



THE MESSAGE OF ABRAHAM

Our universal message isn't "Be Jewish," so what is it? See how Judaism's universal concern began with Abraham and what ethical monotheism means in practice.

I. A TRADITION OF DISTINCTION VS. UNIVERSAL MISSION

In today's world, where questions of inclusion and exclusion dominate discussions, the subject of Judaism's role in the broader global landscape is highly relevant. Is Judaism a "members-only" club, exclusive to those born into it, or does it contain a universal message meant for all of humanity?



THE PASSOVER MEAL
Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, c. 1867.



EXERCISE 1.1

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents “completely universal” (i.e., open to all, with a message intended for everyone) and 5 represents “completely exclusive” (i.e., private, insular, and primarily for a select group), where would you place Judaism?

1	2	3	4	5
UNIVERSAL				EXCLUSIVE



TEXT 1A

A Kingdom of Priests

Exodus 19:3–6

וּמוֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים, וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו ה' מִן הָהָר
לֵאמֹר, כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב וְתִגִּיד לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם, וְאֲשָׂא
אֶתְכֶם עַל פְּנֵי נְשָׁרִים וְאָבֵא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי.

וְעַתָּה אִם שָׂמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְשִׁמַּרְתֶּם אֶת בְּרִיתִי,
וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֹגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים, כִּי לִי כָּל הָאָרֶץ.

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מִמְלַכְת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ.

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבֹר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Moses went up to G-d, and G-d called to him from the mountain, saying, “This is what you shall say to the House of Jacob and tell the Children of Israel:

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Me.

“And now, if you will listen to My voice and keep My covenant, you will be My treasured nation from among all the peoples, for the entire earth is Mine.

“And you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

“These are the words you shall speak to the Children of Israel.”



TEXT 1B

The Target Audience

Ibid. 20:2

אֲנִכִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים.

I am your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.



TEXT 1C

A Jewish Heritage

Deuteronomy 33:4

תּוֹרַה צְוָה לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה, מוֹרֶשֶׁה קְהֵלֵת יַעֲקֹב.

The Torah that Moses commanded us is the heritage of the community of Jacob.



TEXT 2

A Source of Pride and Resentment

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *One People?: Tradition, Modernity, and Jewish Unity* (London, U.K.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993), pp. 27–28

Jewish law imposes a code of difference. Jews are not to be “like all the nations.” Internally, this was a source of pride, expressed in Balaam’s blessing, “It is a people that dwells apart, not reckoned among the nations” (NUMBERS 23:9). Externally it was a source of resentment caught in Haman’s complaint to Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered and dispersed . . . whose laws are different from those of any other people” (ESTHER 3:8).

**RABBI LORD
JONATHAN SACKS
1948–2020**

Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom from 1991 through 2013. Rabbi Sacks attended Cambridge University and received his doctorate from King’s College, London. A prolific and influential author, his books include *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?* and *The Dignity of Difference*. He received the Jerusalem Prize in 1995 for his contributions to enhancing Jewish life in the Diaspora, was knighted and made a life peer in 2005, and became Baron Sacks of Aldgate in 2009.



TEXT 3A

Outsiders Unwelcome

Talmud, Yevamot 109b

מאי דְּכָתִיב: “רַע יִרְעֶה כִּי עָרַב זָר” (מִשְׁלֵי יא, טו)?

רַעָה אַחַר רַעָה תָּבֵא לְמִקְבְּלֵי גֵרִים.

What is the meaning of that which is written: “He who serves as a guarantor for a stranger shall suffer evil” (PROVERBS 11:15)?

This means: Evil after evil will befall those who accept converts.

BABYLONIAN TALMUD

A literary work of monumental proportions that draws upon the legal, spiritual, intellectual, ethical, and historical traditions of Judaism. The 37 tractates of the Babylonian Talmud contain the teachings of the Jewish sages from the period after the destruction of the 2nd Temple through the 5th century CE. It has served as the primary vehicle for the transmission of the Oral Law and the education of Jews over the centuries; it is the entry point for all subsequent legal, ethical, and theological Jewish scholarship.



TEXT 3B

Genuine Interest Required

Tosafot, ad loc.

רָעָה אַחַר רָעָה תָּבֹא לְמִקְבְּלֵי גֵרִים. אָמַר רַב יִצְחָק,
דְּהֵינּוּ הֵיכָא שְׂמִשְׂיָאִין אוּתָן לְהַתְגִּיר אוּ שְׂמִקְבְּלִין אוּתָן
מִיָּד. אָבֵל אִם הֵן מִתְאַמְצִין לְהַתְגִּיר יֵשׁ לָנוּ לְקַבְּלָם.

“Evil after evil will befall those who accept converts”:
Rabbi Yitzchak said: This refers to instances where
non-Jews are encouraged to convert or if they are
accepted too readily and immediately. However, if
they demonstrate a genuine and earnest effort to
embrace the faith, we are obliged to accept them.

TOSAFOT

A collection of French and German Talmudic commentaries written during the 12th and 13th centuries. Among the most famous authors of *Tosafot* are Rabbi Yaakov Tam, Rabbi Shimshon ben Avraham of Sens, and Rabbi Yitzchak (“the Ri”). Printed in almost all editions of the Talmud, these commentaries are fundamental to basic Talmudic study.



NAOMI AND RUTH

Anton Robert Leinweber,
1932 (Private Collection
/ Bridgeman Images).

II. THE BIRTH OF UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY

To better understand Judaism, let's trace its roots back to its very beginning, starting with Abraham, the first Jew. To fully appreciate the revolution he represents, we need to contrast him with Noah, the righteous figure who came before him. Specifically, we will compare Noah's response when informed of the impending Flood with Abraham's reaction when G-d revealed His plan to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.



NOAH AND THE DOVE
Illustration, North French
Hebrew Miscellany, c. 1280.



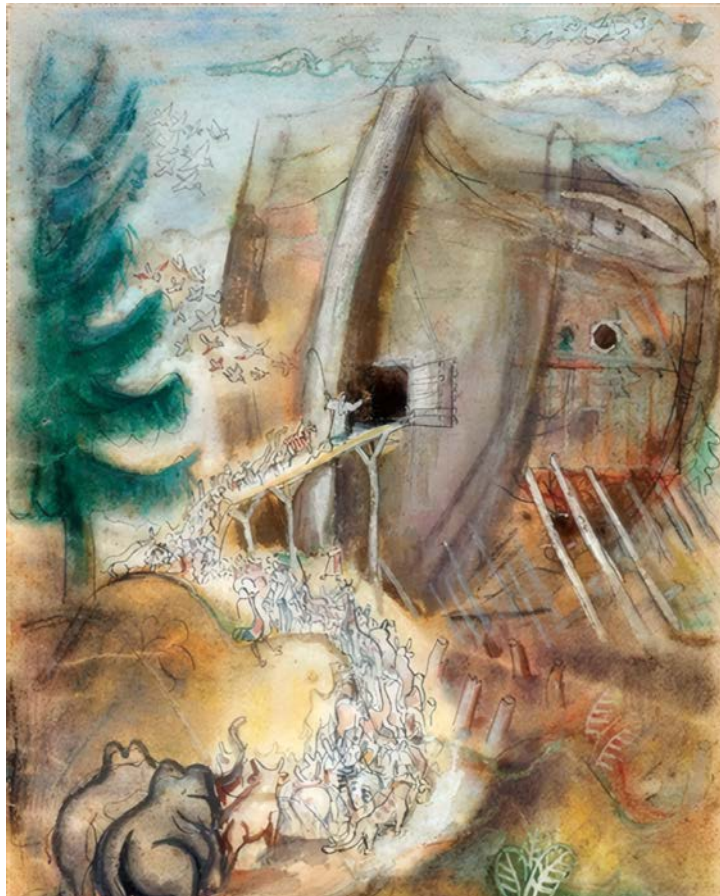
TEXT 4

Righteous and Perfect

Genesis 6:8-9

וְנֹחַ מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי ה'... נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים
הָיָה בְדוֹרֹתָיו, אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים הִתְהַלָּךְ נֹחַ.

Noah found favor in the eyes of G-d. . . .
Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his
generations. Noah walked with G-d.



NOAH'S ARK
Nachum Gutman
(1898–1980).



TEXT 5

An Audacious Showdown

Ibid. 18:20–32

וַיֹּאמֶר ה', "זַעֲקֵת סֹדִם וְעַמּוֹרָה כִּי רַבָּה, וְחַטָּאתָם
כִּי כְבֹדָה מְאֹד. אֲרִדָּה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה, הַפְּצַעְקוּתָהּ
הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ כָלָה, וְאִם לֹא אֲדַעָה" ...

וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר, "הֲאֵף תִּסְפֶּה צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע?
אוּלַּי יֵשׁ חַמְשִׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר. הֲאֵף תִּסְפֶּה וְלֹא
תִּשָּׂא לְמָקוֹם לְמַעַן חַמְשִׁים הַצְּדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּה?"

"חֲלָלָה לָּךְ מַעֲשֵׂת פִּדְבָר הַזֶּה, לְהַמִּית צְדִיק
עִם רָשָׁע, וְהָיָה כְּצְדִיק כְּרָשָׁע. חֲלָלָה לָּךְ!
הַשִּׁפּוֹט כָּל הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט?"

וַיֹּאמֶר ה', "אִם אֶמְצָא בְּסֹדִם חַמְשִׁים צְדִיקִים
בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר, וְנִשְׁפָּאתִי לְכָל הַמָּקוֹם בְּעִבּוּרָם."

וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר, "הֲנִינָה נָא הוֹאֵלֵתִי לְדַבֵּר אֶל
אַדְנִי, וְאֶנְכִי עֹפֵר וְאֶפֶר. אוּלַּי יַחְסְרוּן חַמְשִׁים הַצְּדִיקִים
חַמְשָׁה. הֲתִשְׁחִית בְּחַמְשָׁה אֶת כָּל הָעִיר?" וַיֹּאמֶר,
"לֹא אֲשַׁחֵת אִם אֶמְצָא שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וְחַמְשָׁה."

וַיִּסָּף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר, "אוּלַּי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם
אַרְבָּעִים." וַיֹּאמֶר, "לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה בְּעִבּוּר הָאֲרָבָעִים."

וַיֹּאמֶר, "אַל נָא יַחַר לֵאדְנִי וְאֲדַבְּרָה, אוּלַּי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם
שְׁלֹשִׁים." וַיֹּאמֶר, "לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה אִם אֶמְצָא שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים."

וַיֹּאמֶר, "הֲנִיָּה נָא הוֹאֲלֹתַי לְדָבָר אֶל אֲדֹנָי, אִוְלִי יִמְצְאוּן
שָׁם עֲשָׂרִים." וַיֹּאמֶר, "לֹא אֲשַׁחֲיֵת בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֲשָׂרִים."

וַיֹּאמֶר, "אַל נָא יִחַר לֵאדֹנָי וְאִדְבָּרָה אִנִּי הַפֶּעַם, אִוְלִי יִמְצְאוּן
שָׁם עֶשְׂרֵה." וַיֹּאמֶר, "לֹא אֲשַׁחֲיֵת בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֶשְׂרֵה."

G-d said to Abraham, "The outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah has grown immense, and their sin is very grave. I will descend now and see whether their actions truly match the outcry that has reached Me. If they do, I will bring destruction; if not, I will know what to do." . . .

Abraham approached [G-d] and said, "Will You also destroy the righteous together with the wicked? Perhaps there are fifty righteous people in the city. Will You still destroy it and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who live there?"

"It would be beneath You to act in such a way—to kill the righteous along with the wicked, treating both alike. Far be it from You! Shall the Judge of all the earth not act justly?"

G-d replied, "If I find fifty righteous people in Sodom, I will spare the entire region for their sake."

Abraham answered, "Behold, I have dared to speak to my L-rd, though I am but dust and

ashes. Perhaps there are five fewer than fifty. Will You destroy the whole city for lack of five?”

G-d said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five.”

Abraham continued, “Perhaps forty will be found there.”

G-d answered, “I will not act for the sake of the forty.”

Abraham said, “Please, let my L-rd’s anger not flare up as I speak. Perhaps thirty will be found there.”

G-d replied, “I will not do it if I find thirty.”

Abraham said, “Behold, I have dared to speak to my L-rd again—perhaps twenty will be found there.”

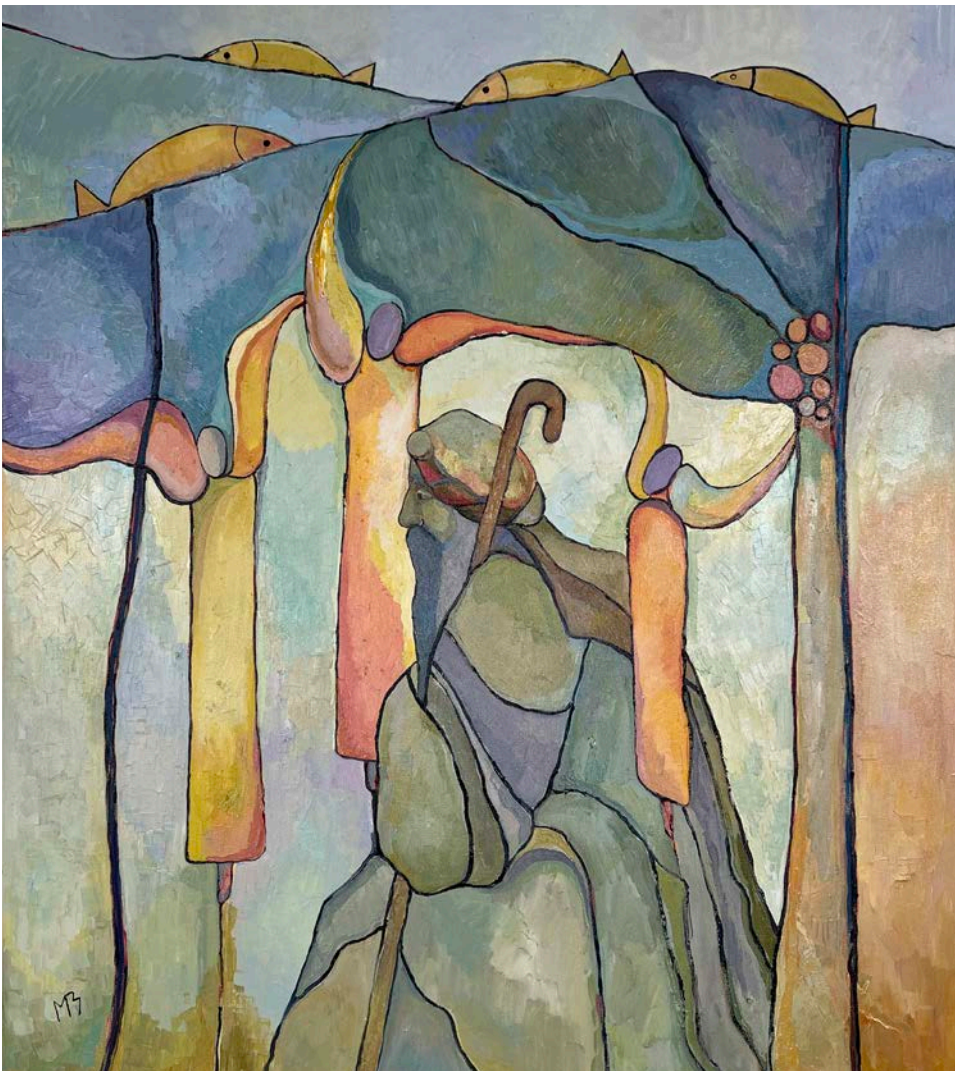
G-d said, “I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty.”

Finally, Abraham said, “Please, let my L-rd not be angered, and I will speak just once more. Perhaps ten will be found there.”

G-d responded, “I will not destroy it for the sake of ten.”

III. THE BLUEPRINT FOR A MORAL WORLD

Abraham's legacy, rooted in righteousness and justice, laid the groundwork for a moral vision meant for all of humanity. Abraham's values are a blueprint for building a just and compassionate society and are encapsulated in the Seven Noahide Laws, the ethical framework given to all of humanity.



ABRAHAM'S THREE GUESTS
Mariya Zeltsman, 2023.



TEXT 6

G-d's Love Explained

Genesis 18:19

כִּי יִדְעֵתִי לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ
אַחֲרָיו, וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט.

I love Abraham because of his commitment to guide his children and followers to follow G-d's path and uphold righteousness and justice.



LOOK NOW TOWARD HEAVEN, AND
TELL THE STARS. GENESIS XV-5

Abel Pann, 1930 (Private Collection /
Christie's Images / Bridgeman Images).



TEXT 7A

The Noahide Code

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings 9:1

עַל שְׁשֵׁה דְבָרִים נִצְטְוָה אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן: עַל עֲבוּדָה זָרָה,
וְעַל בְּרִפְתַּת הַשֵּׁם, וְעַל שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים, וְעַל גִּילּוּי עֲרִיּוֹת,
וְעַל הַגָּזֵל, וְעַל הַדֵּינִים . . . הוֹסִיף לְנַח אֲבָר מִן הַחַי.

G-d commanded Adam concerning
six matters. He forbade

- (1) idolatry,
- (2) cursing G-d,
- (3) murder,
- (4) illicit sexual relations, and
- (5) theft.

And He instructed him to

- (6) establish a judiciary. . . .

To Noah, G-d added another prohibition:

- (7) consuming a limb torn from a living animal.

**RABBI MOSHE
BEN MAIMON
(MAIMONIDES, RAMBAM)
1135–1204**

Halachist, philosopher,
author, and physician.
Maimonides was born
in Córdoba, Spain. After
the conquest of Córdoba
by the Almohads, he fled
Spain and eventually
settled in Cairo, Egypt.
There, he became the
leader of the Jewish
community and served
as court physician to
the vizier of Egypt.
He is most noted for
authoring the *Mishneh
Torah*, an encyclopedic
arrangement of
Jewish law; and for his
philosophical work,
Guide for the Perplexed.
His rulings on Jewish
law are integral to
the formation of
Halachic consensus.



TEXT 7B

A Nation of Influencers

Maimonides, *ibid.* 8:10

צֹוֹה מֹשֶׁה רִבְּנוּ מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה לְכַף אֶת כָּל בְּאֵי
הָעוֹלָם לְקַבֵּל מִצְוֹת שְׁנַצְטוּוּ בְּגֵי נַח.

Moses relayed the Divine command to ensure that all inhabitants of the world accept the Noahide laws.



INSPIRING THE MASSES
Zvi Raphaeli (1924–2005).



TEXT 8

It's Not Just Seven

Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah 416

וְאֵל תִּטְעֶה בְּנֵי בְּזֵה הַחֲשֹׁבוֹן שֶׁל שְׁבַע מִצְוֹת בְּנֵי
נַח הַיְדוּעַ וְהַמוֹזְכָּר בַּתְּלֻמוּד, כִּי בְּאִמַּת שְׂאוֹתָן שְׁבַע
הֵן כְּעֵין כְּלָלוֹת, אֲבָל יֵשׁ בָּהֶן פְּרָטִים הַרְבֵּה.
כְּמוֹ שֶׁאַתָּה מוֹצֵא שְׂאִיסוּר הָעֲרִיּוֹת נֶחֱשָׁב לָהֶם דָּרוֹ כְּלָל
לְמִצְוָה אַחַת, וְיֵשׁ בָּהּ פְּרָטִים . . . וְכֵן עֲנִין עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה כּוֹלוֹ
נֶחֱשָׁב לָהֶם מִצְוָה אַחַת, וְיֵשׁ בָּהּ כְּפֹה וְכַמָּה פְּרָטִים . . .
וְכִמוֹ כֵּן נֹאמֵר, אַחֵר שֶׁהוֹזְהָרוּ בְּעֲנִין הַגָּזֵל שֶׁהוֹזְהָרוּ גַם
כֵּן בְּכָל הַרְחֻקוֹתָיו . . . וּבְכָלֵל הַהֲרַחְקָה שֶׁלֹּא לַחֲמוּד.

Do not be misled by the number seven when it comes to the Noahide laws, even though this number is well known and cited in the Talmud. These seven laws are not seven isolated commands but seven broad categories encompassing many specific laws.

For instance, the prohibition of illicit sexual relations is counted as one Noahide law, yet it includes many distinct prohibitions. . . . Likewise, the prohibition of idolatry is a single law that contains numerous details . . . and the prohibition of theft covers all conduct that leads to theft . . . such as coveting.

SEFER HACHINUCH

A work on the biblical commandments. Four aspects of every *mitzvah* are discussed in this work: the definition of the *mitzvah*; ethical lessons that can be deduced from the *mitzvah*; basic laws pertaining to the observance of the *mitzvah*; and who is obligated to perform the *mitzvah*, and when. The work was composed in the 13th century by an anonymous author who refers to himself as “the Levite of Barcelona.”



TEXT 9

Righteous Gentiles

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings 8:11

כָּל הַמְקַבֵּל שִׁבְעַת מִצְוֹת וְנִזְהָר לַעֲשׂוֹתָן הֲרִי זוֹ
מִחֲסִידֵי אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם, וְיֵשׁ לוֹ חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

Anyone who accepts these seven laws and observes them is counted among the righteous of the nations and has a share in the World to Come.



TEXT 10

Core Torah Principles

Rabbi Menachem Me'iri, Sanhedrin 59a

כָּל שֶׁהוּא עוֹסֵק בְּעֵקֶרֵי שִׁבְעַת מִצְוֹת וּבִפְרִטֵיהֶן
וּבִמְהָ שִׁיּוּצָא מֵהֶן . . . שְׂרׁוּב גּוּפֵי תוֹרָה נִכְלָלִים
בָּהֶן, מְכַבְּדִין אוֹתוֹ אֶפְלוּ כִּלְהֵן גְּדוֹל.

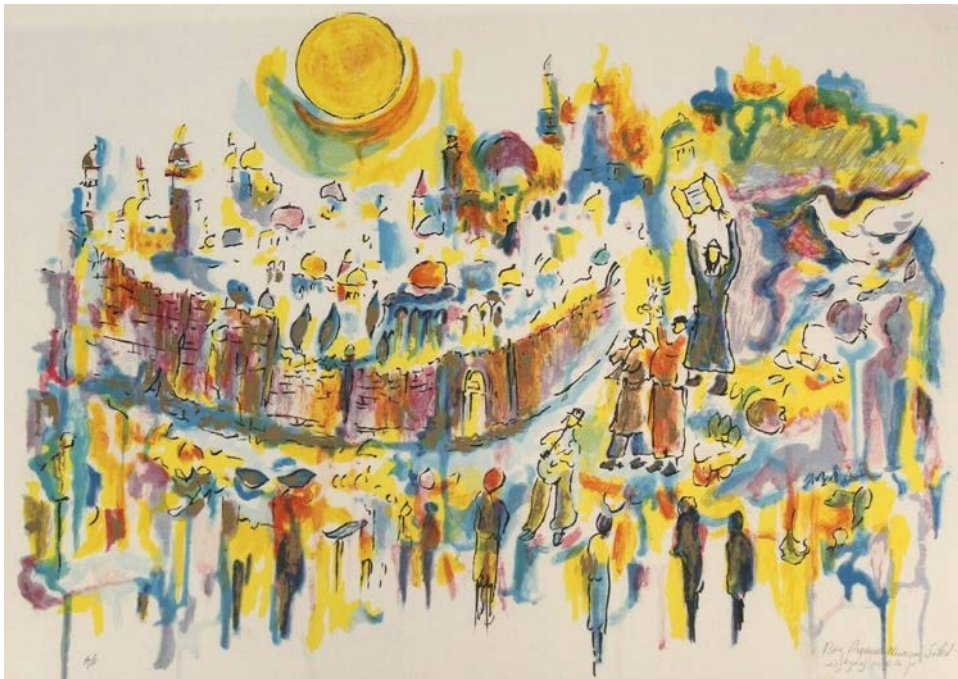
Anyone who engages in the study of the Seven Noahide Laws, their principles, their details, and their applications . . . in which most of the Torah's core teachings are contained, is worthy of great honor, even as much as the High Priest himself.

RABBI MENACHEM ME'IRI
1249-1310

Talmudist and author. Me'iri was born in Provence, France. His monumental work, *Beit Habechirah*, summarizes in a lucid style the discussions of the Talmud along with the commentaries of the major subsequent rabbis. Despite its stature, the work was largely unknown for many generations, and thus has had less influence on subsequent Halachic development.

IV. THE WORLD BEFORE AND AFTER ABRAHAM

Abraham's monotheism had a transformative impact on the paganistic world he was born into. This belief reshaped not only his own life and that of his descendants but also the course of history. Remarkably, Abraham's message remains as relevant today as ever, and it challenges us to always be aware of the true One behind all that exists.



Untitled, Ben Avraham Nhamani.



TEXT 11A

The Wondering Youth

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry 1:3

כִּיּוֹן שֶׁנִּגְמַל אֵיתָן זֶה הַתְּחִיל לְשׁוֹטֵט בְּדַעְתּוֹ וְהוּא
 קָטָן וְהַתְּחִיל לַחֲשֹׁב בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה . . . וְלֹא הָיָה לוֹ
 מְלִמָּד וְלֹא מוֹדִיעַ דְּבַר אֶלָּא מִשְׁקַע בְּאוֹר פְּשָׁדִים בֵּין
 עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים הַטְּפָשִׁים וְאָבִיו וְאָמוֹ וְכָל הָעָם עוֹבְדֵי
 כּוֹכָבִים, וְהוּא עוֹבֵד עִמָּהֶם וְלִבּוֹ מְשׁוֹטֵט וּמְבִין.
 עַד שֶׁהַשִּׁיג דָּרוֹ הָאֵמֶת וְהִבִּין קוֹ הַצֶּדֶק מִתְּבוּנָתוֹ
 הַנְּכוֹנָה. וַיֵּדַע שֶׁיֵּשׁ שָׁם אֱלֹהִים אֶחָד . . . וְהוּא בָּרָא
 הַכֹּל, וְאֵין בְּכָל הַנִּמְצָא אֱלֹהִים חוּץ מִמֶּנּוּ.

As soon as Abraham, this mighty soul, was weaned, he began to think on his own. Even as a young child, his mind would wander and question, by day and by night. . . . He had no teacher and no one to guide him. He was mired among the foolish idol worshippers of Ur Kasdim. His father, his mother, and everyone around him served idols, and he too would join them. Yet his heart kept searching and his mind kept probing.

Eventually, he discovered the true path and, through his own sound reasoning, grasped what was right. He came to understand that there must be one G-d . . . Who created everything, and that among all that exists, there is no other G-d but Him.



TEXT 11B

Managing the Idol Store

Midrash, *Bereshit Rabah* 38:13

תָּרַח עוֹבֵד צְלָמִים הָיָה, חַד זְמַן נָפִיק לְאַתָּר,
 הוֹשִׁיב לְאַבְרָהָם מוֹכֵר תַּחְתָּיו. הָיָה אָתִי בַר
 אֵינֶשׁ בְּעֵי דִיזְבוּ, וְהָיָה אָמַר לֵיהּ בַר כַּמָּה שָׁנִין
 אָתָּ? וְהָיָה אָמַר לֵיהּ בַר חֲמִשִּׁין אוֹ שְׁתַּיִן.
 וְהָיָה אָמַר לֵיהּ, "וַי לֵיהּ לְהֵהוּא גִבְרָא דִּהְוָה בַר שְׁתַּיִן
 וּבְעֵי לְמִסְגָּד לְבַר יוֹמִי", וְהָיָה מִתְבַּיֵּשׁ וְהוֹלֵךְ לוֹ.
 חַד זְמַן אָתָּא חַד אֲתָתָא טְעִינָא בְּיַדָּהּ חֲדָא פִּינָה
 דְּסֻלְתָּ. אָמְרָהּ לֵיהּ, "הָא לָךְ קָרִב קְדָמִיהוֹן". קָם
 נָסִיב בּוּקְלָסָא בְּיַדָּהּ, וְתַבְרִינוּן לְכַלְהוֹן פְּסִילָיָא,
 וַיְהִיב בּוּקְלָסָא בְּיַדָּא דְרַבָּה דִּהְוָה בְּיַנְיָהוֹן.
 פִּינָן דְּאָתָּא אָבוּהָ אָמַר לֵיהּ, "מָאן עָבִיד לְהוֹן פְּדִין?"
 אָמַר לֵיהּ, "מָה נְכַפּוֹר מִינָךְ? אָתָתָּ חֲדָא אֲתָתָּ
 טְעִינָא לָהּ חֲדָא פִּינָה דְּסֻלְתָּ, וְאָמְרָת לִי הָא לָךְ קָרִיב
 קְדָמִיהוֹן. קָרִיבִת לְקְדָמִיהוֹן הָוָה, דִּין אָמַר, 'אָנָּא
 אֵיכּוֹל קְדָמָאִי, וְדִין אָמַר, 'אָנָּא אֵיכּוֹל קְדָמָאִי'. קָם
 הִדִּין רַבָּה דִּהְוָה בְּיַנְיָהוֹן נָסִב בּוּקְלָסָא וְתַבְרִינוּן."
 אָמַר לֵיהּ, "מָה אָתָּה מִפְּלָה בִּי? וַיִּדְעִין אֵינּוּן?"
 אָמַר לֵיהּ, "וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אֲזַנֶּיךָ מָה שְׁפִיךְ אוֹמֵר?"

Terah was an idol maker and salesman. He once went out and left Abraham in charge

BERESHIT RABAH

An early rabbinic commentary on the book of Genesis. This Midrash bears the name of Rabbi Oshiya Rabah (Rabbi Oshiya "the Great"), whose teaching opens this work. This Midrash provides textual exegeses and stories, expounds upon the biblical narrative, and develops and illustrates moral principles. Produced by the sages of the Talmud in the Land of Israel, its use of Aramaic closely resembles that of the Jerusalem Talmud. It was first printed in Constantinople in 1512 together with 4 other Midrashic works on the other 4 books of the Pentateuch.

of the shop. People would come in to buy idols, and Abraham would question them.

“How old are you?” he’d ask.

“Fifty,” or “Sixty,” they would reply.

“You poor fellow!” Abraham would exclaim.

“Imagine that, a man of sixty bowing down to something made yesterday!” Embarrassed, the customers would turn around and leave.

A woman came in carrying a bowl of fine flour.

“Here,” she said, “offer this before them.” Abraham took a stick, smashed all the idols, and placed the stick in the hands of the largest one.

When Terah returned [and saw the destruction], he demanded, “Who did this to my idols?”

“I must be honest with you,” Abraham replied. “A woman brought an offering of flour. When I set it before them, they started fighting. One said, ‘I’ll eat first!’ and another said, ‘No, I will!’ The biggest one got angry, grabbed the stick, and smashed them all.”

“Are you mocking me?” Terah cried. “You know they can’t think or move!”

Abraham answered, “Listen to your own words. . . .”



TEXT 11C

The Great Influencer

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry 1:3

כִּי־נִזְכָּר וְיָדַע, הִתְחִיל לְהַשִּׁיב תְּשׁוּבוֹת עַל בְּנֵי אֹר
כְּשֵׁדִים וְלַעֲרָף דִּין עִמָּהֶם, וְלֹאמַר שֶׁאֵין זֶה דַּרְךְ הָאֱמֻנָה
שֶׁאַתֶּם הוֹלְכִים בָּהּ . . . כִּי־נִזְכָּר וְיָדַע, הִתְחִיל לְהַשִּׁיב תְּשׁוּבוֹת עַל בְּנֵי אֹר
כְּשֵׁדִים וְלַעֲרָף דִּין עִמָּהֶם, וְלֹאמַר שֶׁאֵין זֶה דַּרְךְ הָאֱמֻנָה
שֶׁאַתֶּם הוֹלְכִים בָּהּ . . . כִּי־נִזְכָּר וְיָדַע, הִתְחִיל לְהַשִּׁיב תְּשׁוּבוֹת עַל בְּנֵי אֹר
כְּשֵׁדִים וְלַעֲרָף דִּין עִמָּהֶם, וְלֹאמַר שֶׁאֵין זֶה דַּרְךְ הָאֱמֻנָה

וְהִתְחִיל לְעַמֵּד וְלִקְרֹא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל לְכָל הָעוֹלָם,
וְלִהְיוֹת דִּבְעָם שֶׁיֵּשׁ שֵׁם אֱלֹהִים אֶחָד לְכָל הָעוֹלָם,
וְלֹא רֵאוּי לְעַבֵּד. וְהָיָה מְהֵלָּה וְקוֹרֵא וּמְקַבֵּץ
הָעָם מֵעִיר לְעִיר וּמִמְּלָכָה לְמִמְּלָכָה . . .

וְכִי־נִזְכָּר וְיָדַע, הִתְחִיל לְהַשִּׁיב תְּשׁוּבוֹת עַל בְּנֵי אֹר
כְּשֵׁדִים וְלַעֲרָף דִּין עִמָּהֶם, וְלֹאמַר שֶׁאֵין זֶה דַּרְךְ הָאֱמֻנָה
שֶׁאַתֶּם הוֹלְכִים בָּהּ . . . כִּי־נִזְכָּר וְיָדַע, הִתְחִיל לְהַשִּׁיב תְּשׁוּבוֹת עַל בְּנֵי אֹר
כְּשֵׁדִים וְלַעֲרָף דִּין עִמָּהֶם, וְלֹאמַר שֶׁאֵין זֶה דַּרְךְ הָאֱמֻנָה

Once Abraham recognized and understood the truth, he began to challenge the people of Ur Kasdim, debating with them and showing that their way was false. . . . When his arguments prevailed, the king sought to put him to death, but a miracle occurred, and Abraham escaped to Haran.

There, he began to call out with a mighty voice to all humanity, teaching that there is one G-d, and that He alone is worthy of worship. He would travel from city to city and from kingdom

to kingdom, proclaiming this message and gathering followers wherever he went. . . .

As people assembled around him and questioned his ideas, Abraham would explain according to their understanding, guiding them step by step until they came to recognize the truth. In time, thousands and tens of thousands joined him: these were “the people of the house of Abraham” (GENESIS 17:23), in whose hearts he firmly planted the great principle of faith.



TEXT 12

Hebrew on One Side

Midrash, *Bereshit Rabah* 42:8

... וַיִּגַּד לְאַבְרָם הָעֵבֶרִי (בְּרֵאשִׁית יד, יג) . . .

רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אָמַר: כָּל הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלוֹ
מֵעֵבֶר אֶחָד וְהוּא מֵעֵבֶר אֶחָד.

“A fugitive reported to Abram the Hebrew [that Lot had been taken captive]” (GENESIS 14:13). . . .

Rabbi Yehudah said: [Abraham is called “the Hebrew”] because the entire world was on one side, and he was on the other.



QUESTION

Why does Judaism place such an emphasis on there being *one* G-d? How does this simplify or complicate our understanding of the world and our place in it?



TEXT 13

How G-d Was Replaced by Wood and Stone

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry 1:2

וּפְשֹׁט דָּבָר זֶה בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם לַעֲבֹד אֶת הַצּוּרוֹת בְּעִבּוּדוֹת
מִשְׁנוֹת זוֹ מִזֹּו וּלְהַקְרִיב לָהֶם וּלְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת.

וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁאָרְכוּ הַיָּמִים, נִשְׁתַּפַּח הַשֵּׁם הַנִּכְבָּד וְהַנּוֹרָא
מִפִּי כָּל הַיְקוּם וּמִדַּעְתָּם וְלֹא הִפְרִיחוּהוּ, וְנִמְצְאוּ כָּל עַם
הָאָרֶץ הַנְּשִׂיִם וְהַקְּטָנִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים אֵלֶּא הַצּוּרָה שֶׁל
עֵץ וְשֶׁל אֶבֶן וְהַיִּכָּל שֶׁל אֲבָנִים שֶׁנִּתְחַנְּכוּ מִקְּטָנוּתָם
לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לָהּ וּלְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְהַשְׁבִּיעַ בְּשָׁמָה.

וְהַחֲכָמִים שֶׁהָיוּ בָהֶם, כְּגוֹן כְּהֵנִיָּהֶם וְכִיּוֹצֵא
בָהֶן, מִדְּמִין שֶׁאֵין שָׁם אֵלֹהֵי אֵלֶּא הַכּוֹכָבִים
וְהַגְּלָגְלִים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ הַצּוּרוֹת הָאֵלוּ בַּגְּלָלָם.

Idolatrous practice spread throughout the world. People worshipped images in every possible way, offering sacrifices to them and bowing before them.

As the years passed, the honored and awesome Name was forgotten, and none recognized Him. The entire populace—women and children included—knew nothing other than the forms of wood and stone and the temples of masonry. From their earliest youth they were trained to bow to these images, to serve them, and to swear by their names.

Even the scholars and priests among them imagined that there was no god other than the stars and the heavenly spheres, for whose sake these images had been fashioned.



Abraham destroys the idols of his father. Illustration, *Herlingen Haggadah*, Vienna, 1725.



EXERCISE 1.2

Identify examples in today’s world where people make the same fundamental error as early idolaters—placing ultimate trust, fear, or dependence on something that is merely a means or intermediary, rather than the true Source.

1.

2.

3.



PRIVATE REFLECTIONS

Take a few minutes to write down any thoughts, feelings, or realizations that come to mind as you reflect on the following two questions. Don’t rush: this is your time to think deeply and honestly about how monotheism relates to your own life.

What is my “idol of choice”: something specific in my life that I rely on more than I should?

How would my life change if I internalized the idea that there is only one G-d, only one power, and everything else in my life is a tool, an intermediary, or a blessing from Him?

**TEXT 14A**

From Chaos . . .

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *A Letter in the Scroll*
(New York: Free Press, 2009), pp. 66–67

There were many gods. They fought, struggled, and established hierarchies of dominance, slowly establishing order out of chaos.

We have many records of those ancient times, and though the names of the gods change—depending on whether we speak of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Canaan or ancient Greece—the stories are remarkably similar. The god of the sky does battle with the god of the sea, and out of his victory establishes dry land, usually over the dead body of his slain victim. The god of the lightning and rain impregnates the goddess of the earth, and thus crops grow and the land brings forth its produce. . . .

The ancient world was one in which order was constantly threatened by chaos, at times in the form of floods and droughts, at others by war from invading tribes. Through the stories they told, they explained to themselves why this is so. Disturbances here reflect more ultimate struggles elsewhere, between the gods.



TEXT 14B

... to OrderRabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *ibid.*, p. 73

The account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis is stunningly original, quite unlike any other in antiquity. . . . There are no contending forces, no battles of the gods, no capricious spirits. G-d speaks, and the universe comes into being. G-d is not in nature but above it, transcending it and ordering it according to His word. Nature has no will, or set of wills of its own.



TEXT 15

Trust and Serenity

Psalms 23:1–2, 4

מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד:

ה' רֹעִי, לֹא אֶחְסָר.

בְּנֵאוֹת דְּשָׂא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי, עַל מֵי מְנַחֹת יִנְהַלֵּנִי . . .

גַּם כִּי אֵלֶךְ בְּגֵיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא אִירָא רָע, כִּי אַתָּה עִמָּדִי.

A song by David:

G-d is my shepherd; I will not lack.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside still waters. . . .

PSALMS

Biblical book. The book of Psalms contains 150 psalms expressing praise for G-d, faith in G-d, and laments over tragedies. The primary author of the psalms was King David, who lived in the 9th century BCE. Psalms also contains material from earlier figures. The feelings and circumstances expressed in the psalms resonate throughout the generations, and they have become an important part of communal and personal prayer.

Even when I walk in the valley of death's
shadow, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.



TEXT 16

Confidence and No Fear

Isaiah 12:2

הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָתִי, אֶבְטַח וְלֹא אֶפְחָד
כִּי עֲזָרִי וְזִמְרַת יְיָ ה', וַיְהִי לִי לִישׁוּעָה.

Indeed! G-d is my deliverance. I am
confident and I will not be afraid.

For G-d is my strength and my song,
and He has been my salvation.

ISAIAH

Biblical book. The book of Isaiah contains the prophecies of Isaiah, who lived in the 7th–6th centuries BCE. Isaiah's prophecies contain stern rebukes for the personal failings of the contemporary people of Judea and the corruption of its government. The bulk of the prophecies, however, are stirring consolations and poetic visions of the future Redemption.

V. CURSING G-D

The prohibition against cursing G-d might seem trivial at first glance but is deeply rooted in the essence of monotheism. Denying G-d's goodness strikes at the heart of a meaningful, ordered universe.



SHTETL VORTEX
Chaim Goldberg, 1995.



TEXT 17A

Righteous and Benevolent

Psalms 145:9, 17

טוב ה' לכל, ורחמייו על כל מעשיו . . .

צדיק ה' בכל דרכיו, וחסיד בכל מעשיו.

G-d is good to all, and His compassion is upon all His creations. . . .

G-d is righteous in all His ways, and benevolent in all His deeds.



TEXT 17B

Fair and Just

Deuteronomy 10:17-18

כי ה' אלקיכם הוא אלקי האלקים ואדני האדנים, האל הגדל הגבר והנורא אשר לא ישא פנים ולא יקח שחד.

עשה משפט יתום ואלמנה, ואהב גר לתת לו לחם ושמלה.

For your G-d is the G-d of gods and the L-rd of lords, the great, mighty, and awe-inspiring G-d, Who shows no favoritism and takes no bribes.

He carries out justice for the orphan and the widow, and He loves the stranger, giving them bread and clothing.

VI. FROM CHOSENNESS TO RESPONSIBILITY

We are now ready for a fresh perspective on the concept of Jewish “chosenness,” one that is less about exclusivity and more about responsibility. This responsibility is at the core of Jewish identity, and it calls upon us to teach and exemplify a higher moral standard that can connect all people to G-d.



MITZVAH TRAIN
Michael Muchnik (b. 1952).



TEXT 18

A Nation of Spiritual Mentors

Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno, Exodus 19:6

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מִמְּלַכֶּת כֹּהֲנִים:

וּבְזֶה תִּהְיוּ סְגוּלָה מִכֶּלֶם, כִּי תִהְיוּ מִמְּלַכֶּת כֹּהֲנִים
לְהִבִּין וּלְהוֹרֹת לְכָל הַמִּין הָאָנוּשִׁי "לְקִרְוֵא כֶּלֶם
בְּשֵׁם ה' וּלְעַבְדוֹ שְׂכֵם אֶחָד" (צְפַנְיָה ג, ט).

“And you will be for Me a kingdom
of priests” (EXODUS 19:6):

You will be a unique treasure to Me in the sense
that you will be a kingdom of priests, [whose
mission is] to guide and teach the entire human
race “to call upon the name of G-d and to serve
Him with one purpose” (ZEPHANIAH 3:9).

RABBI OVADIAH SFORNO
C. 1475–C. 1550

Bible commentator
and philosopher.
Born in Cesena, Italy,
Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno
complemented his
Torah studies with
a medical doctorate
from the university of
Ferrara. He served as
a prominent rabbinic
figure in Rome—where
he was a Hebrew tutor
for German humanist
Johannes Reuchlin—and
lived his final years in
Bologna. Rabbi Ovadiah
is best known for his
Bible commentary,
known as *Sforno*; and for
Or Amim (Light of the
Nations), a philosophical
work challenging
Aristotelian philosophy.



TEXT 19A

A Light unto the Nations

Isaiah 42:6

אֲנִי ה' קָרָאתִיךָ בְּצַדִּיק וְאַחֲזַק בְּיָדֶךָ, וְאַצְרִיךָ
וְאַתְּנֶנּוּ לְבְרִית עִם לְאוֹר גּוֹיִם.

I, G-d, have called you with righteousness;
I will strengthen your hand. I will protect
you, and I will set you as a covenant for all
people and a light unto the nations.



TEXT 19B

Teaching the Noahide Laws

Rabbi David Kimchi, ad loc.

וְכֵן תִּהְיֶה גַם כֵּן לְאֹר גוֹיִם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר: "וְהָלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאוֹרְךָ" (יְשַׁעְיָה ס, ג), וְהָאֹר הוּא הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁתֵּצֵא לָהֶם מִצִּיּוֹן.

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיוּ קִיּוֹם הָאוֹמוֹת . . . כִּי בְסִבַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיוּ הַגּוֹיִם שׁוֹמְרִים שְׁבַע מִצְוֹת, וְיֵלְכוּ בְדַרְךְ טוֹבָה, כְּמוֹ: "וְיִזְרְנוּ מִדְרָכָיו וְנִלְכָה בְּאוֹרְחוֹתָיו וְגו'" (יְשַׁעְיָה ב, ג).

The Jewish people are destined to be a light unto the nations, as the verse states, "Nations will go by your light" (ISAIAH 60:3). This refers to the light of the Torah, which will issue forth to them from Zion.

The Jewish people will be the cause of the sustenance of the nations of the world . . . through guiding them to observe the Seven Noahide Laws and to walk in the proper path, as the verse states, "[Multitudes of nations will go to each other and tell one another, 'Come! Let us ascend to the mountain of G-d, to the Temple of the G-d of Jacob.] He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths'" (ISAIAH 2:3).

**RABBI DAVID KIMCHI
(RADAK)
1160-1235**

Provençal medieval grammarian and biblical exegete. Rabbi Kimchi wrote a comprehensive exposition of Hebrew grammar called *Michlol*, and *Sefer Hashborashim*, a dictionary of the Bible.

KEY POINTS

- 1 Judaism appears exclusive because the Torah frames the Jewish people as a distinct nation with a unique covenant. Yet this separateness is only part of the picture. The story of Abraham shows that Judaism includes a universal moral mission for all humanity.
- 2 Abraham differed from Noah by caring about the fate of all people, not only his own family. His bold advocacy for Sodom reveals that Judaism begins with care for the world, not isolation.
- 3 G-d chose Abraham because he taught others to live by righteousness and justice and the values contained in the Seven Noahide Laws. Jews are commanded to teach these laws, and anyone who observes them earns the title “righteous among the nations” with a share in the World to Come.
- 4 Monotheism—the first of the seven laws—revolutionized human thought by replacing a chaotic world of competing forces with one Creator and one coherent moral order. Modern materialism repeats ancient errors by attributing power to intermediaries rather than the true Source.

- 5 Cursing G-d—the second of the seven laws—is prohibited because it undermines the core of monotheism. It denies G-d's goodness, collapsing the trust on which a meaningful, ordered universe depends.
- 6 Chosenness is not about superiority, but *responsibility*. The Jewish mission is to safeguard and share a universal moral framework for all humankind.



The Noahide Laws

The Seven Noahide Laws (*Sheva Mitzvot Benei Noach*) represent the universal moral code that Judaism teaches is incumbent upon all humankind. These principles are categories that encompass detailed laws and are considered relevant to every culture and civilization.

Judaism maintains that G-d, as the supreme Creator and Architect of the universe, constituted laws for all humans and delivered them to the first mortal, Adam. G-d later expanded them for Noah.

The Talmud identifies these obligations:

The descendants of Noah were commanded to observe seven laws (mitzvot): to establish courts of judgment, not to curse the name of G-d, not to practice idolatry, not to engage in forbidden sexual relations, not to murder, not to steal, and not to eat a limb from a living creature.

Talmud, Sanhedrin 56a

Why are these laws referred to as “Noahide” laws?

All humans are descended from Adam, but the universal laws are not labeled “The Adamite Laws,” because his set of Divine commands was slightly different. He was prohibited from eating meat and prohibited from eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. After the Flood, G-d permitted meat to Noah and his descendants. And by then, the prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge was no longer relevant.

Rabbi Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad (d. 1909), *Ben Yehoyada*, ad loc.

The Jews received a clear tradition regarding the Noahide laws from G-d, as taught through Moses—orally, not written in the Torah (although the Talmud identifies a Torah passage [Genesis 2:16–17] that transmits these laws in an encoded format).

ZOOMING IN:

A CLOSER PEEK AT THE NOAHIDE PRINCIPLES



Idolatry

CORRECT IMPRESSION

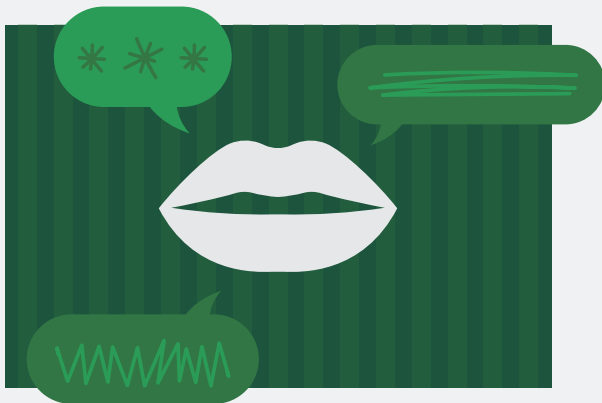
If one walks in front of an idol and drops an item, or their shoelace unties, or the like—they should not bend down to retrieve the item or resolve the issue. Rather, they should sit down on the floor to resolve the issue and then stand and walk off. Otherwise, they may lend the impression that they are bowing to an idol.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry 3:7

BELIEF IN G-D

The prohibition includes not believing that there are beings or forces not totally dependent on G-d and His Providence. Just as when one drives a nail with a hammer, the agent of activity may seem to be the hammer, but it is actually the hand that holds it and the energy used by the hand—so is everything physical and spiritual entirely subject to G-d and His will.

Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet, in Rabbi Moshe Weiner, *The Divine Code*, Part III, Introduction



Cursing G-d

REVERENCE

Cursing G-d is an act of defiance intended to undermine respect and reverence for G-d. The law thereby implies a duty to revere G-d. Therefore, included in this prohibition are acts such as uttering an oath that is false in G-d's name.

Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet, in Rabbi Moshe Weiner, *The Divine Code*, Part III, Introduction

REMARKABLE CAUTION

The extent to which we must be careful what we say about G-d is apparent in the traditional Jewish term, as used in the above Talmudic discussion, to refer to a person who curses their Creator: *Birkat Hashem*, literally, "Blessing the Name." In this phrase, G-d is referred to reverently as Hashem, "The Name," while the prohibited action is referred to euphemistically using its opposite: blessing.



Forbidden relations

CONSTRUCT VS. DESTRUCT

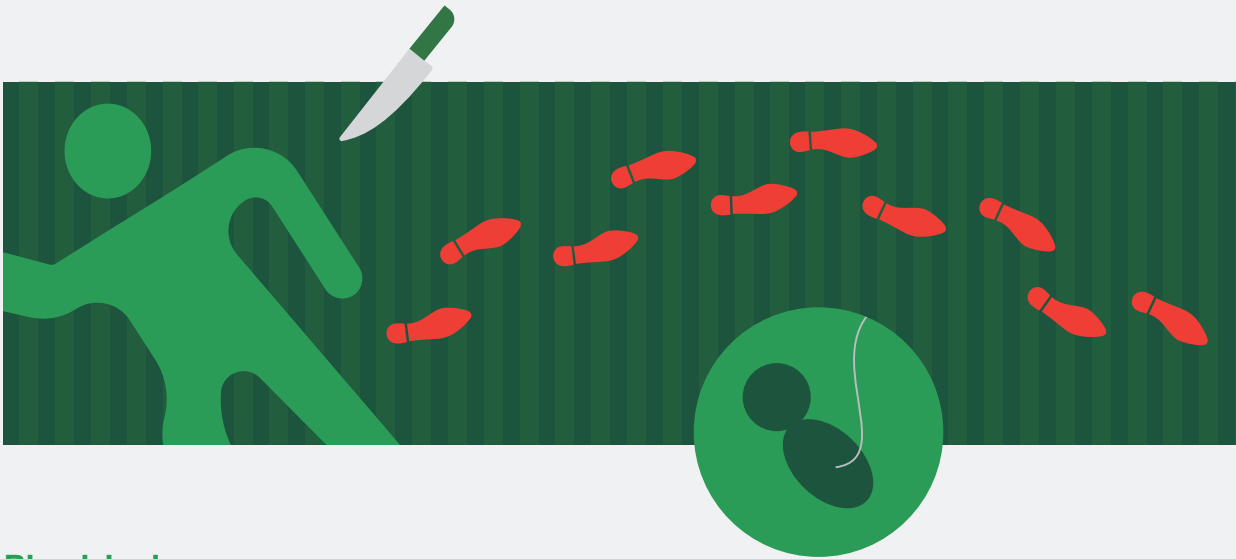
Incest, adultery, and homosexual relations are forbidden. The family unit is the foundation of human society. Sexuality is the fountain of life and so nothing is more holy than the sexual act. So, too, when abused, nothing can be more debasing and destructive to the human being.

"The 7 Noahide Laws," Chabad.org

PRO-MARRIAGE

G-d's words, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24), reveal that it is natural and appropriate for a man to marry a woman and establish a family. One who deviates from this path acts contrary to what G-d intended for mankind.

Rabbi Moshe Weiner, *The Divine Code*, Part VI



Bloodshed

DIVINE IMAGE

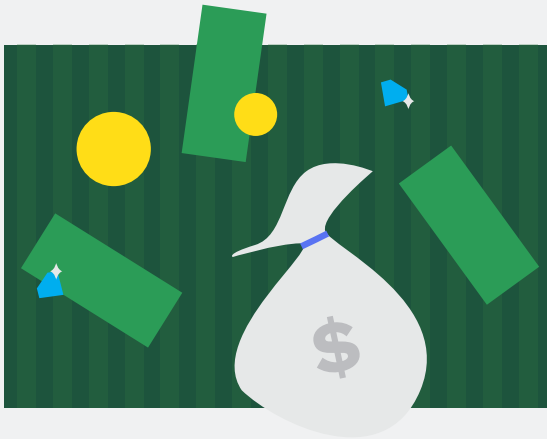
Mankind was created “in the image of G-d,” and therefore possesses a dimension of holiness. Taking a human life diminishes a measure of the Divine image that is present in the world, and without G-d’s permission it is strictly forbidden. Furthermore, murder is an act of extreme rebellion against G-d Himself, Who blessed mankind “to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28), and “He did not create it for emptiness; He fashioned it to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18).

Dr. Michael Schulman, in Rabbi Moshe Weiner, *The Divine Code*, Part V, Introduction

FETUS

The prohibition extends to killing a fetus, for G-d commanded: “One who sheds the blood of a person, through a person [*ba-adam*] their blood shall be shed” (Genesis 9:6). Now the word *ba-adam* literally means “within a person”—so that the verse may be read: One who sheds the blood of a person-within-a-person.” That is: a fetus in its mother’s womb. However, a pregnant woman whose own life is at risk because of her pregnancy is permitted to have an abortion.

Talmud, Sanhedrin 57b; Maimonides, Kings 9:4; Rabbi M. Weiner, *The Divine Code*, Part V



Theft

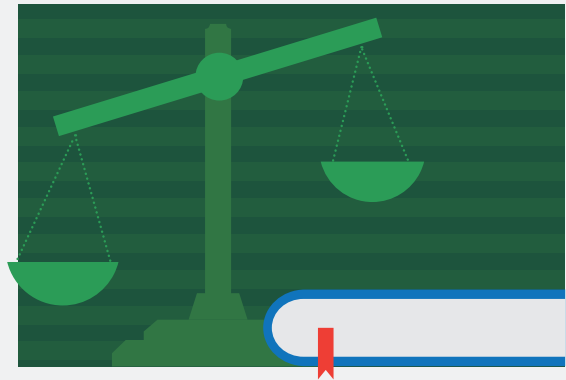
AN ANCIENT CASE

Abraham challenged a Philistine king on the basis of this universal law: “Then Abraham reproached Abimelech over the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had stolen” (Genesis 21:25). The offenders claimed rights to a well they did not dig, and Abimelech was forced to explain an apparent breach of universal law.

ANY AND ALL

The prohibition applies to a theft of even the smallest value, and it includes acts such as abducting people, refusing to pay earned wages, and the like.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings 9:9



Justice

FULL COVERAGE

Just as the Jewish people are commanded to establish courts in each province and in each individual city, so are the descendants of Noah commanded to establish courts in each province and in each individual city.

Talmud, Sanhedrin 56b

CIVIL SPECTRUM

Maimonides considers this law a mandate for courts to both enforce and actively promote the observance of the other six Noahide Laws. I, however, consider it far more than that: It embraces the full gamut of civil laws, from disputed wages to sexual seduction, and from loan disputes to personal injury—parallel to the Jewish system of Torah-based courts.

Nachmanides, Genesis 34:13



Eating the limb of a living animal

AVOID CRUELTY

Until Noah, creatures could be used for work, but not for food. Only after Noah personally cared for the creatures throughout the Flood, were they permitted for food: “Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; just as you may eat the green herbage, I give you all these as well” (Genesis 9:3). With this permission came a prohibition whose purpose was to convey that inflicting needless suffering is forbidden, even for the sake of procuring food.

Rabbi David Kimchi, Genesis 9:4

PURPOSEFUL LIFE

“Do not eat meat while its soul is still within it” (Genesis 9:4)—if we wish to eat meat, we must wait until the entire animal has died before removing one of its limbs for consumption. We are not permitted to cause unnecessary suffering to any creature.

But we must look deeper, into the spirit of the words: that we must respect the life and function of whatever we consume. And that is only sustainable when we recognize that all life is purposeful because it is the work of a single, deliberate and purposeful consciousness.

Rabbi Tzvi Freeman, “Seven Laws for a Beautiful Planet: The Noahide Tradition,” Chabad.org

