

## INTRODUCTION

This volume of essays twins philosophical speculation on chosenness and ritual in Judaism. The justification for such twinning is historical, for historically Jews have set themselves apart, or have been set apart, on account of their particular rituals. Indeed, the very *idea* of 'chosenness' or 'election' entails some material content for its realization—and historically such content is in large measure ritual, the ritual law.

The Jews are "a people apart," chosen (choosing) to obey a divine law in its entirety, including a belief in their own chosenness. It is unarguable that the doctrine of chosenness (or election) is the most difficult for modern Jews to accept. It smacks of elitism or, at least, an antiassimilationist ideology. But for the last two hundred years our political life in the West has been driven by an antielitist, egalitarian, and assimilationist sensibility on both the individual and the cultural level. "Chosenness," "apartness," seems to resist the modern age. But perhaps not. Perhaps assimilation is compatible with ethnic diversity, if one demarcates assimilation at the political level as a corporate pro-attitude towards *supratribal* ideals of justice and peace. Diverse cultural units, then, will naturally find their own way to the *common* goal. But such a construal, pleasing (American?) as it may be, will not exhaust the Jewish doctrine of election. Jews are not merely one people among others; they are traditionally taken to be (and take themselves to be) *first* among equals, God's chosen people. It is then the egalitarian side of the modern political sensibility that most fights against chosenness. The question then is: Is it possible for the modern Jew, *ex hypothesi* dwelling in a democratic society, a society that accords equal legal and political rights to all of its members on the basis of a natural equality, to defend the traditional Jewish doctrine of chosenness? Again, how can chosenness be rendered meaningful and viable for the modern Jew, all of whose social and political affiliations are permeated by an egalitarian outlook? To this it should immediately be added that by "modern" Jew I do not mean simply nontraditional, nonobservant Jews.

Traditional Jews as well must face the same problem. In fact, perhaps it is they who face it most directly, inasmuch as nontraditional Jews have tended to dismiss chosenness as historically irrelevant. For traditional Jews, chosenness is a real problem, for only they live in two worlds.

With such issues before us, we may turn to the first group of essays. The first three chapters address themselves, historically and systematically, to the problematics of election in Judaism. David Novak, in "The Election of Israel: Outline of a Philosophical Analysis," argues against both detractors and some notable defenders of chosenness. He argues against Spinoza and the kabbalists, on the one hand, and against Michael Wyschogrod and Hermann Cohen, on the other, in presenting his own defense of chosenness. Whereas the former make the election of Israel philosophically indefensible, the latter two, in defending the election of Israel, make it a doctrine abetting either a form of chauvinism (Wyschogrod), or, alternatively, a rather benign form of (nonchauvinistic) nationalism, one that entails the (merely) temporary, albeit necessary, separation of Israel (Jews) from the nations of the world (Cohen). Novak finds both of these latter two views unsatisfactory and, for his part, understands the election of Israel as not necessarily temporary (contra Cohen) but not thereby entailing some form of chauvinism (contra Wyschogrod). For Novak, the Torah, in its entirety, is given to Israel alone, but such an election does not negate the fact that *all* the nations are to live according to the Noahide laws and, as a result, have a share in the messianic era. Jews and non-Jews alike *share* common moral ground, and such obligations as Jews have by virtue of their election at Sinai carry no weight about the eventual reward for all moral agents.

Paralleling Novak's essay, Menachem Kellner, in "Chosenness, Not Chauvinism: Maimonides on the Chosen People," considers the possibility of articulating a Jewishly legitimate version of the doctrine of chosenness that does not entail chauvinism. His inquiry leads him to an examination of Maimonides' writings on the nature of Jews in general and on the notion of chosenness in particular. Kellner finds that Maimonides presents a genuinely Jewish way of affirming chosenness without thereby affirming ethnic superiority. In distinguishing between Jews and Israel, between the ethnic group (the children of Abraham) *and* the faith community, and understanding the latter as an *elective*, Maimonides, according to Kellner,

is able to offer a version of election that is at root open ended (nonchauvinistic) and available to *all* who would follow Torah.

In his critique of Kellner's essay, Norbert Samuelson expresses his agreement with the basic thrust of Kellner's project, namely, the desire to develop a nonchauvinistic interpretation of chosenness. But Samuelson believes that Kellner has not succeeded, and cannot succeed, on the basis of Maimonidean materials; Maimonides cannot be rehabilitated to be used for the purposes Kellner wishes. For Samuelson, Kellner's radical distinction on behalf of Maimonides between Jews and Israel, between ethnic group and faith community, is too strong, abets the very position against which he (Kellner) argues, and, finally, is best eliminated to allow for the messianic, futuristic notion of chosenness offered by Hermann Cohen and the late Steven Schwarzschild. For his part, Kellner replies to Samuelson's critique, and all readers will want to follow the twists and turns of the debate closely, determining whether, historically, Maimonides did indeed distinguish between ethnic group and faith community and, if he did, whether such a distinction entails a non-chauvinistic view of chosenness.

The final chapter in this section, Ze'ev Levy's "Judaism and Chosenness: On Some Controversial Aspects from Spinoza to Contemporary Jewish Thought," lays out the role that the doctrine of chosenness has fulfilled in Jewish history, noting that the idea became more pronounced in proportion to oppression, as it furnished a certain ideological self-compensation for the suffering in the diaspora. For Levy, the bubble of such ideological self-compensation, a species of wish fulfillment, was burst by Spinoza, the first Jewish philosopher to come to grips with the doctrine of chosenness and to call it into question. Levy's historical overview next presents a number of post-Spinozistic approaches to chosenness, noting that since the nineteenth century there has been a growing tendency to replace the concept of chosenness by that of 'mission' or 'vocation.' But for Levy, a secular Zionist, such substitutions do not adequately answer the modern critique of the doctrine as historically irrelevant and philosophically illegitimate, inasmuch as it presupposes an indefensible ethnocentrism and is at odds with the Enlightenment ideal of the universal equality of all human beings and the essential equivalence of all human cultures. Levy's essay will force believers in the doctrine of Jewish election on the defensive. Perhaps they will want to enlist Novak and Kellner on their side.

As noted at the outset, the ritual law is paradigmatically expressive of Jewish chosenness. It is through ritual, not dogma, that Judaism has tended to define itself through the ages. But what exactly is the nature of the ritual law? Traditionally a distinction has been made between the *mishpatim* and the *chuqqim*, between the so-called rational laws and ritual laws. This distinction is taken as unproblematic, inasmuch as there seems to be a clear difference between the utility (and rationality) of laws against murder and theft and the apparent lack of utility (and rationality) of laws such as eating meat with milk and wearing cloth of mixed fabric. The latter are the *chuqqim*, the ritual laws, and it is these that are taken to be particularly expressive, even definatory, of Judaism. But as Lenn Goodman, in "Rational Law/Ritual Law," demonstrates, *all* laws have a ritual aspect. Goodman is not out to deny the traditional distinction between the *mishpatim* and the *chuqqim*, any more than was Maimonides in his magnificent discussion of *ta'amei ha-mitzvot* in the third part of the *Guide*. In a sense, Goodman completes Maimonides' project of explicating the law's rationality; where Maimonides is at pains to point out the reason(s) for *all* the laws, even the "ritual" laws, Goodman makes clear that *all* the laws, even the "rational" laws, have a ritual aspect, an aspect that completes their (rational) purpose by symbolically signifying and prescribing the *values* for which they stand. *All* the laws have, and must have, a ritual aspect, for, as Goodman puts it, "the broad moral purposes of law as law underdetermine the precise behavioral prescriptions needed if law is ever to prescribe or proscribe concrete particular actions." Trials and modes of punishment are (clothed in) rituals, and only because they are do the laws that they define have the force they do.

Goodman's essay, presented here in barest outline, repays close study, for if he is right to point to the interconnectedness of reason and ritual, if ritual is not *ipso facto* irrational, then the "idiosyncrasy" of the doctrine of election is diminished. Jews are now to be seen, not as engaged in "strange" rituals, divorced from universal moral values, but rather as involved in presenting, in their own way, those very values. Rituals are now to be understood as means to moral ends, not as (amoral) ends in themselves. I might just add that in following the conceptual thread of his argument, the reader will want to attend to the way in which Goodman develops his own position from historical sources, namely, Saadiah and Maimonides,

and engages them in a way that is both historically sensitive and conceptually fruitful.

From law as ritual symbol to law as metaphor, Moshe Sokol, in "Mitzvah as Metaphor," develops a theory of ritual *mitzvot* which is grounded in the phenomenon of metaphor. Sokol suggests that the metaphorical function, namely, the restructuring of the reader's or listener's experience of the subject of the metaphor, and the interactive mechanism whereby the metaphor achieves its goal, by causing the reader to experience common features of the metaphor's subjects, may usefully be applied to an understanding of ritual *mitzvot*. Illustrating his thesis by reference to *teki'at shofar* (the blowing of the shofar), Sokol argues that one may best understand the nature of ritual *mitzvot* as aiming at a restructuring of the ritualist's experience of God, the Jewish people, or humanity, and doing so by means of an interaction of the ritualist's experience of the ritual with any or all of these subjects.

Sokol, in offering his metaphorical theory of ritual *mitzvot*, is taking part in the traditional discussion of *ta'amei ha-mitzvot*, the reason(s) or explanation(s) for the *mitzvot*. This project he shares with Goodman, and though the reader will note that Goodman and Sokol disagree about the nature of ritual, the former interpreting it as symbolic, the latter as metaphorical, they both agree that ritual has explanatory power and must be understood teleologically. And for the same reasons as Goodman's essay, Sokol's too seems to carry with it an implicit argument that goes some way toward demystifying the doctrine of divine election in Judaism. If Jewish ritual acts as a metaphor for restructuring the ritualist's experience of God and world, then those very rituals that are definatory of Jewish chosenness must be seen as no different *in kind* from those of other peoples. Given the *general* need of mankind to restructure reality so as to make it more explicable, Jews are now to be seen as differing from other peoples neither in the goals they strive to achieve nor in the use of ritual *per se* but, rather, in the *particular* rituals they have adopted.

Jewish particularism, the connecting thread between chosenness and ritual, is fully apparent in Joshua Golding's "Jewish Ritual and the Experience of 'Rootedness.'" In his essay, he focuses upon a universal experience, the sense of belonging or 'rootedness,' and discusses this phenomenon with specific reference to traditional participants in Jewish rituals. Such an experience of rootedness in

the ritual, of finding one's place in and by means of the ritual, is to be accounted for in terms of what Golding calls "the doctrine of Jewish teleology." This doctrine suggests that the rituals and the commandments of the Torah befit the Jew's nature and that the phenomenon of rootedness, of 'fittingness,' is a sign of this. Nontraditional Jews, Jews who either participate in the rituals non-halakhically or do not participate in them at all, will I think find the essay exclusionary. But at the same time such readers, like those detractors of the doctrine of divine election, will be forced to ask where *they* belong and are rooted.

Norbert Samuelson, in "The Concept of Worship in Judaism" provides a structural overview of the history of different conceptions of worship in Judaism. At least three different notions of worship, that is, interpretations of love of God, emerge in different periods in Jewish intellectual history. For the Judaism of the Hebrew Bible, obedience to communal/ritual law is the highest form of worship. For medieval Jewish philosophy, it is the pursuit of scientific/philosophical truth. Finally, for modern Jewish philosophy, it is the struggle for the social/political good that is the highest form of worship. Although Judaism generally recognizes all three as proper modes of Jewish activity, Samuelson resists the temptation to view them as compatible with each other. The conditions of human finitude, the shortness of human life, require that we prioritize these activities, and here there is no agreement. For Samuelson, the source of the incompatibility of Judaism's multiple views of worship is the incoherence of its different (and incompatible) theologies.

But in a sense the source of such incompatibility is not intrinsic to Judaism itself as much as it is to the indiscriminate borrowing by Jews of (incompatible) *non*-Jewish models of the human good. What, after all, is the source of Judaism's different theologies, theologies that entail, say, philosophy or politics as the *summum bonum*? Again, what is the source of the medieval view that the highest form of worship is the pursuit of philosophical truth? And what is the source of the modern (Cohenian) view that the highest form of worship is the struggle for political and social justice? At first glance, the source would seem to be *extraneous* to Judaism itself; indeed, Aristotle and Kant (or maybe Marx) would seem to be the sources for, respectively, the medieval and the modern positions. Given this, the reader will want to puzzle out the apparent need of Jews to look elsewhere for their own (ultimately incompatible)

models of worship and of the human good. Correlatively, one will ask afresh about the essence of Judaism (itself an un-Jewish query?), an essence that seems at first glance derived, parasitic upon other cultures for its being.

In asking about the essence or nature of Judaism, we have come full circle. We began with the doctrine of divine election in Judaism, a doctrine that has stamped Judaism as the most idiosyncratic of religions and Jews as the most parochial of peoples. And now at the end we are seemingly more distant than ever from having any clear idea, assuming there is one, of the essence of Judaism, what makes Judaism what it is. Jews are at once unique and protean, never changing and yet always changing. Perhaps, at least, this much is clear: the Jews are a people apart, a single people destined to find and make explicit ever new ways to express mankind's eternal struggle to worship its creator.

The eleventh and the twelfth annual conferences of the Academy for Jewish Philosophy provided the occasions for the initial presentation of the essays in this volume. The eleventh conference of the Academy, held June 3–4, 1990, in Philadelphia at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and at Temple University, focused on chosenness in Judaism. The twelfth conference, held June 9–10, 1991, in Cincinnati at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, was given over to aspects of ritual in Jewish philosophical thought. In light of the discussions at the meetings, all the essays included herein have been revised. None has been published previously.

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