



A lesson from  
**Aleph Learning Institute**

## The Underpinnings of a Nation

## Lesson 3//Series 4

Historically, our forefather Jacob, taught all his sons to keep the commandments of Abraham, and align with Levi who remained in the house of study. After the passing of Jacob, his children and others united in a common belief. In this regard they were considered one nation. However, eventually they lost that status due to an erosion of our ancestor's monotheistic beliefs. **Maimonides says:** When the Jews extended their stay in Egypt, they relapsed and learned from the Egyptians to worship the stars, with the exception of the tribe of Levi. During the plagues in Egypt, the Jewish people again became believers, seeing G-d's wonders, and turning away from idolatry to believe in the one true G-d. Because of G-d's love for us, to uphold the oath He made with Abraham (The Treaty of the Parts). He therefore, brought forth our teacher, Moses, master of all prophets, and sent him to redeem the Jewish people.

They did not achieve nationhood simply by virtue of their newfound belief. What renders us G-d's chosen nation was not contingent on our beliefs; rather it was a result of G-d deciding that we are His nation. This choice went into effect at the moment of leaving Egypt, when G-d alone redeemed us.

**Upon leaving Egypt we transformed from a nation that believes in G-d to 'The nation of G-d'.** Psalms 33:12 : Happy is the nation for whom Hashem is their G-d, the nation that **He chose** as an inheritance to Him.

Ordinarily, when a person chooses anything; consumer products, a job, a university, they weigh the options. We weigh our options regarding what will give us the most satisfaction, and then make an educated choice. Chassidic philosophy says that in these cases, we are not really the ultimate arbiter. Rather than us choosing the matter, in a sense, the university or job offer, chooses us. We are merely crunching the numbers and choosing based on what will be most beneficial to us.

True "free choice" occurs when I am the ultimate decision maker, uninfluenced by any outside matter, other than my own discretion. Only when there is nothing swaying me one way or another am I free to choose based on my independent choice. True "free choice" cannot be logical, from our rational mind, it's a choice that transcends logic. It stems from deep in the soul. The individual may not be able to explain why they feel so strongly pulled towards one of the options, as it is above logic. Hashem did not choose us on account of intellectual superiority or good looks. We were chosen because that is what G-d desired, period. Regardless of our immersion in Egyptian culture and religion, even regaining our faith in G-d did not make us His nation. **We only became a nation when G-d did the choosing.** The fact that we

were not superior spiritually to the Egyptians was not a disqualification, since G-d was not choosing us based on our advantages or merits. **Deuteronomy 7:7:** Not because you are more numerous than any peoples did G-d delight in you and choose you; for you are least of all the peoples.

**The precursor to our nationhood and subsequent redemption, is that we had to be one cohesive entity ready for that choice. In order for G-d to choose the Jews as a nation, there had to be a nation to choose.** It's not feasible to choose a random group of individuals as your nation, there must first be a cohesive unit of people who act as a nation. This is the meaning of the prayer: "You have chosen us from amongst the many nations." The prayer continues: **"And he lifted us up and sanctified us with His commandments."**

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[www.AlephLearningInstitute.org](http://www.AlephLearningInstitute.org) | [alephjli@gmail.com](mailto:alephjli@gmail.com)

**Aleph Learning Institute**  
Chabad of Maryland, Inc. (tax deductible)  
6701 Old Pimlico RD Baltimore, MD 21209  
ATT: Mrs. Rochel Kaplan, Director

*Thank you!*

**G-d is willing to choose us regardless of any faults we may have or may not have. But for that choice to take effect, we need to be a singular entity plausible for choice. A nation is defined by unity, whereas division dissolves that nation.**

Unfortunately it usually takes tragedy to bring people together. This pattern can be detected in the Egyptian slavery. What sounds like pointless misery is in fact an integral part of the process of nation building. Moses realized that the inherent suffering in Egypt had positive outcome, namely to lead the Jewish people in unity and solidarity. Chassidus explains (**Torah Or, Beshalach**) that for a seed to grow and bear fruit, it must first decompose in the ground. Only after losing the previous identity of a seed does it grow into something quantitatively different. The Jewish people are subject to the same process. The time spent enslaved in Egypt, was the decomposition of our national seed. Our suffering removed any trace of previous identity or ego and taught us the lesson of solidarity.

Rabbi Akiva taught: "Love your fellow as yourself. This is the entire Torah." **How can we achieve selfless love- to love someone else just like you love yourself?** G- d says that we are capable of selfless love, because at our very core we are one. That is what is unique to the Jewish people, as one nation. Therefore we are capable of selfless love.

**Dear Friend:**

**Welcome back to our third edition of "Out of the Box", a Torah lesson at your doorstep.**

**As we begin reading the second (Exodus) of the 5 Books of Moses, portion of Shemot, we follow the journey of the Jewish people toward nationhood, beginning with their descent to Egypt toward receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai.**

**Hashem chose the Jewish people, and It is incumbent upon us to upkeep our national status, i.e. the unity that makes us a nation. By sticking together and seeing positivity and beauty within our fellow, regardless of our differences, we allow our nation to be strong, enduring and blessed. Am Yisroel Chai! Wishing each of you a Healthy, Happy New Year 2019!**

**Sincerely yours,**

**Rochel Kaplan, Founder & Director Aleph Learning Institute**