

The Covenants of Sinai and Egypt - Kol Dodi Dofek Chap 6

When we delve into our historical existence we come to an important realization regarding our Weltanschauung. The Torah relates that the Holy One concluded two Covenants with Israel. One Covenant was made in Egypt. "And I shall take you unto Me for a people, and I will be to you a God" (Exodus 6:7). The second Covenant was at Mount Sinai. "And he [Moses] took the book of the covenant ... and he said: 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord made with you in agreement with all these words'" (Exodus 24:7-8). (The third Covenant, in the Book of Deuteronomy (28:69), is identical in content and purpose to the Covenant of Sinai.) What is the essence of these two Covenants? It appears to me that this question was already answered at the beginning of our essay. Just as Judaism distinguished fate from destiny in the realm of personal individuality, so it also differentiated between these two concepts in the sphere of our national-historical existence. The individual is tethered to his nation with bonds of fate and chains of destiny. In accordance with this postulate, one can say that the Covenant of Egypt was a Covenant of Fate, and the Covenant of Sinai was one of destiny.

What is the Covenant of Fate? Fate signifies in the life of the nation, as it does in the life of the individual, an existence of compulsion. A strange force merges all individuals into one unit. The individual is subject and subjugated against his will to the national fate/existence, and it is impossible for him to avoid it and be absorbed into a different reality. The environment expels the Jew who flees from the presence of God, so that he is awakened from his slumber, like Jonah the prophet, who awoke to the voice of the ship's captain demanding to know his personal national-religious identity.

The historical loneliness of the Jew percolates from a feeling of compulsive fate. He is as alone in his life on earth as in his death. The concept of kever yisrael emphasizes the Jew's strange detachment from the world. Sociologists and psychologists may say what they wish about the inexplicable isolation of the Jew. Their explanations are nothing more than barren speculation, incapable of rationally describing the phenomenon. Jewish separateness belongs to the framework of the Covenant of Fate that was concluded in Egypt. In truth, Judaism andwithdrawal from the world are synonymous. Even before the exile in Egypt, separateness descended upon our world with the appearance of the first Jew, our father Abraham. Abraham the Hebrew (ivri) lived apart. "The whole world was on one side (ever), and he on the other side" (Bereshit Rabbah 42:8). Balaam, when he gazed upon the Israelite camp, understood the wonder of the experience of Jewish separateness and proclaimed with amazement: "They are a nation dwelling alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Numbers 23:9). Even if a Jew reaches the pinnacle of social and political accomplishment, he will not be able to free himself from the chains of isolation. Paradoxical fate watches over the isolation and uniqueness of the Jew, despite his apparent integration into his non-Jewish environment. Even people of power and authority, such as Joseph, the regent of Egypt, was separated from Egyptian society and remained alone in his tent. "And they served him [Joseph] by himself ... and for the Egyptians ... by themselves." (Genesis 43:32). (Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, because it was a taboo for them). Before his death Joseph pleaded with his brothers, "When God will surely remember you and bring you out of this land, you shall carry up my bones from here" (Genesis 50:25). For despite my greatness and glory I am tied to you and your existence both in life and in death. This singular, inexplicable phenomenon of the individual clinging to the community and feeling alienated from the outside world was forged and formed in Egypt. There Israel was elevated to the status of a nation in the sense of a unity from which arises uniqueness as well . The awareness of the Fate Covenant in all of its manifestations is an integral part of our historical-metaphysical essence.

When the exclusive fate-driven individual stands face to face with God, he encounters the God of the Jews, who is revealed to man by the experience of loneliness and from the inexorabilityof existence — from the fate awareness that overcomes and subjugates man. He is the Almighty who does not wait for the supplications of man and his voluntary summons. He imposes His sovereignty upon him against his will. A Jew cannot banish the God of the Jews from his world. Even if he desecrates his Shabbat, defiles his table and his bed, and tries to deny his identity, he will not escape the dominion of the God of the Jews, which follows him like a shadow. So long as a person's physiognomy testifies to his birth, so long as Jewish blood flows in his veins, and so long as his flesh is Jewish, he is compelled to serve the God of the Hebrews. There is no counsel or tactic that can oppose Him. Even if the Jew who spurns his people should soar to the farthest heavens, from there the hand of the God of the Hebrews shall reach him. Where shall the Jew go to flee the God of the Hebrews and where can he escape from His presence?

And they said: The God of the Hebrews has revealed Himself to us. Please allow us to take a three days' journey into the desert, and we shall deliver sacrifices unto God lest he smite us with pestilence or sword — Exodus 5:3. Failure to cleave to the commands of the God of the Hebrews results in punishment and the destruction of existence. The Covenant of Fate is also expressed in positive categories that stem from the awareness of shared fate. There are four facets to this rare state of mind.

First, the awareness of shared fate appears as that of shared experience. We are all in the realm of a shared fate that binds together the different strata of the nation and does not discriminate between classes and individuals. Fate does not distinguish between nobility and commonfolk, between rich and poor, between a prince dressed in royal purple velvet and a poor man who goes begging from door to door, between a pious Jew and an assimilationist.

Even though we may speak a mix of different languages, even if we are citizens of different lands, even if we look different (one being short and black, the other tall and blond), even if we live in different economic systems and under different living conditions (the one living in a royal palace, the other in a humble cave), we have but one fate. When the Jew in the cave is attacked, the security of the Jew standing in the courtyard of the king is jeopardized. "Do not think in your soul that you, from all the Jews [will escape and], shall flee to the palace of the king" (Esther 4:13). Queen Esther robed in majesty and Mordechai wearing sackcloth were situated in the same historical nexus. "All Israel are bound together (haverim)" (TB Sotah 37a). We are all persecuted, or we are all saved together.

Second, the awareness of shared historical experience leads to the experience of shared suffering. A feeling of empathy is a basic fact in the consciousness of shared Jewish fate. The suffering of one segment of the nation is the lot of the entire community. The scattered and separated people mourns and is consoled together. Prayer, the cry, and the consolation were formulated, as I emphasized above, in the plural. Supplications that emerge from the depths of travail are not confined to the suffering and affliction of the groaning individual. They encompass the needs of the entire community. When there is a sick person in one's house, one prays not only for that person but for all the sick of Israel. When one enters the house of a mourner to comfort him and to wipe the tear from the bereaved's sad face, he directs his words of condolence to "all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." The slightest disturbance in the state of an individual or a sector of the people should trouble all segments of the nation throughout their dispersion. It is forbidden and it is impossible for the individual to isolate himself from his fellow and not participate in his suffering. If the assumption of shared historical experience is accurate, then shared suffering is its direct corollary.

One of the great preachers of the last generation put it well when he likened the people of Israel to the two-headed son about whom it was asked in the Talmud whether he would, as a dual-personality, take two shares of his familial inheritance or only one portion. So too one may ask: Has the dispersal of the nation in the Diaspora, and its taking root in different surroundings, caused its spiritual disintegration, or has the unity of the people not been lost despite the fact it has grown many heads and speaks many languages, with different customs and diverse ways of life? In a word, is the Jewish Diaspora one or not? The answer, continued the preacher, to the question of the unity of the people is identical with the decision rendered in the beth midrash to the litigant who asked about the status of the two-headed heir. Let them pour boiling water on the head of the one, said the Rabbi, and let us see the other's reaction. If the other screams in pain,then the two comprise one personality, and they shall receive one share of the inheritance. However, if the second does not feel the suffering of the first, then they are two individuals enfolded in one body, and they shall receive two shares of the estate.

With respect to the unity of the nation as well, one must firmly establish that so long as there is shared suffering, in the sense of "I am with him in his distress" (Psalms 91:15), there is unity. If the Jew, on whom Providence has shined Its countenance, and who believes that with respect to himself the sharpness of hatred has been removed, and estrangement from his surroundings has passed, nevertheless still feels the distress of the nation and the burden of its fate/existence, then his bond to the nation has not been severed. If boiling water is poured on the head of a Moroccan Jew, the prim and proper Jew in Paris or London must scream, and by feeling the pain, shows himself loyal to the nation. The breakup of the people and the constriction of its self-image are the result of a lack of empathy.

Third, shared suffering is expressed in a feeling of shared obligation and responsibility. When the children of Israel left Egypt, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, pleaded before God, and said: "Lord, God of Hosts of all flesh, shall one man sin and You direct divine wrath at the entire congregation?" (Numbers 16:22). This prayer accomplished that which the "shepherds of Israel" (Ezekiel 34:2) sought. The Holy One agreed with their action and only punished Korah and his cohorts. However, God only demonstrated this loving-kindness momentarily. Forever after, the "I" is ensnared in the sin of his fellow, if he had it within his power to reprimand, admonish, and bring his neighbor to repentance. The people of Israel have a collective responsibility, both halakhic and moral, for one another. The discrete units coalesce into a single halakhic-moral unity, with one all-encompassing and normative conscience and consciousness. The halakhah has already decreed that "all Jews are sureties for one another" (TB Shavu'ot 39a), such that one who has already fulfilled his personal mitzvah is not considered fully absolved thereby and may therefore fulfill the obligation on behalf of others who have not as yet done so. The "I" is not exempt from its obligation so long as his neighbor has not fulfilled that which is incumbent upon him. There is a special covenant of mutual responsibility among the children of Israel. This covenant is expressed in the blessings and imprecations pronounced on Mounts Gerizim and Ebal (Deuteronomy 11:29). It is based upon the notion of peoplehood revealed to Moses in Egypt. Out of this concept grew the covenant of mutual obligation. Moses, the dean of all prophets, in relating this covenant of mutual obligation, emphasized: "For that He may establish you today unto Him as a people, and He shall be unto you as a God" (Deuteronomy 29:12). He thus returned to the formulation of the Covenant of Egypt. "And I will take you to Me as a people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7). Here the notion of shared fate was elevated from the plane of communal-political suffering to that of halakhic and moral responsibility. We are all sureties for one another, as it is said: "And the revelations belong to us and to our children forever" (Deuteronomy 29:28).

Sharing of responsibility is not simply a halakhic-speculative notion, but a central fact in the history of Israel's relations with other nations. Our neighbors perpetually blame us for the transgressions of our co-religionists, and they turn the Talmud's rhetorical question of, "[If] Tobias sins; should Zigud be whipped?" (TB Pesahim 113b), into an everyday reality that no one questions. The identification of the activities of the individual with the deeds of the nation is a fundamental truth of the history of our people. Our enemies do not allow the individual Jew to remain alone in his own confines. They take him out of his own four cubits into the public domain and there harshly criticize the [entire] community because of him. This "standard" is only employed in relation to Israel and not with respect to other nations. No one has yet accused a Russian or a Chinese individual of being an agent of international communism and then held him liable, by virtue of his national origin, for the nations that lead the communist regime and aspire to subjugate the world under this cruel order. In contrast to this logical and humane approach to the members of other nations, the Jewish people as a whole is slandered, because of a handful of Jewish apostates, [with the allegation] that it is sympathetic to communism. We have yet to be absolved from this libel. Once again, the explanations of the experts for this phenomenon are not satisfactory. It makes no difference whether the causes are found in the realm of psychopathology or in the sphere of social history. Scientific classification is beside the point; the phenomenon remains obscure and inaccessible. We Orthodox Jews have one solution to this riddle: the hand of the Covenant of Fate, which was concluded in Egypt on the basis of the absolute uniqueness of the nation, is revealedamidst such an unintelligible reality.

The commandment to sanctify God's Name and the prohibition against desecrating it are clear in light of the principle of shared responsibility and obligation. The activity of the individual is debited to the account of the many. Every wrong committed by an individual stains the name of Israel throughout the world. The individual is responsible not only for his own conscience but also for the collective conscience of the nation. If he conducts himself properly, he has sanctified the name of the nation and the name of the God of Israel; if he has sinned, he causes shame to befall the nation and desecrates its God.

Fourth, shared experience is expressed by cooperation. The obligation to perform acts of charity (tzedakah) and loving-kindness (hesed) is derived from the experience of unity that is so all-pervading and encompassing. When the Torah deals with these precepts it uses the term "brother" rather than "friend." "And if your brother shall become impoverished ... you shall support him ... and he shall live among you".—Leviticus 25:35 "Do not harden your heart, and do not shut your hand against your needy brother ... open your hand to your poor and destitute brother in your land."—Deuteronomy 15:7, 11

Confrontation with the fateful reality of the nation in all of its strangeness instills the Jew with his common awareness in the realm of social activism. The shared situation of all Jews, whether in the objective realm, as an event, or in the subjective realm, as suffering, taps the sources in the individual's soul for loving-kindness and pity for his brethren, who are in trouble and that in a roundabout way touches him as well. Maimonides formulated this idea in his laconic but content-filled manner.

All Jews and those attached to them are like brothers, as it is said, "You are sons to the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1), and if a brother will not show mercy to his brother, then who will have mercy on him? And to whom can the poor of Israel look for help — to those other nations who hate and persecute? They can look for help only to their brethren.

From [both] the midst of a heritage which is compulsive and fateful and a terrible aloneness which are the source of the unity of the nation, issues forth the attribute of loving-kindness which summons and drives the fateful collective to imbue their unity with positive content by means of the constant participation in events, suffering, consciousness and acts of mutual assistance. The isolated Jew finds his solace in his active adhesion to the whole and by tearing down barriers of egotistical-separatist existence, and by joining his neighbors. The oppressive experience of fate finds its connection in the coalescing of individual personal experiences into the new entity called a nation. The obligation of love for another person emanates from the self-awareness of the people of fate, which is alone and perplexed by its uniqueness. For this was the Covenant of Egypt concluded.[12]

12. Translated by David Z. Gordon, 2006