
7 *I will take you to Myself as a people* וּלְקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהָיִיתִי
and I will be a God to you; you will לָכֵן לֵאלֹהִים וַיִּדְעֻתֶם כִּי אֲנִי
come to know that I am 'ה', your

7 **ולקחתי**. Once you are standing tall, when you will be free and aware of your human rights, I will take you to be My people. As soon as you

God, Who brings you out from un- יהוה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם
 der the burdens of Egypt. מִתַּחַת סְבִלּוֹת מִצְרַיִם:

are free, you will become My people! You will become My people, without a land, without territory of your own, solely through Me!

לי לעם. These two short words are the first statement of Israel's destiny. They express the quality that makes Judaism so unique. It is entirely inappropriate to refer to Judaism as "the Jewish religion"; it is thoughtless to define Judaism as a religion, to classify it with the other religions, and then to be amazed that this "religion" includes so many elements that transcend the conventional bounds of "religion." **לי לעם:** Israel is to be a people unto God.

This statement alone already makes it clear that Judaism, as established by God, is not a religion at all. True, Judaism also embraces elements generally characterized as "religion," but the term "Judaism" is completely different and infinitely broader. In "religion," God has only temples, churches, priestly orders, congregations, etc. Nations, peoples, are subject only to kings and governments; they are founded on the concept of statehood, not on religion and God. In Judaism, however, God founded not a church, but a nation; a whole national life is to be fashioned by Him. Israel will be His people, not just a congregation of believers.

How different are the ways of the "holy tongue" in its choice of fitting expressions for the concepts "people" and its correlate, "king"!

In German, the king (*König*) is the one who has the capability and the power (*der Könnende*); and the people (*Volk*), who follow him, are those who are obligated to obey him (*das Folgende*). (In the Romance languages the term for a people has an even stronger connotation of disparagement and degradation; see our Commentary, *Bereshis* 11:7.) Thus, the people exists only for the sake of the king; without a king, there is no people.

Not so in our "holy tongue." The concept "עם" is not dependent on any kind of relationship to a higher authority over or external to the עם. Rather, עם is a self-contained concept that focuses solely on the *interrelation* of large numbers of people (עם is related to עם from the

root (עמם). The basic meaning of מלך is: one who serves as the head of others, one who benefits the nation through his intelligence, one who thinks for others. (Cf. the Rabbinic term נמלך, “to consult with someone.” Related to מלך on the concrete level is מלק. See Commentary, *Bereshis* 10:10.) Thus, the king exists for the sake of the people’s society, so that its members should attain, through one another and with one another, their ultimate purpose; but the people’s society does not exist for the sake of the king.

When God says ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם, it means: Your *social* lives are to be guided by My wisdom; your *social* lives should be a revelation of My spirit.

A later generation sought to reduce the whole substance of their relationship to God to the life of the Sanctuary and its offerings. Even when they were rebuked for their social degeneration, they took cover behind the cry: הִיבֵל ה'! הִיבֵל ה'! (Yirmeyahu 7:4). The Prophet then thundered against them: הִיבֵל ה' הִמָּה! (ibid.) — they themselves should be the temple of God. As the Prophet explained:

For on the day that I brought your fathers out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them of עוֹלָה וזֶבַח; not for that did I take them into service. Rather, I took them into service for this: Obey My voice; then I will be your God, ואתם תהיו לי לעם וגו' (ibid. 7:22–23).

It is true that God did also speak to us *about* offerings. What is more, on the day of our deliverance from Egypt, it was precisely by an offering and only by an offering that He constituted us into a people. But He did not constitute us into a “Temple congregation” so that we should bring offerings. Rather, *by means of* the offering, He wished to constitute us into a people, an עם.

It was precisely this institution — the offering — that first founded the state on its fundamental guiding principles, as we will later show (see Commentary below, 12:3–6). Whereas other peoples are united by their common share in their homeland, the Jewish people are united by their common share in the God of Israel.

והייתי לכם לאלקים; יציאת מצרים — ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם — מתן תורה; וידעתם כי אני ה' אלקיכם המוציא וגו' — through the wandering in the wilderness.

Only through their experience in the wilderness will they come to realize that ה' did not just redeem them once from Egypt, but, rather, would always be their God; at present and at all times in the future He

8 *And then I will bring you into the land concerning which I raised My hand, to give it to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, and I will give it to you as a heritage, I, ה'!*

ח וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
נְשָׂאתִי אֶת-יָדִי לָתֵת אֹתָהּ
לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלַיַּעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי
אֹתָהּ לְכֶם מְוֹרֶשֶׁת אֲנִי יְהוָה:

9 *Moshe spoke thus to the Children of Israel, but they did not hearken to Moshe because of impatience and because of harsh bondage.*

ט וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בֵּן אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מִקְצָר רוּחַ
וּמִעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה: פ

would protect them, so that they not succumb under the “burdens of Egypt,” and would lead them out from under such burdens.

עבדים we have never again become; גרים we should never again become; but סבלוּח we shall have to bear, as long as we are human. As long as we remain faithful to God, we can be certain of God’s unwavering and even miraculous support. That is what is to be made clear to us, for all time to come, from our wandering in the wilderness; and only then —

8 *והבאתי אתכם וגו'.* Thus, Israel is to be fully constituted as a nation even *before* it receives a land of its own. Hence, its existence as a nation is not contingent upon possession of a land; rather, its possession of a land is contingent upon the faithful fulfillment of its task as a nation.

מורשה. It was already given to your forefathers in spirit, and you will receive it only as their heirs.

9 *קוצר רוח* — synonymous with קצר אפים and the opposite of ארך אפים — means “impatience.” The inhumanity of the present weighed heavily upon them, and the need to meet its demands and to find for themselves even a momentary respite sapped all their strength. They were drained of all spirit and did not have the energy to turn their thoughts to the future, of which Moshe wished to speak to them. They were so pressed by the demands of the present and so burdened by their work that they did not even have the patience to listen to him quietly.