

An essay excerpted from the original Hebrew text of

SHEVA MITZVOT HASHEM*

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Jerusalem, Israel

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*Authorized English translation published as:

The Divine Code, 2nd Expanded Edition, ISBN 978-0-9814811-6-6

From the Author's Preface to *Sheva Mitzvot HaShem*

Free translation and synopsis

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A. Objectives of the publication and this preface

This compilation [the Hebrew publication *Sheva Mitzvot HaShem*, translated in English as *The Divine Code*] comes to collect from the Oral Torah and the Torah-law decisions of the Jewish Sages that which is “the word of G-d” – the Torah Law – in the explanation of the *Seven Commandments for the Children of Noah*, which are for all Gentiles.¹ This is in order to instruct Gentiles concerning the path that G-d commanded for them in the Torah, and that it is the proper path for them to faithfully believe in and observe, so that through this they can merit the spiritual level and title of a “pious Gentile”.² To this end, it serves to teach Gentiles about their precepts: what is forbidden and what is permitted, and who is obligated and who is exempt. This is in order to help and guide them in fulfilling the Seven Commandments that they were commanded by G-d to keep, according to the detailed requirements.

Beginning in the 1980's, the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch, rallied a call to the Gentiles of the world to fulfill their Seven Commandments, and to the Jews of the world to influence and convince the Gentiles concerning the importance of their Seven Commandments and the need to fulfill them. In light of this calling, large numbers of Gentiles began to show interest and attempted to find information about the details of these precepts. Our publication comes to fill this need by bringing before them, in the form of a Code of Torah Law, all the elucidated laws and their details and extensions, based on the many sources that I have succeeded in gathering with G-d's help.

This preface explains the teaching from Rambam (Maimonides) regarding the Torah-based obligation of the Gentiles to keep their Seven Commandments, and the Torah-based obligation of the Jewish people to compel the Gentiles to faithfully accept upon themselves and fulfill these Seven Commandments.

B. Explanation of Rambam, *Laws of Kings* 8:10 – “to compel all the inhabitants of the world”

¹ *Editor's note:* The term “Gentile” denotes all Non-Jews. A person who is born to a Gentile mother is a Gentile by birth, and in correct grammatical terms, he has the title *Noahite*. A person who is born to a Jewess is a Jew by birth, and has the title *Israelite*. These terms are meant to describe the person's lineage by birth, and not the person's subsequent religious upbringing or choice of religion or faith. By G-d's Law, it is incumbent upon all *Noahites* to follow the *Seven Commandments for the Children of Noah*, and it is incumbent upon all *Israelites* to follow the *613 Commandments for the Children of Israel*. All of these 620 Divine commandments are known only from the Torah of Moses, which was given by G-d to Moses partly in writing as the Five Books of Moses, and partly as G-d's detailed instructions and explanations that were taught and passed down as the Torah's Oral Law. (620 is the numerical value of the Hebrew word *Keter*, meaning crown.) Through the process of traditional conversion according to Torah Law, it is possible for a *Noahite* person to convert to become an *Israelite* person.

² *Editor's note:* This pious belief and observance for a Gentile (a Noahite) is a path of particular spiritual faith, which in common modern terminology is often referred to as the *Noahide faith*, or *Noahidism*, and its adherents are referred to as *Noahides*. Similarly, the incumbent spiritual faith for a Jew (an Israelite) is called *Judaism*.

Rambam, in the end of Chapter 8, *Laws of Kings*, writes:

[From Halacha (Torah Law) 8:10] Moses only gave the Torah and [the Jewish] commandments as an inheritance to [the Children of] Israel, as it states [Deut. 33:4]: “[The Torah]... is the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob,” and to all those who desire to convert from among the other nations, as it says [Num. 15:15], “The convert shall be the same as you.” However, someone who does not desire to [convert and] accept Torah and the [Jewish] commandments should not be forced to do so. By the same regard, Moses was commanded by the Al-mighty to compel all the inhabitants of the world to accept the commandments given to Noah’s descendants.

[From Halacha 8:11] Anyone who accepts upon himself the fulfillment of these Seven Commandments and is precise in their observance is considered one of “the pious among the Gentiles of the world” [*Chassidei Umot Ha’Olam*] and will merit a share in the World to Come. This applies only when he accepts them and fulfills them because the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Torah and informed us through Moses, our teacher, that Noah’s descendants had been previously commanded to fulfill them. However, if he fulfills them out of intellectual conviction, he is not a *Ger Toshav*,³ nor of “the pious among the Gentiles”, nor of their wise men.

We understand the following general Torah laws from the above precepts cited by Rambam:

1. It is an obligation upon the Jews to compel all Gentiles to observe their Seven Commandments.
2. Gentiles are commanded to observe their Seven Commandments because G-d commanded this through Moses, and if this would not be the case (G-d forbid), there would not be such a concept as “the pious among the Gentiles”.

Only further on in Chapters 9 and 10 does Rambam explain the details of the Seven Commandments, in and of themselves. This shows that the two general laws above result from the relationship between the Jewish people (and the Torah that was given to them) and the Gentiles of the world, and not from the obligations of the Seven Commandments themselves. In *Likkutei Sichot*⁴ an explanation of the above words of Rambam is discussed, and the following is asked:

1. Rambam writes: “Moses was commanded by the Al-mighty to compel all the inhabitants of the world to accept the commandments given to Noah’s descendants.” Why must the Jewish people compel the Gentiles to fulfill their commandments?
2. “...he accepts them and fulfills them because the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Torah and informed us through Moses, our teacher, that Noah’s descendants had been commanded to fulfill them.” Why must the Gentiles fulfill their Seven Commandments because they were written in the Torah by Moses our teacher [as instructed by G-d]?

In *Likkutei Sichot*, it is explained that the law “to compel all the inhabitants of the world” results from the fact that the Seven Commandments were written in the Torah, and Moses our teacher made them known specifically to the Jewish people. This indeed obligates the Jews, who accepted the Torah and are commanded through it, to keep this commandment [to influence the Gentiles], just as they are

³ A “Resident Gentile”, the title for a pious Gentile during the time of the First Temple who gained permission to live in the Holy Land by making a formal declaration of his commitment to observe the Seven Commandments.

⁴ Vol. 26, p. 132 and following. [*Likkutei Sichot* are volumes of transcribed and footnoted talks by the Rebbe.]

obligated to keep all their commandments in the Torah.⁵ As specified above, this is the reason that this law was deliberately elaborated upon by Rambam at the end of Chapter 8 [which deals with Jewish commandments], before he explains the detailed observance of the Seven Commandments by Gentiles in Chapter 9. However, this matter is also very important for Gentiles, for the essential fulfillment of their Seven Commandments results from a commandment from G-d as given specifically in the Torah, through Moses.

We will now explain that beyond the details of the Divine commandments, there is a type of general commandment to acknowledge He Who commanded the commandments – in other words, “the essence of the commandment” – and this applies for Gentiles also. Note that this obligation that Moses was commanded “to compel” is not a result of, nor related to, the commandment upon the Gentiles to establish a judicial system. Rather, it is a principle resulting from the [spiritual] essence of the Divine command. It appears that this is explained in the Talmud, Tractate *Sanhedrin* (56b) as Rashi elucidates there: “And the L-rd G-d commanded [upon] Adam...” (Gen. 2:16) – [This means that G-d] commanded His G-dliness upon Adam, that he (Adam) should not exchange Him for another [through idolatry]. Even though the intention of the Sages was to explain the specific commandments to Adam, nevertheless, encompassing these specific commandments is a general command to accept the authority of the Commander – “**I AM E-LOKIM**”. Acceptance of this rule is referred to as “**the essence of the command.**”

If a person does not accept this essence of the command, it is obvious that he does not accept [in faith] any of the Seven Commandments as a G-dly command. As a result, any Gentile who does not accept G-d as the Commander does not truly accept upon himself the yoke of the Seven Commandments, and one who does not accept upon himself the yoke of the Seven Commandments does not truly accept upon himself the authority of G-d. Therefore,⁶ [the Torah is teaching that] it is incumbent upon a Gentile to accept upon himself the “yoke of Heaven”, namely, to acknowledge the Kingship of G-d, and to accept upon himself G-d’s Kingship and His commandments,⁷ for this is the “essence of the command.”

From the explanation in *Likkutei Sichot* on Rambam’s words, the following may be concluded:

1. A Gentile is obligated to accept upon himself and fulfill the Seven Commandments because G-d commanded the Gentiles and made it known to them through Moses our teacher in the Torah, and one who is careful to fulfill them because of this reason is considered a “pious one among the Gentiles”.
2. This obligation includes the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven and the acknowledgement of G-d as the Commander of all these Seven Commandments.
3. The basic obligations of the Gentiles have never changed, and the commandments to Adam and Noah are the same commandments that were repeated to Moses our teacher.⁸ However, one who is not careful to keep them in their complete form, for the reason that G-d commanded him in the Torah that was given over through Moses, is not one of the “pious among the Gentiles”.
4. The obligations of a Gentile, and his ability to be a “pious Gentile”, apply at every moment, and not only in the time when a status of *Ger Toshav* applied in the Land of Israel.

⁵ See *Likkutei Sichot* Volume 4, p. 1094.

⁶ See *Likkutei Sichot* Volume 26, p. 136-7.

⁷ *Likkutei Sichot* Volume 26, p. 139.

⁸ Although the essence of the commandments has not been changed, some details were changed or added by G-d at Mt. Sinai, as explained in the book [for example, aspects of forbidden relations between Jews and Gentiles].

5. It is incumbent upon the Jewish people (as a part of keeping the Torah and its commandments) to compel all Gentiles to accept upon themselves and to fulfill their Seven Commandments. This compelling is separated into two methods:

- a. Compelling to fulfill the commandments in actuality, even if this will not be for the reason that they are commandments of G-d that are written in the Torah by Moses, and even if those fulfilling them will not be considered pious. Thus, the Jewish people have the duty to compel them at least in such a way, if possible.
- b. Compelling that the fulfillment of the Seven Commandments will be accepted because G-d commanded them and they were written in the Torah by Moses our teacher. This is primarily accomplished through pleasant words and persuasion, to teach Gentiles that this is the true way for them to fulfill their commandments [so that their reward will be complete].

According to Rambam in *Law of Kings*, Chapter 9, the obligation of Gentile judges is also to teach the people the laws, and not only to judge them. Included in the commandment of setting up courts of law are additional obligations such as education in acknowledgement of G-d and fulfillment of His Seven Commandments, and additionally all the rest of the Torah's moral values, and the obligation to influence others [about the One True G-d] with words, just as Abraham conducted himself with his [idolatrous] guests. This is because the commandment of setting up courts of law is not only an obligation of judgment and punishment, but also one of greater, all-encompassing value – to be concerned with the moral status of the entire society. Automatically, this obligation rests on each and every person who has a power of influence – for example, for parents to educate their young children.

It appears that this is explained in the Tractate *Sanhedrin*,⁹ that Adam the first man was commanded regarding these laws, as derived from the verse “and the L-rd G-d commanded etc.” Similarly, it says about Abraham: “for I made it known to him so that he would command his sons and his household after him to keep the way of G-d to do righteousness and justice”. Indeed, the obligation for justice that was said to Abraham referred to the education of his children and his household. Similarly, regarding the commandment of setting up judicial courts that was said to Adam the first man: he was commanded to do it on the same day that he was created so that he would fulfill it immediately, and even though in his first days of existence no society existed yet that he would be able to judge within a judicial system, nevertheless, this commandment was given regarding education of his children. This is a great principle in the commandment of setting up judicial courts, for just as the law prevents transgressions, warns the people, and judges transgressors in order to prevent future transgression, how much more so does the obligation include the initial prevention of transgression through proper education.

C. Compelling in a peaceful way

This obligation of Jews for compelling Gentiles through persuasion and ways of peace is derived from three general Jewish commandments:

1. Moses was commanded to compel all Gentiles, as expounded above at length, for this is the essence of the Divine command.
2. The full observance of the commandment to set up courts of law relies upon the Jewish Torah scholars to educate and warn the Gentiles [about the Seven Commandments, thus providing the basis for Gentiles to make legal rulings in their courts that are in accordance with G-d's will].
3. The commandment to love G-d.

⁹ Pages 56b, 57b.

According to the opinion of Rambam there is another perspective on this obligation to compel all Gentiles to fulfill the Seven Commandments, in addition to what he wrote in *Laws of Kings*, and this is what he wrote in *Sefer Hamitzvos*¹⁰ regarding the Jewish commandment of loving G-d: “it has already been explained [in *Sifri*] that this commandment also includes the duty that we must call out to all mankind to serve Him and believe in Him ... and the *Sifri*¹¹ says: ‘And you shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart...’ – He must be made beloved by the creations, just as Abraham did, as it says, ‘And the souls that they [Abraham and Sarah] made in Haran,’ meaning that just as Abraham (who was a lover of G-d, as the verse testifies about him: ‘Abraham, the one who loved Me’) strived to call out to all mankind to believe in G-d, so too you [as a Jew] should love Him to the point that you shall cause mankind to call out to Him.”

Rambam’s opinion is that from the commandment of loving G-d, we derive this command of calling out to all the Gentiles to serve G-d and to love Him. This is not referring to a simple feeling of love without resulting action, but instead to a love of G-d that perforce leads to a proper expression in action, meaning that the Gentiles should accept upon themselves to love Him and to fulfill His Seven Commandments and His proper ways [that He expects from every person; these are the ways of morality and piety that are obligatory based upon the reasoning of the human mind]. Thus, the behavior of Abraham that is described in Tractate *Sota* (10b) to call out to the world to serve G-d is not something that is “beyond the letter of the Law”, but instead it is a duty that is included in the Jewish commandment of loving G-d.

The explanation of this obligation to compel the Gentiles can be further elaborated upon based on the will of G-d that the Jewish nation should influence all the nations of the world in peaceful and pious ways, as it is written by Sforno on the verse (Exodus 19:6) “And you should be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Through this they will be [recognized as] a kingdom of priests, by undertaking to teach all of humanity to call out in the name of G-d and to serve Him as one group, as it is said (Isaiah 61:6) “And you, priests of G-d, shall call out”, and as it is said (Isaiah 2:3) “From Zion the Torah will go forth [to the whole world].”

Furthermore, the purpose of the entire creation is to acknowledge the unity of G-d, and to serve Him in unity, as we pray three times daily [or more, in the traditional Jewish liturgy]:

“It is incumbent upon us to praise the Master of all things ... And therefore we hope to You, L-rd our G-d that we may speedily behold ... to perfect the world under the sovereignty of the Al-mighty. All mankind shall invoke your Name, to turn to You all the wicked of the earth. Then all the inhabitants of the world will recognize and know that every knee should bend to You ... And they will take upon themselves the yoke of Your kingdom. May You soon reign over them forever and ever, etc.”

Since Jews say this precious prayer, praying and beseeching from their hearts and souls, it is a true goal in and of itself: the revelation of G-d’s Kingship throughout the whole world, recognized by the intelligence of humanity that will acknowledge and know Him, together as one group, for this is the true purpose of the His Kingship in this world. Therefore it is obvious that it is our duty to do all in our power to quickly reach this destination, which is the will of G-d, may He be blessed. Surely, the very thing that we are requesting, praying and yearning for demands from us to do all we can in an active way to bring about the actualization of the thing. It should never occur to us that we would ask and pray for such a great request, and then we would not do anything to reach that goal. Such behavior would be totally contradictory to all logic!

¹⁰ Jewish Positive Commandment #3

¹¹ On Deuteronomy 6:5.

D. Conclusions in the Torah Law of “Moses commanded to compel all the inhabitants of the world” to observe the Seven Commandments

1. The Jewish people are commanded to compel all the inhabitants of the world to accept upon themselves and fulfill their Seven Commandments, at every time and in every place. In addition, we are obligated to compel them in a manner of convincing them to fulfill their commandments. This commandment includes the obligation upon the Jews to teach the Gentiles their Seven Commandments and their obligations to G-d.

2. This commandment is not incumbent only on a Jewish king or Jewish courts, but upon every single individual who has the ability to influence a Gentile.

3. This obligation “to compel all the inhabitants of the world” is only in places [and times] when harm would not come to the Jews through it, even if the harm is only financial – and obviously if it would include danger to life.

(This is the reason that for many generations this matter was not dealt with in a public manner, not in attempting to influence the Gentiles of the world to fulfill their Seven Commandments, and not even handing down halachic decisions regarding the laws of the matters of the Seven Commandments. However, in our generation there is no danger in this, and the matter is possible and well accepted by the Gentiles of the world. Therefore, the obligation of Moses our teacher’s command to compel and convince all the inhabitants of the world to keep the Seven Commandments is now in effect.

4. This obligation to compel all the inhabitants of the world to fulfill their Seven Commandments is also upon the Gentiles themselves, for they are obligated to compel the rest of the Gentiles to keep the Seven Commandments.