

**JCI CURRICULUM: UNIT 1: CHAPTER 7 – UNIVERSALISM &
PARTICULARISM
LESSON 2: CHOSENNESS**

LESSON 2: CHOSENNESS (45 mins – 1 hour)

Goals

For students to:

- Analyze the concept of chosenness in Jewish tradition.
- Evaluate the views expressed in contemporary and ancient Jewish texts
- Apply Jewish texts about particularism and universalism to a relevant contemporary dilemma.
- Attempt to reach a synthesis between the values of particularism and universalism in their personal Jewish worldviews.

Materials:

- Markers
- Pens
- Blank pieces of paper and colored pens/ crayons/ pencils
- Poster board
- Paper / journals
- Text handouts and questions:
 - Text #1: Exodus 19:4-6;
 - Text #2: Isaiah 42: 6-7;
 - Yeshayahu Leibowitz, spring 1981, *Jewish Quarterly Review*. No. 19. p. 53
(optional)

Procedure

1) Framing exercise #1 (10 mins)

- a) Write “The Chosen People” (עם סגולה - *am segulah*) on the board.
- b) Ask the class if they have heard of the idea of “the chosen people”.
- c) Ask class to brainstorm their associations connected to the idea of “the chosen people” and write them on the board. (You could have students come up and write their own ideas to vary the teaching mode).
- d) Read over the associations with the class. Ask: Is it a good thing to be a chosen people? Discuss briefly.

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2) Main Activity (20 - 30 mins)

- Divide the class into *chavruta* pairs.
- Hand out the following texts and questions.
- Allocate 5 -10 minutes for reading and discussing the texts and questions.

Text #1: Exodus 19:4-6

שמות פרק יט

(ד) אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואבא אתכם אלי:
(ה) ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקלי ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים כי לי כל הארץ:
(ו) ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש אלה הדברים אשר תדבר אל בני ישראל:

Exodus 19:4-6

4. You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself.
5. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own treasure among all peoples; for all the earth is mine;
6. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the people of Israel.

- What does it mean to be a “treasure among all peoples” (*segulah mi'kol ha'amim*) according to this text?
- What is the condition set up in verse 5?

Text #2: Isaiah 42: 6-7

ישעיה מב: ו-ז

אֲנִי הַ קְרֵאתִיךָ בְּצִדְקָה, וְאַחֲזֶק בְּיָדְךָ; וְאַצְרֶךָ, וְאַתְּנֶנְךָ לְבְרִית עֵם--לְאֹר גּוֹיִם. לְפָקֹחַ עֵינַיִם עִוְרוֹת; לְהוֹצִיא מִמִּסְגַּר אֲסִיר, מִבַּיִת כְּלֵא יֹשְׁבֵי חֹשֶׁךְ.

Isaiah 42: 6-7

6. I the Lord have called to you *b'tzedek*. I have taken you by the hand, created you, and appointed you a covenant people, a light of the nations.
7. Opening eyes deprived of light, rescuing prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

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➤ What does it mean to be a “light of the nations” (אור גוים – *or goyim*) in this text?

- d) Regroup and discuss. Ask students:
- What are the responsibilities of being a “treasure among all peoples”? – Elicit definitions of “a kingdom of priests” (ממלכת כהנים) and “a holy nation” (גוי קדוש).
 - What are the responsibilities of being a “light of the nations” (“*or goyim*”)? – Elicit definitions of “a covenant people” (בְּרִית עַם)
 - Why do you think it says in Isaiah “I the Lord have called to you *b’tzedek*”? How would you translate *tzedek* here? What are Jews called upon to do here?
 - Discuss the conditions of being a chosen people set up in these texts. Explain that “סגולה” (“*segula*”) translated here as “treasure” is often translated as chosen. Refer to the condition in Exodus 19:5: “*If* you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, *then* you shall be my own treasure among all peoples”. Elicit/ Explain that chosenness appears to be set up as a condition of fulfilling God’s commandments, which is fleshed out further in Isaiah to explicitly include ethical commandments.

*** If you have extra time and it is appropriate for your group:**

- e) Introduce the following contemporary text. Hand out and ask a student to read aloud:

“*Yibud* (the “chosenness” or unique element of the Jewish people) is not a gift granted to the people as their everlasting property, but is instead a demand, a mission and a task imposed on the people, a goal towards which they must aspire eternally, with no guarantee that they will ever attain it. The problem of the *yibud* of the Jewish people does not find expression in the question: ‘Did God endow the people of Israel with sanctity?’ but in the query, ‘Is the people of Israel striving to achieve sanctity by accepting the yoke of Torah and mitzvot?’ (Yeshayahu Leibowitz, spring 1981, *Jewish Quarterly Review*. No. 19. p. 53)

- d) Discuss how this text connects to the elements that arose in the earlier discussion. Do Leibowitz’s claims agree with the concept of “*segula*” and “*or goim*” in the biblical texts? *

Concluding Activity (15 -20 mins)

- a) Ask students in groups of 3-4 to agree upon the way they think that Jews can best be an “*am segula*”- a chosen people, a treasure among the nations and light to the nations – in today’s world. Their ideas should fit into the ideas of “*segula*” in the texts already studied, for example include the ideas of being a “kingdom of priests”, a “holy nation”, keeping God’s covenant, and acting “*b’tzedek*”.

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- b) Tell students to design a new Jewish organization that fulfills this particular role of being an “*am segula*”. This can be based on an existing Jewish or non-Jewish organization or be a totally new invention. An example could be a Jewish version of savedarfur.org, or a Jewish “Doctors without Borders”
- c) Students must create a one page poster for their organization, with a name, subtitle and logo that represent their organization’s work and explain how it fulfills the mission of being “*am segula*”. Give students 5-10 minutes to work on this.
- d) Ask students to briefly present their organizations and posters, explaining how their organization best fulfills the mission of being an “*am segula*”.

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Appendix:

Text #1: Exodus 19:4-6

שמות פרק יט

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6. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the people of Israel.

- What does it mean to be a “treasure among all peoples” (סגולה מכל העמים) according to this text?
- What is the condition set up in verse 5?

Text #2: Isaiah 42: 6-7

ישעיה מב : ו-ז

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7. Opening eyes deprived of light, rescuing prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

- What does it mean to be a “light of the nations” (אור גוים) in this text?

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Text #3:

"*Yihud* (the "chosenness" or unique element of the Jewish people) is not a gift granted to the people as their everlasting property, but is instead a demand, a mission and a task imposed on the people, a goal towards which they must aspire eternally, with no guarantee that they will ever attain in.. The problem of the *yihud* of the Jewish people does not find expression in the question: 'Did God endow the people of Israel with sanctity?' but in the query, 'Is the people of Israel striving to achieve sanctity by accepting the yoke of Torah and mitzvot?'
--Yeshayahu Leibowitz, spring 1981, *Jewish Quarterly Review*. No. 19, p. 53