IDEAS OF SHABUOT # 3 My Witnesses

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"And now, if you will listen to My commands and keep My covenant , you will become a treasure to Me (segula) among all peoples … and you will be to Me a kingdom of priests (mamlekhet kohanim) and a holy nation (goy qadosh). " Shemot 19: 5-6

Previously, we explained two of the three concepts expressed in this pasuq: we explored the concept of 'am segula (see this) and the concept of kingdom of priests or mamlekhet kohanim (see this).

Today we will explain the third and last concept expressed in the election of 'am Israel, *goy qadosh*. It is impossible to translate the word *qadosh* with one single English word. "Qadosh" could mean, according to the context: sacred, holy, special, separated, consecrated, unique, different, and more.

In the context of the covenant, which we commemorate in Shabu'ot, goy qadosh means that we are God's "chosen" people.

Chosen for what?

We were chosen first and foremost to be God's witnesses. In Shabu'ot, when we received the Tora, HaShem revealed Himself to the people of Israel. We saw no images, but we heard His voice. We are "qadosh" because we were the sole witnesses of God's existence. The case of God's existence does not rest on

philosophical or scientific evidences. It rests on the testimony of the Jewish people. As the prophet Yeshayahu said: ,□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□ ,'□ □□□□□ ,□□□□□ □□□□□□ ,□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□ ,□□□□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□ *"So says HaShem [to Israel] "You are My witnesses, my servant, whom I have chosen; so you will know and believe and make understand that I'm [God], there is no god before Me, no after Me".*

In one of his letters (Igeret Teman) Maimonides explains that the first thing a Jewish parent should teach his child is the story of Shabu'ot, known in Hebrew as □□□□ □□ □□□□ , the event in which when we witnessed God's revelation at the feet of Mt. Sinai. This is what defines us, Jews, as the chosen people.

Conventional wisdom notwithstanding, to be the chosen people does not mean that we have more rights. On the contrary, it means that because we were witnesses of HaShem's existence, HaShem expects from us an exemplary behavior. God will be examining our conduct closer than the rest of the nations. Perhaps, no one formulated this cardinal concept better than the prophet Amos (3:2). So said HaShem, □□□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□□□□□ □□ □□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□ □□ □□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ *"You alone [the people of Israel] I've known (=loved, chosen) from among all the families of the earth; therefore I will hold you to accountable for all your iniquities…"*

To be the chosen people is not about having more rights but more obligations. To be a Jew is a huge responsibility. If a Jew acts with dishonesty, cheats, misbehaves, offends,etc., then he would disqualify himself as one of HaShem's witnesses, causing Hilul HaShem, i.e., "making the case for Creator weaker".

To be a Jew implies the permanent awareness that the case for God rests on our living testimony.