

# Our Responsibility to Humanity

**A**s Jews in exile we must navigate many challenges. Frequently these trials demand that we adopt a defensive posture. We must retain our identity. We must traverse animosity. This sentiment is particularly powerful at times like this when it becomes clear to us that we resemble a lamb surrounded by seventy wolves.<sup>1</sup> But in exile we must also build and grow. And not just for ourselves. We must contribute to humanity, be a light unto the nations (Yeshayahu 42:6).

## A Kingdom of Priests

Our concern for humanity is not limited to exile; it is at the core of our mission. Thus, before God gives the Torah to the Jewish people, he designates them as a kingdom of priests:

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמִלְכַת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה  
הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבֹּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

**And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.

Shemot 19:6

R. Avraham son of Rambam (in Rambam's name) and R. Ovadia

Seforno note that the accolade demands that we take responsibility for the spiritual needs of the entire world — like priests, the Jews are to serve the populace.

תהיו אתם בשמירת תורת מנהיגי העולם,  
היחס שלכם אליהם כיחס הכהן אל עדתו ילכו  
העולם בעקבותיכם ויהיו מחקים את מעשיכם  
ויתהלכו בדרכיכם.

*You shall be, through the keeping of my Torah the leaders of the world. Your relationship shall resemble the relationship of a priest to his flock. The entire world shall follow your lead and await your actions and walk in your path.*

**Commentary of R. Avraham Son of Rambam, Shemot 19:6**

ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים. ובוזה תהיו  
סגולה מכלם כי תהיו ממלכת כהנים להבין  
ולהורות לכל המין האנושי לקרוא כלם בשם  
ה', ולעבדו שכם אחד.

*And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and through this you shall be a treasure from among the nations, for you will be a kingdom of priests to guide and teach all of humanity to serve God and serve Him unitedly.*

Seforno, Shemot 19:6

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch  
(Commentary to Sefer Vayikra



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20:26) sums up this perspective on chosenness:

... so that in no way does Jewish thought look on the choice of Israel as a rejection of the rest of humanity. It regards the choice of Israel only as a beginning, only the restarting of the spiritual and moral rebuilding of Mankind, only the first step to that future... where many nations will attach themselves to God, and become His People, and Israel's Sanctuary will not only be the central heart of Israel but the center of Mankind, who will have found their way to God.

## A Nation Apart

There are, of course, many verses and statements in Chazal that highlight

<sup>1</sup> See *Tanchuma*, *Toldot 5* and *Ester Rabbah* 10:11.

the singularity of the Jewish people. Misunderstood, they suggest that God only cares about the Jewish people. Certainly, God's election of the Jewish people is a central tenet of our belief. Each day we thank Him for choosing us among the nations and giving us His Torah (*asher bachar banu mi-kol ha-amim vi-natan lanu et Torato*). However, as we explain in the forthcoming volume of *Illuminating Jewish Thought*, chapters 29-33, God's choosing of the Jewish people and forming a special bond with them does not imply a lack of concern with the rest of humanity. On the contrary, as God tells Avraham when He initially selects him for his noble task, *ve-nivrichu becha kol mishpechot ha-adama*, "and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you" (Bereishit 12:3).

How then are we meant to understand the sources that suggest that God is only concerned with the Jewish people?<sup>2</sup> How are we to explain the focus on ourselves?

R. Shlomo Fisher (*Drashot Beit Yishai* Ch. 26) offers a fascinating insight that will help us gain perspective on this topic. His thesis allows us to see the sources that highlight the essential differences between Jew and non-Jew, as well as the sources that play up the significant contributions of non-Jews, as two sides of a single coin. In the process, he also explains a baffling topic—vicarious suffering.

R. Fisher notes that there are two models for *bechirat Yisrael*. In one model, we find the Jewish people as the first among many nations. This approach can be seen in the verse *bni bechori Yisrael* (Shemot 4:22), which depicts the Jewish people as a *bechor*, a firstborn. This metaphor implies that

God has many children; however, like a *bechor*, we enjoy a special relationship with Him. But this distinction comes with a responsibility — as the *bechor*, we are responsible for the spirituality of the rest of the world.

This, too, can be seen in many verses. Rambam and Seforno's understanding of Shemot 19:6 (that we are responsible for the spirituality of the rest of the world) reflects this perspective. In this light, we understand such concepts as *ohr la-goyim*:

אֲנִי ה' קָרָאתִיךָ בְּצֶדֶק וְאַחֲזַק בְּיָדְךָ וְאַצְרֶךְ  
וְאֶתֵּנְךָ לְבְרִית עִם לְאוּר גּוֹיִם:

*I Hashem have called you in righteousness, taken hold of your hand, and kept you, and I have set you as a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations.*

**Yeshayahu 42:6**

Thus, in the first model of *bechirat Yisrael*, we find the Jewish people as the first among many nations, a privilege accompanied with a responsibility towards our "younger brothers."

The second model of *bechirat Yisrael* is exemplified by the verse *hen am levadad yishkon u-va-goyim lo yitchashav*, "They are a nation apart, not counted among the nations" (Bamidbar 23:9). This is the model we find depicted in *Kuzari* as well as in many Kabbalistic sources. According to this, we are not just first among many nations, but categorically different, in a spiritual sense. According to *Kuzari* our souls are not the same as their souls.

According to R. Fisher, both components are true. There is a duality to our chosenness. We are both first among nations, *bni bechori Yisrael*, and at the same time wholly apart from them, *hen am levadad yishkon u-va-goyim lo yitchashav*. It is important

to remember that even according to the second model we are not saying non-Jews are deficient. Non-Jews play an important role in the world. They have and continue to make important contributions to the world and can achieve greatness. *Chasidei umot ha-olam* (pious Gentiles) have a portion in *olam ha-ba*. However, spiritually, Jews are a world unto themselves.

## Our Dual Identity

With this duality in mind, we can better understand how some sources underscore the Jewish people's role as part of the broader mission of all of humanity, while other sources stress Jewish particularity. That is not to say that there is no debate about the Torah's attitude towards non-Jews. Without a doubt, certain thinkers are more particularistic than others. However, all thinkers must accept God's concern with all of humanity even as they embrace Jewish chosenness. Moreover, we, His people, must follow in His ways and also manifest concern with all of mankind.

The Rav noted that Avraham expressed these two elements of his identity when addressing the people of Cheit while buying a burial plot for Sara. He refers to himself as a *ger v-toshav*, a stranger and resident (Bereishit 23:4). Seemingly these two terms are incompatible, one is either a foreigner or citizen. Avraham teaches us that we must recognize we are both:

*The first Patriarch, Abraham, introduced himself to the inhabitants of Canaan with the words, 'I am a stranger and a resident among you.' Are not these two terms mutually exclusive?*

*Abraham's definition of his dual status, we believe, describes with profound accuracy*

2 One example is Rashi, *Shemot* 19:5, *ve-heim be-einai u-lefanai le-klum*, "but they [the other nations] mean nothing to Me."



the historical position of the Jew who resides in a predominantly non-Jewish society. He was the resident, like other inhabitants of Canaan, sharing with them a concern for the welfare of society, digging wells and contributing to the progress of the country in loyalty to its government and institutions. Here, Abraham was clearly a fellow citizen, a patriot among compatriots, joining others in advancing the common welfare.

However, there was another aspect, the spiritual, in which Abraham regarded himself as a stranger. His identification and solidarity with his fellow citizens in the secular realm did not imply his readiness to relinquish any aspects of his religious uniqueness. His was a different faith and he was governed by perceptions, truths, and observances which set him apart from the larger faith community. In this regard, Abraham and his descendants would always remain 'strangers.' ...

Like other people, the Jew has more than one identity. He is part of a larger family of mankind, but he also has a Jewish identity which separates him from others. Each identity imposes upon him particular responsibilities. As a citizen of a pluralistic society, the Jew assumes social and political obligation to contribute to the general welfare and to combat such common dangers as famine, corruption, disease and foreign enemies ... freedom, dignity and security of human life. These are concerns which transcend all boundaries of difference.

The Jew, however, has another identity which he does not share with the rest of mankind: the covenant with God which was established at Mt. Sinai three thousand years ago... This identity involves responsibilities and a way of life which are uniquely Jewish and which, inevitably

set the Jew apart from non-Jews. It is particularistic, rather than universalistic... There is an inevitable tension in trying to uphold these two identities.<sup>3</sup>

Homiletically, R. Soloveitchik explains in "Confrontations" (p. 27) and *Reflections of the Rav* (pp. 169-177) that when Yaakov sends messengers to Eisav, he anticipates that Eisav will ask him three questions (Bereishit 32:18). In answering these questions Yaakov clarifies the nature of our dual identity. In one respect Yaakov states we have nothing to do with you, Eisav; we are a nation unto ourselves, with a unique past, present, and future. But, at the same time, we have so much in common. All humans share a *tzellel* Elokim, a common source; we face common challenges, and share a common fate. Eisav's first two questions relate to our spiritual identity: "Whose are you? (To whom do you pledge your ultimate loyalty?) And where are you going? (What objectives and goals do you seek for yourself in the future? Who is your God and what manner of life and discipline will He require of you and your descendants?)" Consequently, Yaakov commanded his representatives to reply boldly, clearly and precisely that their metaphysical identities, their spiritual future and social commitment were the private concerns of Yaakov. "They are your servant Yaakov's," and no human power may interfere or attempt to sever this eternal bond with God that had been established in the covenant

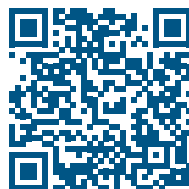
with Avraham (Bereishit 32:19).

However, Yaakov anticipated a third question: "And whose are these [cattle, gifts, etc.] ahead of you?" — Are you ready to contribute your talents, capabilities, and material resources toward the material and cultural welfare of the general society? Are you ready to give of your oxen, goats, camels, and bulls? Are you willing to pay taxes, to develop and industrialize the country? To this we answer in the affirmative. Yes, we are determined to contribute, to participate in every civic, scientific and political enterprise. We feel obligated to enrich society with our creative talents and to be constructive and useful citizens (Bereishit 32:21).

## The Suffering Servant

In light of the above distinction, R. Fisher answers the very troubling question of Radak concerning the challenging prophecy of the suffering servant — *hinei yaskil avdi* — from Yeshayahu 52-53.<sup>4</sup> To appreciate this fundamental teaching, we need to digress to analyze this baffling chapter.

The verses describe the servant of God suffering terribly. The identity of this servant, however, is unclear. Rashi understands that it refers to the Jewish people as a whole. According to Rashi, then, these verses inform the Jewish people that they suffer in the exile because of the sins of the non-Jews,



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<sup>3</sup> *Reflections of the Rav*, Chapter 16.

<sup>4</sup> This prophecy is famous for a different reason. These 15 verses are the most widely used by Christian polemicists attempting to find references to Jesus in Tanach. We discuss their claims in *Illuminating Jewish Thought* 30.11-12.

a notion sometimes called vicarious atonement:

ד אָבן חָלִינוּ הוּא נָשָׂא וּמַכְאִיֵּנוּ סְבָלָם וְאַנְחָנוּ  
חֲשַׁבְנָהּ נִגּוּעַ מִכָּה אֱלֹקִים וּמַעֲנָה: ה וְהוּא  
מַחֲלֵל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ מִדָּכָא מַעֲוִיֵּתֵינוּ מוֹסֵר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ  
עָלָיו וּבְחֻבֵּרְתּוֹ נִרְפָּא לָנוּ:

4 Surely our diseases he did bear, and our pains he carried; whereas we considered him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.  
5 But he was wounded because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities. The chastisement of our welfare was upon him, and with his stripes we were healed.<sup>5</sup>

**Yeshayahu 52:4-5**

Rashi<sup>6</sup> explains:

(ד) אכן חלינו הוא נשא - אכן לשון אבל בכל מקום אבל עתה אנו רואים שלא מחמת שפלותו בא לו אלא מיוסר היה ביסורין להיות כל האומות מתכפרות בייסוריהן של ישראל: חלי שהיה ראוי לבא עלינו הוא נשא.

*Achen means "but" in all places. Thus, the verse means that now we see that this came to him [the servant] not because of his low state, but rather because he was chastised with pains so that all the nations be atoned for with Israel's suffering. The illness that should rightfully have come upon us — he (the servant) bore.*

ואנחנו חשבנוהו - אנו היינו סבורים שהוא

שנאוי למקום והוא לא היה כן אלא מחולל היה מפשעינו ומדוכא מעונותינו.

*We (the nations) thought that he (the servant) was hated by God, but he (the servant) was not [hated]; rather, he was pained because of our (the nations') transgressions and crushed because of our inquiries.*

(ה) מוסר שלומינו עליו - באו עליו יסורי השלום שהיה לנו שהוא היה מיוסר להיות שלום לכל העולם.

*The chastisement due to the welfare that we enjoyed came upon him, for he was chastised so that there be peace in the entire world.*

Thus, according to Rashi, the suffering servant was chastised with pains so that all the nations be atoned for with Israel's suffering.

Rashi's comments are startling, as the notion of vicarious suffering seems foreign to Jewish theology, which always stresses that the guilty party is punished. Radak, in fact, cites several verses that appear to state that one person never suffers for the sins of another.<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, Radak rejects Rashi's interpretation — it is inconceivable that one person or group of people suffers

to atone for the sins of another group of people. Radak therefore rereads the verses in an innovative manner. He understands that the non-Jews, upon seeing the inexplicable suffering of the Jewish people, eventually will conclude that the Jews must be suffering for their (i.e. the nations') sins — what else could account for such anguish? — but this is not actually the case. In reality, we alone are responsible for our fate.

אכן חלינו - הנה כתב יחזקאל הנביא בן לא ישא בעון האב ואב לא ישא בעון הבן כל שכן איש אחד באיש אחר וכל שכן אומה באומה אחרת,<sup>8</sup> אם כן מה הוא חלינו הוא נשא, מחולל מפשעינו ובחברתו נרפא לנו, ואינו דומה לזה מה שאמר ירמיהו בספר קינות אבותינו חטאו ואינם ואנחנו עונותיהם סבלנו, כי הוא על דרך פוקד עון אבות על בנים, והוא כשאוחזים הבנים מעשה אבותם בידיהם, כמו שאמר לשונאי, שזהו משפט מאת האל שנושא הבן עונו ועון האב, ומה שאמר ירמיהו אמר על לשון הנוהים כי מתוך צערם לא יהיו דבריהם במשפט ובמשקל, וזה שיאמרו האומות אכן חלינו הוא נשא והדומים לזה הוא דברי עצמם לא שישאל סבלו עון האומות אלא הם יחשבו זה בדעתם כאשר יראו בעת הישועה<sup>9</sup> כי האמונה שהחזיקו בה ישראל היא האמת והאמונה שהחזיקו הם בה היא שקר ויאמרו אך שקר נחלו אבותינו הבל ואין וגוי, יאמרו לפי סברתם אם כן מה

5 i.e., through his wound, we were cured.

6 Parts of these passages were removed from many printings of Rashi.

7 Consider the following examples:

דברים כד:טז: לא יומתו אבות על בנים ובנים לא יומתו על אבות איש בחטאו יומתו: רש"י שם: לא יומתו אבות על בנים - בעדות בנים. ואם תאמר בעון בנים, אבל מי שאינו איש מת בעון אביו, הקטנים מתים בעון אבותם בידי שמים: מלכים ב יד:ו: ואת בני המכים לא המית ככתוב בספר תורת משה אשר צוה ה' לאמר לא יומתו אבות על בנים ובנים לא יומתו על אבות כי אם איש בחטאו יומת: דברי הימים ב כה:ד: ואת בניהם לא המית כי ככתוב בתורה בספר משה אשר צוה יקוק לאמר לא ימותו אבות על בנים ובנים לא ימותו על אבות כי איש בחטאו יומתו: יחזקאל פרק יח כ: הנפש החטאת היא תמות בן לא ישא בעון האב ואב לא ישא בעון הבן צדקת הצדיק עליו תהיה ורשעת הרשע עליו תהיה:

8 First, he proves that one person or people cannot suffer for others.

9 i.e., the nations will incorrectly assume, when they see that their religion is shown to be false and Judaism correct, that the suffering experienced by the Jews was for the nations' sins. (Ironically, as Dr. David Berger pointed out, the Christians will apply their own theology to themselves.) Radak's understanding is plausible for verses 4 and 5, but he still must explain verses 11 and 12, which seem to parallel 4 and 5 except that God is the speaker, making Radak's justification of 4 and 5 impossible (in 4 and 5, the nations are speaking, so a theological error is plausible). But 11 and 12 are easier to deal with and can be interpreted as saying that He will bear the sins of the nations, i.e., although they do not deserve it, they will prosper because of us:

(יא) מעמל נפשו - מעמל נפשו שסבל בגלות יהיה לו גמול שיראה ישבע, כלומר יראה טוב שישבע בו:

היה הצער שהיו סובלים ישראל בגלות הנה לא היה בעונם כי הם היו מחזיקים אמונת ישראל ואנחנו שהיה לנו שלום ושלוה והשקט ובטח היינו מחזיקים אמונת שקר, אם כן החולי והמכאוב שהיה ראוי לבא עלינו היה בא עליהם והם היו כופר וכפרה לנו ואנחנו חשבנוהו בהיותו בגלות שהוא נגוע ומוכה אלקים ומעונה מיד האלקים בעונו והנה אנו רואים כי לא זה בעונו אלא בעונינו זה שאמר: *The prophet Yechezkeil declares, "A son shall not bear the iniquity of the father..." Surely, one person shall not bear another's sins, and certainly not one nation for another. If so, how do we reconcile this verse and the following one? Yirmiyahu's plaint in Eicha 5:6: "Our fathers sinned and they are no more, and we have borne their iniquities," is not relevant. It follows the principle, "He visits the iniquity of the fathers on the sons" (Shemot 34:7), meaning that if they continue to sin as their fathers did, they will be punished both for their own sins and their fathers'. Yirmiyahu, however, quotes the expression of the lamenters, who, because of their extreme anguish, did not word their lamentations properly, but lamented that they were suffering solely because of their parents' sin. Our verse,*

*however, is the statement of the nations, who believe that Israel suffers for their (i.e. the nations') sins; not that Israel does, in fact, suffer for them. Then they see at the time of the redemption that their faith is false, so they ask, "Why did Israel, the believers in the true faith, suffer in exile all these years? Their suffering surely was not due to their own sins, since they adhere to the true religion. Paradoxically, we, who believed in a false religion, live in peace and tranquility. Apparently, the afflictions that rightfully should have befallen us befell Israel. That was surely for our sins, not for theirs."*

**Radak, Yeshayahu 53:4**

However, Rashi appears to be the simpler reading of the verses. Moreover, Chazal seem to accept the notion of vicarious suffering, at least with respect to *tzaddikim*; and they derive this concept from these verses in Yeshayahu.<sup>10</sup>

עליו הכתוב אומר (ישעיהו נג:א) מעמל נפשו יראה ישבע וגו'. מכאן אמרו הת"ח שבדור הוא סובל עונות הדור שבתוכו בינו לבין עצמו ואין כל בריה יכולה להכיר בהן אלא הקב"ה לבדו ועליו הכתוב אומר (שם) ועונותם הוא יסבול. ...About him (the righteous person) the verse says, "Of the travail of his soul he

*shall see to the full..." (Yeshayahu 53:11). From here, we see that a Torah scholar of the generation suffers the sins of that generation by himself, and no creation is able to recognize this — only Hashem knows. About him the verse says, "and their iniquities he did bear."*

**Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabba 27:4**

What emerges from Chazal and Rashi is the notion that righteous individuals suffer for the sins of the nation, and the Jewish people, as a whole, suffer for the sins of the nations. We can easily identify with Radak's rejection of Rashi. How is it conceivable that the Jews will be punished for the sins of the nations? Where is the justice? What is the logic?

R. Fisher answers that the reason we bear the sins of the nations is because we are, to some degree, responsible for them. As a *mamlechet kohanim*, we are responsible to teach and minister to the entire world. If we are negligent in this task, we bear responsibility for their sins and suffer accordingly.<sup>11</sup> Numerous sources, such as *Ohr ha-Chaim* on Vayikra 19:17, suggest a similar approach to dealing with the

בדעתו יצדיק צדיק עבדי לרבים - עבדי הוא ישראל כמו שאמרנו בתחילת הפרשה, ופירוש בדעתו, כמו שכתוב כי מלאה הארץ דעה את ה', וכתוב כי כלם ידעו אותי, והנה עבדי ישראל שהיה צדיק ויודע את ה' יצדיק בדעתו גוים רבים, כמו שכתוב והלכו עמים רבים ואמרו לכו ונעלה אל הר ה' ואל בית אלהי יעקב ויורנו מדרכיו וגו'. ועונתם הוא יסבול - הוא בצדקתו יסבול עונות הגו' כי בצדקתו יהיה שלום וטוב בעולם אפילו לעכו"ם.

As opposed to Rashi, who explains the verse in past tense, giving the reasons for Israel's exaltation in messianic times, Radak understands this in the future tense, representing God's words.

(יב) לכן אחלק לו ברבים - רבים ועצומים הם גוג ומגוג והעמים אשר יבאו עמו אל ירושלים, כמו שאמר זכריה הנביא ואסף חיל כל הגוים סביב זהב וכסף ובגדים לרוב, וזה יהיה לו תחת אשר הערה למות נפשו גמול שמסר עצמו למיתה ביד העכו"ם בגלות יהיה לו כל הכבוד הזה ויהיה ממונם תחת ממונו שלקחו ונפשם תחת נפשו שימותו שם כל חיל גוג ומגוג כמו שכתוב.

הערה - שפך נפשו למות, וכן ותער כדה, ענין שפיכה אבל הוא בענין אחר.

ואת פשעים נמנה - כמו שפירשנו ויתן את רשעים קברו והוא חטא רבים, ויתכן לפרשו בגלות ור"ל חטא רבים שחטאו בו העכו"ם והוא נשא וסבל צערם, והוא על דרך וחטאת עמך. ולפשעים יפגיע - ואף על פי כן היה מתפלל בעבור הרשעים שהיו פושעים בו והיה מבקש מהם לברך את ארצם, כמו שאמר ודרשו את שלום העיר אשר הגלתי אתכם שם וגומר, וכמוהו מן הכבוד בלשון תחנה ובקשה הפגיעו במלך וישתומם כי אין מפגיע, גם יש לפרש בעת הגאולה ויהיה פירוש כמו שפירשנו ועונותם הוא יסבל, ורבותינו פירשוהו על משה רבינו ע"ה ואמרו תחת אשר הערה למות נפשו שמסר עצמו למיתה שנאמר ואם אין מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת, ואת רשעים נמנה שנמנה עם מתי מדבר, והוא חטא רבים נשא שכפר על מעשה העגל, ולפשעים יפגיע שבקש רחמים על פשעי ישראל, וי"ת הנה ישיכל עבדי יצלח משיחא ותרנגם כאשר שממו כמו דסברו ליה בית ישראל וגו'.

<sup>10</sup> This midrash seems to understand the suffering servant as a single righteous individual silently suffering because of the sins of his generation. Specifically, the *midrash* is explaining the following verse:

מעמל נפשו יראה ישבע בדעתו יצדיק צדיק עבדי לרבים ועונתם הוא יסבול:

**Of the travail of his soul he shall see to the full, even My servant, who by his knowledge did justify the Righteous One to the many, and their iniquities he did bear.**

<sup>11</sup> See R. Hirsch's comments to Devarim 32:43 on the phrase *ve-chiper admato amo*, "and His people are to bring atonement to His whole world of men."



righteous suffering for the sins of their generation.<sup>12</sup> In Volume 3 of *Illuminating Jewish Thought* (section 30.12) we attempt to elucidate this baffling phenomenon.

Perhaps R. Fisher's understanding of vicarious atonement is already alluded to in *Kuzari*. *Kuzari* (2:34) compares the Jewish people in exile to the dry bones depicted by Yechezkeil. No longer are we glorious and splendid; instead, we are like a body without a head and without a heart. Thus, Yeshaya describes the Jewish people as a grotesque suffering servant who "has neither form nor comeliness," someone "from whom men hid their faces." In other words, *Kuzari* understands that the suffering servant is the Jewish people in exile and that the servant's gruesome appearance reflects our lowly spiritual state. *Kuzari* then turns to the riddle of why this servant should suffer for the sins of the world:

אמר הכוזרי: ואיך יהיה זה משל לישראל,  
והוא אמר: "חולינו הוא נשא", וישראל לא  
מצא אותם מה שמצאם כי אם בעוונם?  
ספר הכוזרי מאמר ב

*The Khazar king: How can the suffering servant serve as a comparison for Israel, as it is said: "Surely our diseases he did bear?" That which has befallen Israel has come to pass on account of its own sins; Israel does not suffer for the sins of others.*

אמר החבר: ישראל באומות כלב באברים,  
הוא רב חוליים מכולם, ורב בריאות מכולם....  
*The Chaveir: Israel amidst the nations is like the heart amidst the organs of the body; it is at one and the same time the*

*most sick and the healthiest of them ...*  
**Kuzari, Ma'amar 2**

How does the analogy to the heart resolve the question of how the Jews can suffer for the sins of the rest of the world? The simple understanding may be that by being attached to the rest of the world, we are naturally affected. But perhaps *Kuzari* is alluding to the theory articulated by R. Fisher. The heart bears the responsibility of nourishing the rest of the body. If it fails to fulfill this mission, the maladies that injure the rest of the body will devastate the heart.<sup>13</sup>

## Material Responsibilities

Thus far we have considered a Jew's spiritual responsibility towards humanity. However, numerous sources also point to his material responsibility. Yirmiyahu instructed the Jewish inhabitants of Bavel to "seek the welfare of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in its prosperity you shall prosper" (29:7). *Bereishit Rabbah* 79:6 states:

ויהן את פני העיר התחיל מעמיד הטליסין  
ומוכר בזול הדא אמרת שאדם צריך להחזיק  
טובה למקום שיש לו הנאה ממנו.  
*He (Yaakov Avinu) began to set up carts and sell merchandise inexpensively. This teaches that a person must feel and express gratitude [in a tangible way] to a place (of residence) from which he benefits.*

Another source that emphasizes our concern for broader society is *Avoda Zara* 25a, which notes that Scripture refers to the forefathers as *yesharim* or

straight. Netziv, in his introduction to *Bereishit*, explains that this is due to their concern for the betterment of the world. For example, Avraham prayed for the savior of Sedom even though its inhabitants were wicked:

זה היה שבח האבות שמלבד שהיו צדיקים  
וחסידים ואוהבי ה' באופן היותר אפשר עוד  
היו ישרים. היינו שהתנהגו עם אוה"ע אפי'  
עובדי אלילים מכוערים. מ"מ היו עמם באהבה  
וחשו לטובתם באשר היא קיום הבריאה. כמו  
שאנו רואים כמה השתטח א"א להתפלל על  
סדום.

*This was the greatness of our Forefathers. In addition to being righteous, pious and lovers of God to the utmost degree, they were also yesharim. That means they acted towards the nations of the world, despite their being detestable idol worshipers, with love and concern for their welfare, as this allows for the continuity of the creation. For example, we see how our forefather Avraham exerted himself greatly in prayer for the welfare of Sedom.*

## In the Messianic Era

While our responsibility to support and inspire humanity is particularly important during the exile, when we are ensconced among the nations, it will continue even after redemption. Indeed, Scripture emphasizes that our partnership with the entire world along with our unique role will be fully realized in the Messianic Era.

והביאותים אל הר קדשי ושפחתים בבית  
תפלת עולתיהם וזבחייהם לרצון על מזבחי כי  
ביתי בית תפלה יקרא לכל העמים.  
*I will bring them to My sacred mount,*

12 Commenting on the mitzva of chastisement (הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך ולא תשא עליו חטא) he writes the reason why the righteous are punished (lit. seized) because of the transgression of the generation (בעוון הדור נתפסים גדולי עולם) is because they could have done more to improve the Jewish people and prevent them from sinning in the first place.

טעם תפיסת הצדיק, הוא בשביל עוון הדור, אם יוכיחנו הרי הוא ניצול ממה נפשך, אם חזרו בתשובה הרי אין כאן עוונות שיתפס עליהם, ואם לא חזרו הרי נפטרת מתפיסה. כמו שגילה סודו ביד עבדיו הנביאים, דכתיב (יחזקאל לג, ט) ואתה כי הזהרת רשע מדרכו לשוב ממנה ולא שב מדרכו, הוא בעונו ימות ואתה נפשך הצלת.

13 *Kuzari* adds another dimension to the analogy. The sensitivity of the heart causes the effects of sins to be more pronounced.

And let them rejoice in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices Shall be welcome on My altar; For My House shall be called A house of prayer **for all peoples.**"

**Yeshayahu 56:7**

וְהֵבִיאוּ אֶת כָּל אֲחֵיכֶם מִכָּל הַגּוֹיִם מִנְחָה לָּהּ  
בְּסוּסִים וּבְרֶכֶב וּבַצִּבִּיּוֹת וּבַפָּרָדִים וּבַכְרָרוֹת  
עַל הָר קֹדֶשׁ יְרוּשָׁלַם אָמַר ה' כֹּאֲשֶׁר יָבִיאוּ בְנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַמִּנְחָה בְּכָלִי טְהוֹר בֵּית ה':

"And they shall bring all your brethren **from all the nations** as a tribute to Hashem, with horses and with chariots, and with covered wagons and with mules and with joyous songs upon My holy mount, Jerusalem," says Hashem, "as the children of Israel bring the offering in a pure vessel to the house of Hashem."

**Yeshayahu 66:20**

כִּי הִנֵּה הַחֹשֶׁךְ יִכְסֶה אֶרֶץ וְעֶרְפֹּל לְאֻמִּים וְעֲלִיף  
זֶרַח ה' וּכְבוֹדוֹ עֲלֵיךְ יֵרָאֶה: וְהָלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאוֹרְךָ  
וּמַלְכִים לְנֹגַהּ זֶרְחֶךָ:

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but upon you, Hashem will arise, and His glory shall be seen upon you. And nations shall walk by your light, and kings at the brightness of your rising.

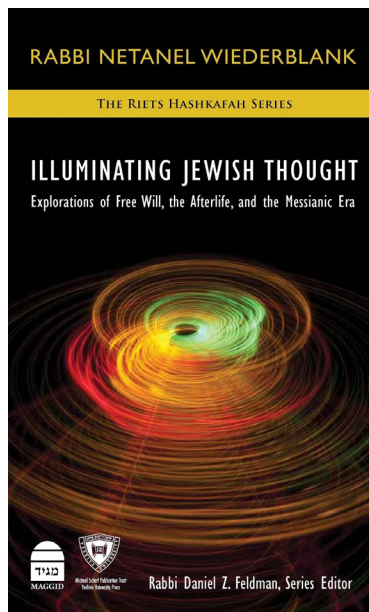
**Yeshayahu 60:2–3**

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת בִּימֵי הַהֵמָּה אֲשֶׁר יִחְזִיקוּ  
עֲשָׂרָה אֲנָשִׁים מִכָּל לְשׁוֹנוֹת הַגּוֹיִם וְהִחְזִיקוּ  
בְּכַנְף אִישׁ יְהוּדִי לֵאמֹר נִלְכָּה עִמָּכֶם כִּי שָׁמַעְנוּ  
אֱלֹקִים עִמָּכֶם:

Thus says Hashem, Master of hosts: "In those days, it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, shall even take hold of the skirt of a Jew, saying: 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

**Zechariah 8:23**

Significantly, each of the above verses emphasizes the special relationship we have with God along with God's concern and our responsibility for all of humanity. This dual focus, on the universal and the particular, shines in the prayer of *Aleinu*, which originates in the Rosh ha-Shana liturgy and now is recited thrice daily. The first stanza highlights Israel's preeminence: "It is our duty to praise the Master of all, to ascribe greatness to the Molder of primeval creation, for He has not made



Excerpted from *Illuminating Jewish Thought* (RIETS Press/Maggid)

us like the nations of the lands and has not emplaced us like the families of the earth; for He has not assigned our portion like theirs nor our lot like all their multitudes."<sup>14</sup> The second stanza, though, longs for a day "when all of mankind will call upon Your name;" the ideal world is not one when we alone acknowledge God's sovereignty — it is one of universal recognition of God.

## Conclusion

Certain segments of Jews sadly build a whole religion out of *tikkun olam*.<sup>15</sup> Having fully embraced western egalitarianism they reject the notion of *bechirat Yisrael*, the idea that God chose the Jewish people as a special nation with a special purpose. The notion of *kedushat Yisrael*, a distinct sanctity granted to the Jewish people, is incorrectly seen as racist. Thus, the only manifestation of our singularity is the idea of responsibility towards others, *tikkun olam*. Accordingly, it becomes the centerpiece of their religion.

Sometimes, as a reaction, those who embrace Torah and *bechirat Yisrael* go to the other extreme. They associate the idea of *tikkun olam* with non-Orthodox Judaism and dismiss the concept that because of our chosenness we bear responsibility towards humanity. However, as we have seen, this too is false.

In dark times such as those we face now it is easy to forget this responsibility. Survival mode tends to kick in as we realize that we are a sheep surrounded by seventy wolves. At times like this we must focus on survival. However, even as we struggle to survive, we must not forget our broader mission. We must do our part to bring redemption, not just to ourselves, but to the entire world.

<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the uncensored version, which includes the line "For they worship vanity and emptiness and pray to a god who cannot save," seems to allude to an essential difference between Jew and non-Jew insofar as we thank God for "not making us like the nations of the land ... who worship vanity and emptiness." This inference, of course, must be squared with the Torah's presumption that all humans have free will and no one is forced to serve other gods, a topic discussed Unit 5 of *Illuminating Jewish Thought*.

<sup>15</sup> Whether this is the correct usage of the term or not is irrelevant for our discussion.