

The 7 Laws of the Children of Noah

- 1. With respect to God's commandments, all of humanity is divided into two general classifications: the Children of Israel and the Children of Noah.**
- 2. The Children of Israel are the Jews, the descendants of the Patriarch Jacob. They are commanded to fulfill the 613 Commandments of the Torah.**
- 3. The Children of Noah comprise the seventy original nations of the world and their branches. They are commanded concerning the Seven Universal Laws, also known as the Seven Laws of the Children of Noah or the Seven Noahide Laws.[\[1\]](#) These Seven Universal Laws pertain to idolatry, blasphemy, murder, theft, sexual relations, eating the limb of a living animal, and establishing courts of law.**
- 4. All Seven Universal Laws are prohibitions. Do not wonder at this. Negative commandments are of a higher order than positive commandments, and their fulfillment, which takes more effort than positive commandments, earns a greater reward.**
- 5. Men and women are equal in their responsibility to observe the seven commandments.[\[2\]](#)**
- 6. It is a matter of dispute as to when a person becomes responsible for his or her actions under these laws. One**

opinion holds that it depends on the intellectual development of the individual.[\[3\]](#) According to this opinion, as soon as a child has attained the maturity to understand the meaning and significance of the Seven Universal Laws, he is obligated to the fullest extent of the law. The other opinion is that a boy reaches the age of legal responsibility at his thirteenth birthday and a girl at her twelfth birthday.[\[4\]](#)

7. The Children of Noah are permanently warned concerning the Seven Universal Laws. This means that ignorance of the law is not a valid defense. One cannot claim, for example, that he did not know that idolatry was one of the seven commandments. Nor can he claim that he did not know that bowing down to an idol constitutes idolatry. (He can, however, claim that he did not know that such-and-such was an idol, for this is not ignorance of the law.) Therefore, one is duty bound to study the Seven Universal Laws to the best of one's ability and to teach the knowledge of them to one's children.

8. When one of the Children of Noah resolves to fulfill the Seven Universal Commandments, his or her soul is elevated. This person becomes one of the *Chasidei Umot ha-Olam*, the Pious Ones of the Nations, and receives a share of the Eternal World.[\[5\]](#) The Holy Scriptures call one who accepts the yoke of fulfilling the Seven Universal Laws a *ger toshav*, a proselyte of the gate. This person is permitted to live in the Land of Israel and to enter the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and to offer sacrifices to the God of Israel.[\[6\]](#)

9. Although the Children of Noah are commanded only concerning the Seven Universal Commandments, they are

permitted to observe any of the 613 Commandments of the Torah for the sake of receiving divine reward.^[7] The exceptions to this are:^[8]

- a. Observing the Sabbath in the manner of the Jews (resting from the actions that were needed for the building of the Tabernacle during the Exodus from Egypt)
- b. Observing the Jewish holy days in the manner of the Jews (resting in a similar manner to the Sabbath)
- c. Studying those parts of the Torah that do not apply to the Noahides' service of God
- d. Writing a Torah scroll (the Five Books of Moses) or receiving an *aliyah* to the Torah (reading a portion of the Torah at a public gathering)
- e. Making, writing, or wearing *tefilin*, the phylacteries worn during prayer that contain portions of the Torah
- f. Writing or affixing a *mezuzah*, the parchment containing portions of the Torah, to one's doorposts or gateposts

(Note: A prime purpose of the Seven Universal Laws is to teach the Children of Noah about the Oneness of God, and therefore those parts of Torah that pertain to this knowledge are permissible for him to study. This includes the entirety of the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Also, the study of any part of the Torah that brings one to greater knowledge concerning the performance of the Seven Noahide Commandments is permissible. But Talmudic or Halakhic study of subjects that pertain exclusively to the

Jew's service of God is forbidden. The Noahide who studies portions of the Torah that do not pertain to him damages his soul.[\[9\]](#))

10. If a Noahide is striving in the learning of Torah or keeping the Sabbath in the manner of Jews or reveals new aspects of Torah, he may be physically restrained and informed that he is liable for capital punishment, but is not put to death.

(Note: The action taken against him is only meant to dissuade him from doing forbidden acts. If the court that is established in consonance with the Seven Universal Laws gives the death penalty to a Noahide, the execution is an atonement for this person's transgression, and consequently one who transgresses and is punished by the court can merit a portion in the World to Come.[\[10\]](#) Furthermore, the Noahide must experience reincarnation to be able to atone for transgressions he had done.)

11. The responsibility of The Seven Noahide Laws is a yoke of faith in God. This means that the laws must be observed solely because God commanded them. If the Children of Noah observe these Seven Universal Laws for any reason or intention other than to fulfill God's will, the performance is invalid and no divine reward is received. This means that if one of the Children of Noah says, "These laws seem sensible and beneficial, therefore I will observe them," his actions accomplish nothing and he receives no reward.[\[11\]](#)

12. When one of the Children of Noah engages in the study of the Seven Universal Laws, he is able to attain a spiritual

level higher than the High Priest of the Jews, who alone has the sanctity to enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. [\[12\]](#)

13. If one of the Children of Noah wishes to accept the full responsibility of the Torah and the 613 Commandments, he or she can convert and become a Jew in every respect. One who elects to do this is called a *ger tzedek*, a righteous proselyte. [\[13\]](#) It is a principle of Judaism, however, not to seek converts, and one who requests conversion is generally discouraged. Should the person persist in the desire to convert, counsel should be taken only with an Orthodox rabbi or scholar, for conversion not in accord with *Halakha*, Torah Law, is no conversion at all, and conversion supervised and bestowed by rabbis who themselves do not follow the laws of the Torah are null and void, neither recognized in heaven nor by any God-fearing Jew.

14. It is incorrect to think that since the Children of Israel have 613 Commandments and the Children of Noah have seven commandments, the ratio of spiritual worth is proportionally 613 to seven. The truth is that the Seven Universal Laws are general commandments, each containing many parts and details, whereas the 613 Commandments of the Torah are specific, each relating to one basic detail of the Divine Law. Therefore, the numerical disparity in no way reflects the relative spiritual worth of the two systems of commandments. [\[14\]](#) The prime difference in the service of the Israelite and that of the Noahide is that the Noahide sees the existence of existence, that is, he refines the world, whereas the Israelite sees the non-existence of existence, that

is, he reveals the Godliness in the world. Of course, refining the world reveals its inherent Godliness and revealing Godliness automatically refines the world.

15. The statutory punishment for transgressing any one of the Seven Laws of Noah is capital punishment. [15] According to some, punishment is the same whether one transgresses with knowledge of the law or is ignorant of the law. [16] According to others, a transgressor of the Noahide Law who is ignorant of the law receives the death penalty only in the case of murder. [17]

16. If the courts cannot punish an individual for lack of witnesses or any other reason (see the chapter on Courts of Law), the transgressor will be punished by Divine Decree. [18]

17. Besides the Seven Universal Commandments, the Children of Noah have traditionally taken it upon themselves to fulfill the commandment of honoring father and mother. [19] (see the chapter on Honoring Father and Mother).

18. Some authorities are of the opinion that the Children of Noah are obligated to fulfill the commandment of giving charity. [20] Others state that it is proper and meritorious for the Children of Noah to give charity but that it is not actually commanded of them. [21]

19. If a Noahide who follows the Seven Universal Laws gives charity, the Israelites accept it from him and give it to the poor of Israel, since through the merit of giving charity to

the poor among the Jewish people one is given life by God and saved from death. But a Noahide who does not accept the yoke of the Seven Noahide Laws and gives charity is not permitted to give it to the needy of Israel. His charity may be given to poor Noahides only.

20. If one of the Children of Noah arises and performs a miracle and says that God sent him, then instructs others to add to or subtract from any of the Seven Universal Laws or explains them in a way not heard at Mount Sinai, or claims that the 613 Commandments given to the Jews are not eternal, but limited to a fixed period of time, this person is deemed a false prophet and incurs the death penalty.[\[22\]](#)

21. There is an oral tradition that the Children of Noah are forbidden to interbreed animals of different species or to graft trees of different kinds,[\[23\]](#) although some authorities hold that they are permitted to do either.[\[24\]](#) However, they may wear *shaatnez* (clothing containing both wool and linen) and they may plant different seeds such as grape and wheat in the same field, which are acts forbidden to Jews. [\[25\]](#) Forbidden interbreeding and grafting are not punishable in courts of law.

22. The Sages of Israel state that Children of Ketura (the sons of Abraham's concubine, Hagar) who were born after Ishmael and Isaac must by law be circumcised. Since today the descendants of Ishmael are intermixed with the descendants of the other sons of Hagar, all are obligated to be circumcised on the eighth day after they are born. Those transgressing this are not liable for the death penalty.[\[26\]](#)

This law applies only to Semitic peoples, although all other nations are allowed to circumcise if they desire.

23. One opinion holds that only the six sons of Hagar and not their descendants were obligated to be circumcised.[\[27\]](#)

24. In accord with the Seven Universal Commandments, man is enjoined against creating any religion based on his own intellect. He either develops religion based on these Divine Laws or becomes a righteous proselyte, a Jew, and accepts all 613 commandments of the Torah.[\[28\]](#)

(Note: Concerning making holidays for themselves, Noahides may participate in the celebration of certain Jewish holidays, such as Shavuot, celebrating the Giving of the Torah, since the Children of Noah received their commandments at the same time, or Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year and Day of Judgment, since all mankind is judged by God on that day, so it should therefore be important to the Noahide as well as the Israelite. Rosh Hashanah is also the day that Adam, the First Man, was created by God, and all mankind is descended from Adam just as it is from Noah.[\[29\]](#) Even these, however, the Noahide celebrates only in order to bring additional merit and reward to himself, and he may not rest in the manner of the Jews. Moreover, the Noahide is strictly forbidden to create a new holiday that has religious significance and claim that it is part of his own religion, even if the religion is the observance of the Seven Noahide Laws. For example, it would be forbidden to make a holiday celebrating the subsiding of the waters of the Flood of Noah or anything of the like. And, all the more so, it would be forbidden to

institute holidays that ascribe religious significance to events outside the purview of the Seven Noahide Commandments. Celebrating secular activities and commemorating historical events, even if they involve a festive meal, are permissible.)

25. The nations of the world acknowledge the existence of God and they do not transgress the will of God. Their failing is an inability to be nullified to God, and they deny His Oneness by thinking that they themselves are separate entities, calling Him the God of gods. Therefore, we find that when they transgress the Seven Noahide Commandments, it is only because the spirit of folly enters them and covers the truth, concealing it from them.[\[30\]](#) But from their essential being, they are not able to transgress the Will of God. Therefore, even Balaam, the wicked prophet who had sexual relations with an animal, his ass, which is a clear transgression of the Seven Noahide Laws, said, "I am not able to transgress the word of God" (Num. 22:18).

26. The commandment to be fruitful and multiply was given to Noah, but inasmuch as it was not repeated at Mount Sinai, this commandment is not considered part of the Seven Universal Laws.[\[31\]](#) However, the Children of Noah have the obligation to make the whole earth a dwelling place for mankind.[\[32\]](#) This is minimally achieved by every couple giving birth to a male and a female child who are in turn capable of reproduction.[\[33\]](#) Moreover, the couple that bears more children is credited with bringing more spiritual goodness into the world, assuming that these children are reared in an environment of morality by fulfilling the Seven Universal Laws.

27. A Noahide who strikes an Israelite causing even a slight wound, though he is theoretically condemned for this, does not receive the death penalty.[\[34\]](#)

28. When a Noahide dies, he is to be buried in the earth, "for out of it were you taken; for you are dust and unto dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). This does not mean that the Children of Noah transgress one of the Seven Commandments by utilizing another process such as cremation or cryogenic preservation, but they will lack the atonement that burial in the earth accomplishes.[\[35\]](#)

29. By observing the Seven Universal Laws, mankind is given the means by which it can perfect itself. The individual, through these laws, has the power to refine his essential being, and can reach higher and higher without limit. For it is written, "I call heaven and earth to bear witness, that any individual, man or woman, Jew or Gentile, freeman or slave, can have the Holy Spirit bestowed upon him. It all depends on his deeds." [\[36\]](#) And it is also written, "Ultimately, all is understood: fear God and observe His commandments, for this is the completion of man" (Eccles. 12:13).

[\[1\]](#) *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 56a*

[\[2\]](#) *Encyclopedia Talmudica, The Children of Noah, volume 3, page 348*

[\[3\]](#) *The Rosh (Rabbeinu Asher), responsa number 16*

- [4]** *Babylonian Talmud, Nazir 29b*, commentary of Rashi, "And Rabbi Yose..."; *Likutei Sichot* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, volume 5, page 421
- [5]** *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings*, chapter 8, law 11
- [6]** *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Forbidden Relationships*, chapter 14, law 7
- [7]** *Ibid.*, *Laws of Kings*, chapter 10, law 10
- [8]** *Ibid.*, chapter 10, law 9 and the commentary of Radvaz on chapter 10, law 10
- [9]** *Yud-Tess Kislev Farbrengen* with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, 5745 (1984)
- [10]** *Tanya, Iggeret HaTshuvah*, chapter 1, page 90b
- [11]** *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings*, chapter 8, law 11
- [12]** *Babylonian Talmud, Baba Kamma 38a*
- [13]** *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, Laws of Conversion*, chapter 268, law 2
- [14]** *The Seven Laws of Noah*, Lichtenstein, chapter 9, page 89
- [15]** *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings*, chapter 10, law 14
- [16]** *Babylonian Talmud, Makkot 9a*, commentary of Rashi, "Therefore..."
- [17]** *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings*, chapter 10, law 1

- [18]** Commentary of Rashi on Exod. 23:7 and 21:13;
Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 37b
- [19]** *Nahal Eshkol*, Laws of Circumcision, chapter 39,
number 6
- [20]** *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 56b*, commentary of
Rabbeinu Nissim, "And He commanded him - these are the
judges"
- [21]** *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings, chapter 10, law 10
- [22]** *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Foundation of Torah,
chapter 9, law 1
- [23]** *Ibid.*, Laws of Kings, chapter 10, law 6
- [24]** *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh Deah*, chapter 297, note 3,
commentary of the *Shach*
- [25]** *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 56b*
- [26]** *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings, chapter 10, law 7, 8
- [27]** *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 59b*, commentary of
Rashi, "And if you want to say circumcision..."
- [28]** *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings, chapter 10, law 9
- [29]** *Me'am Loez*, Genesis, chapter 13, page 194
- [30]** *Sefer HaArchin Chabad*, volume 2, The Nations of the
World, chapter 1, section 3, page 269
- [31]** *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 59b*

[32] *Sefer Hahinnukh*, First Commandment

[33] *Shulchan Arukh, Even HaEzer*, chapter 1, law 5

[34] *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings*, chapter 10, law 6

[35] *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 46b

[36] *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu*, beginning of chapter 9