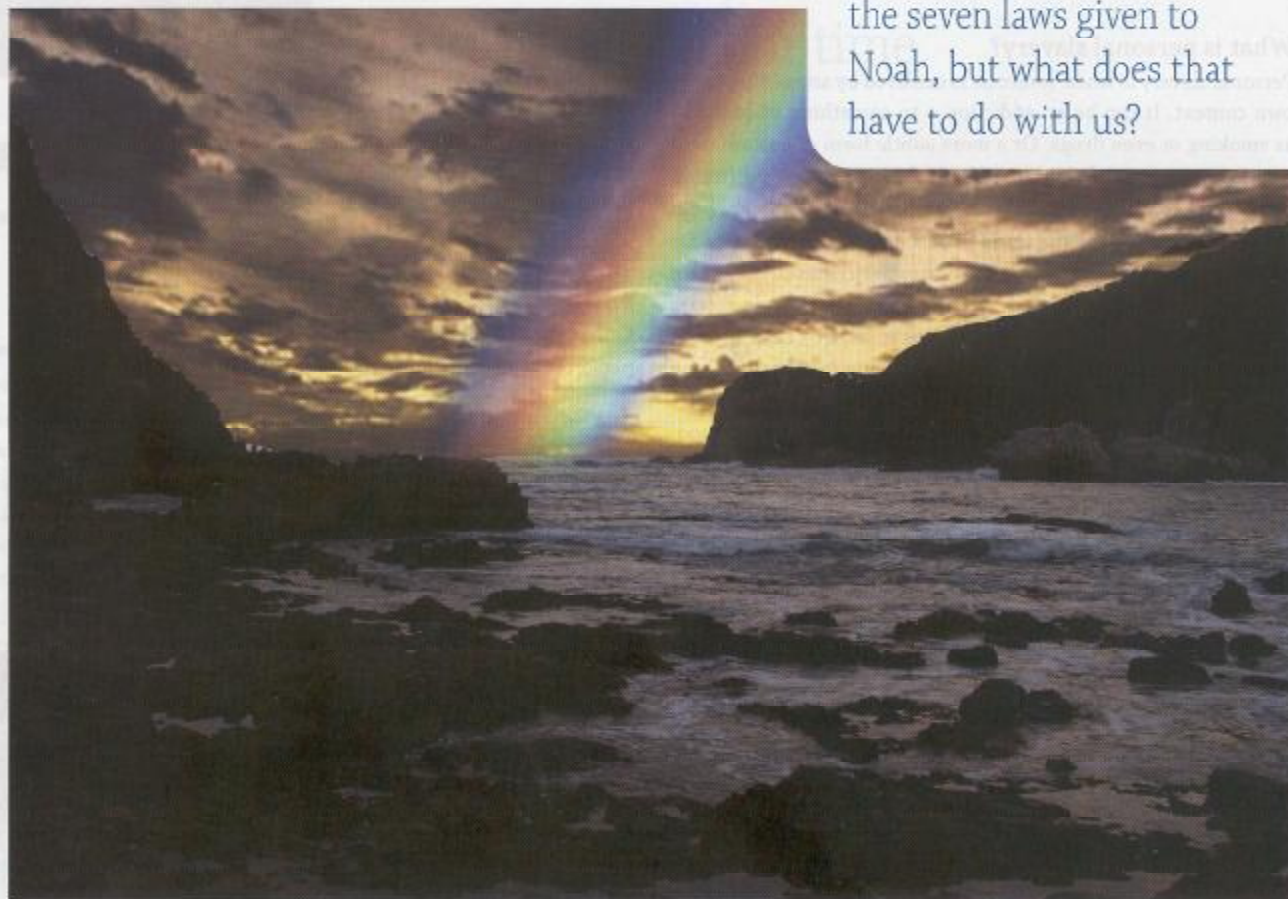


NOAHIDES

BY CHANDREA SEREBRO

The whole of mankind stems from one righteous man – Noah. A new global monotheistic religion follows the seven laws given to Noah, but what does that have to do with us?



AS JEWS, OUR TOP PRIORITY is to strengthen and ensure Jewish survival and continuance. And our second priority is to inspire and encourage as many human beings as we can to become fine, exemplary Noahides who will live by these principals.

Jews have a responsibility to be “a light unto the nations”. Asks Rabbi Nachman Bernhard, Rabbi Emeritus of the Oxford Synagogue-Centre, who is actively involved with the Noahide movement around the world: “What exactly is that light, and what is it that Hashem intended the non-Jews to do? As Jews, we have been commissioned by Hashem

to take on His mitzvot and to lead disciplined lives, in order to fashion us into role models for the world, to enable us to influence others and to get them to undertake to be what Hashem made them capable of becoming.”

The Seven Noahide Laws were given to Noah and his children after the Great Flood. In fact, the first six were given to Adam in the Garden of Eden as an instruction manual for living in the world, and civilisation should have been built on those precepts. But the Torah describes how the 10 generations between Adam and Noah went astray, and “the world became dark, morally corrupt, and spiritually decadent,”

says Rabbi Bernhard. And so Hashem immersed the world in the purifying Mikveh of the Great Flood, saving only Noah and his family, who seemed worthy enough to give the world another chance. “Hashem reinforced the original covenant that He had with Adam with Noah, by giving him seven mitzvot outlining a programme of basic human decency, in the name of the one true G-d. From there, the world was intended to progress according to these very laws, for the precepts included in these commandments provide the guidelines for truly moral behaviour.”

Just as it is with the 613 mitzvot, the seven Noahide laws and details of their

observance were once again given to Moshe in the Written and Oral Torah, and these are recorded and expounded on in the Talmud. And now, says Rabbi Bernhard, one of the things that we, as Jews, are to do in order to be a beacon unto the nations, is to help make the nations of the world aware of what it is they need to do, in line with what Hashem expects of them. "It is up to all of us Jews to encourage the world to get back on track toward human decency, and to do this by observing these laws." This was actively done in Biblical and Talmudic times, but this became increasingly difficult and impractical for Jews to do in the Diaspora, due to anti-Semitism and oppression. In recent decades, however, with increased tolerance toward religious diversity, and especially with the increased popularity and reach of Jewish outreach organisations, Jews once again have the opportunity to provide this 'light', and help to affect their gentile neighbours.

ENLIGHTENING

"When the Jews received the Torah, they were given the mission of illuminating that world with the teachings of the Torah, as there needed to be a people that would take on the mission of setting an example to the world." Yes, we should all, as Jews, be doing something active to make it known. We should all be trying to set an example for the world, and we should be trying to make it clear to people that these seven things are what the entire world needs to do. But this should not be misconstrued with the non-Jewish practice of missionising, or proselytising, which is not the Jewish way. "No," says Rabbi Bernhard, "the intention is never to turn the broader nations into Jews. In fact, he explains, not only do we not go out to convert the masses, but we even have to ascertain very carefully the merit of converting any particular candidate to Judaism.

"Being a Jew is not easy. And the problem

if people get it into their heads that they want to become Jewish is that it isn't always practical for them to do so." Besides, it is unnecessary too. "For us Jews, it is not enough just to be a mensch. If that were all, we could just join the Boy Scouts. We Jews have sworn to keep the mitzvot and live a Torah way of life. But for a non-Jew, being a mensch, keeping the seven mitzvot of Noach – that is righteousness. If they are keeping the Noahide mitzvot, then as non-Jews, they are doing enough, and that is their one-way ticket to Olam Haba." As the Talmud states: "The righteous people of all nations have a share in the world to come."

That, then is the vital mission for which the Chosen People were chosen, says Rabbi Bernhard. Nothing less than to change the world and make it a better place. Something so ambiguous, huge and difficult, it seems to be a mission impossible. So how to do it, where to start? "Perhaps that is why so few >

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even try. But the answer lies in the very question: 'Who and what are the Noahides?' They are people committed to the true 'Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of G-d'. And because of that commitment, and their sheer numbers, they are the only ones who can save the world and make it a better place." But that doesn't leave us Jews out. No, as Jews, our top priority, says Rabbi Bernhard, is to strengthen and ensure Jewish survival. And our second priority, he says, "is to make lots and lots of Noahides – by inspiring and encouraging as many human beings as we can to become fine, exemplary Noahides who will live by these principals."

BNEI NOACH AROUND THE WORLD

Around the world, people have gravitated toward the Noahide movement, so much so that it now a modern monotheistic movement gaining increasing popularity in the USA, Europe, and South America. Noahide groups, institutions, prayer centres, websites, Facebook sites, and meet-up groups exist the world over, and while it doesn't exist in South Africa in an organised fashion, there certainly are Noahides in South Africa. The best website to go to for more information is www.asknoah.com.

WHAT ARE THE 'SHEVA MITZVOT BNEI NOACH' OR THE SEVEN NOAHIDE MITZVOT?

Not to worship anyone or anything other than the One Supreme G-d

Not to murder

Not to steal

Not to curse or blaspheme G-d's holy name

Not to engage in forbidden sexual relations (such as adultery, bestiality, incest and homosexuality)

To set up courts of law for society

Not to eat meat taken from an animal or bird before it is completely dead III