

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center:

The concept of the *Chosen People*, especially when it applies to the Jewish people, is a complex one.

Are we chosen because God loves us more than others? Are we chosen for our intrinsic moral qualities? Are Jews better than others?

Just the title of Richard Lynn's book: *The Chosen People: A Study of Jewish Intelligence and Achievement*, generated, as you can imagine, a profusion of mixed feelings and reactions.

Many Reform and Conservative Rabbis, struggling with this concept, emphasize that we are not chosen "because" but "for." In other words, the chosenness is in our mission to be a Holy People and a Light unto the Nations. Yet, this could still be problematic since not every Jew we know can serve as a *Light unto the Nations*, and on the other hand, we are not the only ones who see themselves as chosen.

In light of the above, I would like to offer a different definition of chosenness, one by Rabbi David Wolpe, a definition that while not negating the traditional one, brings the idea of chosenness to a new place. Rabbi Wolpe writes, "To be chosen is not to be better than others; it is to be called to be better than one currently is."

In this definition, one I like in particular, chosenness is first of all, a decision that begins with me. In other words, I should ask myself: how do I bring me from where I am right now to where I ought to be?

This is the main question we are addressing every Monday at 6:30 PM in our Mussar shiur: What does it mean to be a mensch and how do we get there? We all have room for improvement (If you believe you don't, then the Mussar shiur is not for you).

This definition of chosenness tells me that if I am special, it is because I have the potential to become a better human being. The same applies to our shul, to our community, to the Jewish people in particular, and to the entire humanity in general.

This definition of chosenness, I am afraid, comes with homework attached. Let's start working on it!

Rabbi Manes Kogan