What does it mean to be Jewish?

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קדוש

“And now if you are willing to accept My commandments and keep My covenant , you will become My treasure (segula) among all peoples … and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests (mamlekhet kohanim) and a holy nation (goy qadosh) “.

Today we will explain the third term expressed in the election of Israel: *goy qadosh* גוי קדוש.
GOY: The word “goy”, conventionally used to refer to a non-Jewish person, simply means “people” or “nation.” And in the Tora, it is often used in reference to the people of Israel.
QADOSH: The next word, “qadosh” is impossible to translate into English with a single term. “Qadosh” can mean, depending on the context: sacred, assigned, holy, special, separate, dedicated, unique, different, and more.
In the context of the giving of the Tora, which we celebrate in Shabu’ot, “goy qadosh” means that we are a “consecrated” people, chosen and assigned by God to achieve a particular mission.

We were chosen, firstly, to witness the existence of God. In Shabu’ot, when we received the Tora, HaShem revealed Himself to Israel. We did not see any images, but we heard His voice. We were (and are) the only “ear-witnesses” of God’s existence. The proof of the existence of God in Judaism is not based on philosophical or scientific evidence but on our own collective experience at the time of the giving of the Tora. As the prophet Yesha’ayahu so beautifully said אַתֶּם עֵדַי , נְאֻם ה ‘וְעַבְדִּי אֲשֶׁר בָּחָרְתִּי , לְמַעַן תֵּדְעוּ וְתַאֲמִינוּ לִי וְתָבִינוּ , כִּי אֲנִי הוּא , לְפָנַי לֹא נוֹצַר אֵל וְאַחֲרַי לֹא יִהְיֶה *“Thus says HaShem [to Israel] You are my*

witnesses, My servants, whom I have chosen, so you know Me and you believe [in Me] and so you will make known that I am [God], and that there is no God besides Me. ” The Cuzari of Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, a book describing the most basic principles of Judaism, explains that in other religions it is always “one person” (Muhammad, Yeshu, Mary Magdalene, Joseph Smith, etc.) who has the “privilege” to receiving a divine revelation. No nation even dared to “make up” a story of a collective revelation –which would obviously lend more credibility to the alleged revelation– because it would be a fabrication impossible to sustain. In the case of the Jewish people, says the Cuzari, there were 600,000 “eyewitnesses” of HaShem’s revelation on Mount Sinai. Something else. Being the chosen people means being witnesses to the existence of HaShem and knowing that as such, He expects from us an exemplary behavior. HaShem is much more demanding with those who enjoyed the privilege of the “knowledge” of His existence. HaShem examines the behavior of Am Israel with more rigor than other nations.

No one explained this idea better than the prophet Amos (3: 2) . Thus said HaShem, רק אתכם ידעתי מכל משפחות האדמה על כן אפקד עליכם את כל עונתיכם *“Only you [the Israelites] I have known (=i’ve chosen) among all the families of the earth. Therefore, I will consider you accountable for all your sins … “* Accordingly, being the chosen people means to have more obligations. Each Yehudi is a witness to HaShem’s existence. Therefore, if a Jew behaves wrongly, dishonestly, or in an inappropriate way , ***he disqualifies himself as one of HaShem’s witnesses***, generating thus Hillul HaShem, the desecration of the Divine Name. Why? Because one disqualified witness means one LESS witness of the existence of God! In one of his letters (Iggeret Teman) Maimonides explains that the first idea a Jewish parent must teach his or her children is the story of Shabu’ot, מעמד הר סיני, the event that records the revelation of HaShem at the foot of Mount Sinai. Having participated in this event, and having witnessed the Presence

of HaShem, it is the first thing that defines us as Jews, and as His chosen people.