

The Seven Colors of the Rainbow

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THE SEVEN NOAHIDE LAWS.

Rabbi Yirmeyahu Bindman.

It is well known that the Jewish faith does not seek to make converts, and so it is generally supposed that since the Jewish people do not want to make other people into Jews, they are happy just to be left alone. The world is often very surprised to discover that the Jewish faith includes a complete provision for all non-Jews, regardless of race, social class or national origin, perfectly attuned to their needs, and deriving from the same source in Divine revelation through the prophecy of Moses, without any intermediary whatsoever. Only the true universal faith of the Jews regularly offers something to those who are not its members, and this is its sign of authenticity.

This provision is known as the Noachide Laws. Though the first man and his wife, Adam and Eve, were commanded to observe them, they emerged fully only after Noah had survived the flood that wiped away violent sinners whose wrongdoings had engulfed the world in his time. The ancestors of the Jewish people were also commanded in them until they were given the whole Torah at Mount Sinai, and they were then reaffirmed through Moses for all the other nations.

The laws are all prohibitions, unlike those of the Jewish people who have affirmative commandments, but they are not intended to make life dull or restricted. They point out what

the good and true path should be, and with this path all moral necessities for the non-Jews are established, without need for any other philosophy, scientific discovery or change in government. All relationships between Jews and non-Jews are likewise explained, both in Israel and in other countries.

Sexual transgression.

All people originate from sexual relations, and so the laws that govern them are our most basic 'constitution', testifying to the Divine origin of humankind. Non-Jews are not commanded to marry, but they are encouraged to do so, and they are forbidden to have relations with the wife of another man. Male homosexuality, incest and bestial relations are also forbidden under the same heading, even though the desires for them are very different. Jews and non-Jews are forbidden to each other, because of the different origin of their respective commandments. When these laws are observed, then human relations of all kinds are enhanced by the Divine sanction, and love increases throughout the world.

Murder.

Though the reasons for sexual prohibitions may be mysterious, most people if asked what laws they would make to govern the world would immediately say that on no account must illegal bloodshed be allowed to go unpunished. Human life is a sacred trust, and can only be taken with legal sanction. The murderer is executed by decapitation, at the sentence of the duly authorized sovereign court only. Protection is extended to the unborn, and the details of any abortion case must be closely studied according to the law. War action is subject to strict security standards, at the order of a lawful regime. It is rare for any person to take life in truly wanton circumstances, because of instinctive recognition of its value, and this recognition must be taken up to the level of reckoning that the spiritual law requires.

Theft.

The first man and woman transgressed the Noachide prohibition of theft by eating the fruit which had been forbidden to them, and this is still a Divine provision for non-Jews regarding all property in the hands of others. Property ownership is underwritten by Divine law for all humanity, and is not just a matter for an aggrieved individual to settle for himself. Respect for property rights is the basis for generosity with possessions, and for business dealings that lead the world through its use and traffic of goods to its final destiny. This brings moral satisfaction in the workplace, and the fostering of ethics in this area is a prime need for our society.

Idolatry.

If the worship of entities other than the Creator had not been forbidden by His express command, then people would be free to choose what to worship, just as they choose their own personal friends. However the whole area of relations between humanity and its Creator has been placed under specific requirements, namely that only His truth and unity should be the subject of belief, worship and philosophy. His revelation has two levels, the one in nature for ordinary reckoning, and the other through prophecy on Mount Sinai for the moral law. All non-Jews derive their true religious fulfillment from this latter source, and any reference to an intermediary causes error and loss of morality. There is no need for non-Jews to form associations for Noachide observance and prayer, but they may do so if they wish.

Cursing the Name.

The power of speech distinguishes humanity from all other species, and this distinction leads to the specific human prohibition not to use speech for cursing the Creator, because

it shows ingratitude for his kindness. This commandment pairs with the previous one, showing that the Divine rulership and the Divine love go together at all times and places, no matter how great the difficulties may seem. Jews and non-Jews are commanded in the same verse in this respect, showing how in the Messianic times all of humankind will join together in voicing praise for the Creator. All other misuses of speech, such as gossip, obscenity and lies, are indicated in this commandment as something to avoid, just as prayer and words of Torah are desirable so that speech will become truly Divine.

Eating the limb of a living animal.

Though it may seem far-fetched to think of eating meat from a living creature, the intent behind this prohibition is to safeguard the human sexual integrity. The connection between eating and sexuality is well known, and it is the sexual drive for consumption of the 'heat of life' that leads to the kind of greed that damages reproduction. The Noachide Law teaches us that this is rectified by being careful to eat only meat from an animal that is fully dead, and this is by no means always the case in our factory society where slaughterhouses handle meat animals quickly and carelessly, sometimes only stunning them before cutting them up for sale. Care in this observance fosters all requirements for the love of nature and the preservation of the environment, and safeguards the passage of souls as manifested in the life and consumption of food animals until the ultimate destiny of the world.

System of justice.

The non-Jewish nations of the world are commanded to avoid the state of anarchy by assuming and exercising the sovereign jurisdiction, to maintain courts that punish offenders by due process of law, and that provide civil redress in society. The Noachide Laws themselves form the basis of the criminal code, but each nation may make civil laws as it sees fit within the

general guidelines. This provision does not apply within the Land of Israel, where the sovereign power is in the hands of the Jewish people, and they judge non-Jews of any nationality living or visiting there under these same Noachide Laws.

Corporations are held in being by the sovereign power through the enactment of corporate law, which is empowered by this commandment. The sovereign power is responsible for regulating these corporations in the public interest, and ensuring their conformity with all aspects of the law. Thus Communism and Fascism are in breach of the spiritual law because of their lack of this regulation. Non-Jews are obligated to seek reconciliation rather than take their disputes straight to court, and this in turn obligates them to give charitable donations to the needy so as to foster reconciliation in general.

The Rabbis of the Talmud say, 'War comes to the world through the delay of justice, the perversion of justice, and the teaching of Torah out of accordance with its legal meaning.' When all processes of law are rectified in this way, with good government applied to sustain them, functioning in Divine integrity, then grievances are properly handled and true peace emerges into the light of day. This is among the recognitions of the United States Congress in its Declaration endorsing the Noachide Laws (H.J. Res. 104, Public Law 102-14, March 1990 and subsequently), based on long historic understanding of the Jewish people and the Torah.

Book explanation by Rabbi Bindman:

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