

Lesson Plan – Chosenness

The following lesson plan is a suggestion of how Rabbi Sacks' ideas on the idea of a Chosen People, utilising some of the resources, contained in this unit could be incorporated into a 60-minute class for high-school age students. This lesson plan will focus solely on one particular idea within the thought of Rabbi Sacks. There are many other themes found in this unit of resources which would take more classroom-time to explore with your students.

Goal: To explore the concept of a chosen people in classic and contemporary Jewish texts, with a specific focus on the role of chosenness in the thought of Rabbi Sacks.

1-5 minutes: Opening Activity

Project this Opening Activity text onto the board and ask your students the connected Core Questions.

Mark Twain was the pen name of American novelist Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910). The following famous passage is taken from a magazine article he wrote in 1899 in answer to a request to clarify his views about the Jews.

If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way.

Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk.

His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it.

The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind.

All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?

Mark Twain, Concerning the Jews, Harper's Magazine, June 1899

Core Questions

1. How can the survival of the Jewish people against all the odds be explained?
2. What does Jewish history tell us about the relationship between the Jewish People and God?
3. Why do you think the Jewish People have "contributed to the world's list of great names... way out of proportion to their weakness of numbers"?

6-25 minutes: Chosenness in classic Jewish sources

Divide your students into 4 groups and give each group one of the set texts below. Ask them to learn in *chavrutot* for 10 minutes.

- The origins of Jewish chosenness in the Bible/Covenantal Chosenness
- God's relationship with other nations:
- Who chose whom?
- Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic holiness/chosenness

Then bring the class back together and ask a *chavruta* from each of the four groups to present the text they looked at, with a focus on what it can teach us about the concept of Jewish chosenness.

26-30 minutes: Chosenness texts from the writings of Rabbi Sacks

Ask a volunteer to read the text from *To Heal a Fractured World*, pp. 65-67, and using the linked Core Questions in our teaching resources, discuss with your class Rabbi Sacks' approach to chosenness, and what, from his perspective, it means to be an "Am Segulah".

31-35 min: A Light unto the Nations

Using the video [Rabbi Sacks on the Chosen People](#) and/or the text from page 53 of *The Dignity of Difference*, consider what Rabbi Sacks believes we are modelling, and how we should be an example of to the world?

36-40 min: Activity time

Ask each student to write down as many examples as they can of the Jewish experience of being different (either from Jewish history, or from their own experience). Ask for volunteers to share their examples.

41-45 min: Israel

Ask a volunteer to read the text from *Future Tense*, pp. 135-136, and consider the related Core Questions found in our teaching resources. Then ask your students what they think the relationship is for Rabbi Sacks between chosenness, the Jewish national mission, and the State of Israel.

46-50 min: What about those Jews who live in the diaspora?

Consider this question for a moment, and then show this video: [Rabbi Sacks on Tikkun Olam](#). Afterwards, ask what the relationship between all these concepts are (chosenness, the Jewish national mission, *Kiddush Hashem*, and *Tikkun Olam*).

51-55 min: Activity: Examples of Tikkun Olam

Ask your students if they can think of other examples of Jews being involved in *Tikkun Olam* and thereby making a *Kiddush Hashem* (this could be a research assignment for a future class, or for homework).

56-60 min: Summing up:

In the last few minutes of the class, ensure your students have understood the following points:

- The Jewish people are described as a *Segulah* by God.
- This is connected in the Torah to a covenantal relationship with God which includes the observing of the Torah.
- There are some Jewish thinkers who believe that the Jewish people are intrinsically more holy than non-Jewish people.
- Rambam and Rabbi Sacks do not believe this to be the case. They believe that Jews are unique only in what they are called on to be.
- Rabbi Sacks believes the Jewish people are called on to be exemplars of *The Dignity of Difference*, and they have a national responsibility to model Torah values.
- The ultimate way to do this is to create a model society in the Land of Israel based on Torah values, although it can also be done through acts of *Kiddush Hashem/Tikkun Olam*.