

CHAPTER 4:1 ISRAEL AND THE OTHER NATIONS

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Derech Hashem - The Way of G-d 2:4:1

One of the most profoundly significant ways G-d interacts with humanity is by differentiating between ourselves, the Jews, and other people ¹.

Now, we're all the same on the surface, of course ², yet when it comes to the concerns of the Torah our people is set apart from all others ³. We'll do what we can here to explain this as best as we can and to show how we're all alike and how we're different.

Footnotes:

¹ That is, while the previous chapter dwelt on how G-d interfaces with individuals, this one will focus in on how G-d interacts with the Jewish Nation as a whole, His "chosen people" (see Deuteronomy 7:6), His "kingdom of priests and holy nation" (Exodus 9:16), as opposed to how He relates to others.

² Aside from being comprised of the same physical components, we have deeper connections, too: all of us have a spiritual side, we're all given free will, we all have the potential to be good or bad, etc.

³ When Shakespeare's famous Jewish character, Shylock, protested anti-Jewish discrimination by intoning, "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?" ("Merchant of Venice" Act 3, Scene 1) his point was that we Jews are just like other people in many, many ways, and that we're not to be feared or loathed. But in a certain sense, Shylock was off-the-mark (for he was mouthing Shakespeare's admirable indictment against anti-Semitism and wasn't addressing the themes we'll be dwelling upon here.)

For despite all appearances -- despite the fact that most people would be hard pressed to pick a Jew out in a crowd with any certainty (unless someone was wearing the tell-tale outward signs of a Jew) -- we Jews *are* different. Take away one fold after another, one layer after another of physical, emotional, and social likeness to others, and somehow all that gives way to a different breed.

For like every other one, the Jewish Nation has its unique national genius which sets it apart from the others. The point is though that our national genius touches on a very special phenomenon: the ability to draw close to G-d through His Torah. For we Jews can draw close to Him in ways no one

else can, thanks to the Torah. The fact that we might be attractive, intelligent, gifted, and the like isn't what sets us apart: it's that all-important potential to draw close to G-d that way.

Many of us -- Jew and non-Jew -- will squirm at the idea and grow ill at ease, since it's a decidedly un-modern one that's awash in political incorrectness. But be that as it may, the idea isn't our own; it's stated outright in the Torah.

We'll thus spend time exploring the implications of our distinctiveness, including the ideas that every other nation could have wound up being "the Jewish Nation" had things worked out differently in antiquity; the idea that Abraham alone deserved to be the root of the Jewish Nation, and no one else; the fact that other nations had been given a "second chance" later on but didn't take advantage of it; that other peoples thus function differently on a cosmic level; and more.

At bottom there's no reason to grow arrogant at our standing. It has nothing to do with us per se and everything to do with our G-d-given task in this world.