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**If the Torah is our Constitution, Then What is its Preamble?**

Many Americans have memorized the ideals put forth in the Preamble to the US Constitution: " We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

Is there a corresponding preamble to the Torah? If yes, what is it? What implications does it have for us?

Nothing in our written Torah connects Shavuot with *mattan Torah*, the giving of the Torah. Yet emphatically our liturgy declares that Shavuot is "*Z'man mattan torateinu*". In addition, the reading for the first day of Shavuot is clearly about *mattan Torah*.

I would suggest consulting a good *humash* or *machzor* and reading the passage that we read on Shavuot with focus upon that which **precedes** *mattan Torah* (Exodus, chapter 19, which is part of Parashat Yitro).

There is a lot ritual there, no doubt! But what did God expect from us? In accepting this *brit*, this covenant, what were we to become to God?

The answer lies in Exodus 19:5-6: "If you obey Me and observe My covenant, you shall be a *segulah* from amongst all nations, because the world is Mine. And you shall be a *mamlechet kohanim v'goy qaddosh*."

Our charge is to obey God, to guard/observe the compact, to become a priestly government and a holy nation.

This compact is not with individuals. It is with the Nation of Israel at large.

Let us compare the passages of Parashat Yitro that are not included in the Shavuot reading with the conversion declaration of Ruth. Yitro, Moses's father-

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in-law, declares God's greatness, but he abandons Israel. His acceptance of the one true God is not a call to follow Torah, just some kind of ethical monotheism

On the other hand, Ruth declares: "*Ameich ami veilokayich eloka*" – Your nation is my nation your God is my God. Note the sequence! Thus Ruth is a true convert because she joins our nation and accepts the one true God. This is critical.

Any convert can discover the Noahide covenant by emulating Avraham's discovery of ethical monotheism. However, the leap into Judaism is when one binds with the People of Israel, the society of Believers and Servers.

Of course, you don't need to be Jewish to relate to God. But if you want to become part of a holy nation and an ethical society, then you must seek Judaism. There are Gentile priests in this world but there is no other Priestly Nation! This is unique

This is **our** preamble: to produce a holy and ethical society.

*Chag Same'ach!*

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