

Do Jews Have a Mitzvah to Influence the Values of American Society?



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1. Dovid Lichtenstein, *Headlines 2: Halachic Debates of Current Events*

Light Unto the Nations, or None of Our Business? Influencing Gentiles to Observe the Noachide Laws

Throughout the centuries, Jewish activism and diplomacy focused on the effort to secure the Jews' right to observe our traditions without fear or intimidation. The goal, in short, was to be left alone so that we could practice our religion without disturbance from our gentile hosts. Whatever influence and leverage Jews had was used to help enable their communities to live Jewish lives. Few Jews, if any, considered the possibility of influencing the surrounding gentiles' personal religious beliefs or practices.

With the blossoming of the American Jewish community in the latter part of the 20th century, when religious freedom was self-understood and Jews rose to positions of prominence and influence, the opportunity arose for a much different kind of activism: inspiring the gentile world to embrace Judaism's universal code. The liberties guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, as well as the culture of tolerance and freedom that characterizes the United States, has given American Jews a level of comfort and confidence that offers the prospect of influencing our gentile neighbors to adopt the beliefs and lifestyle that we believe to be obligatory upon all mankind.

Beginning in the 1980s, the Lubavitcher Rebbe energetically called upon his followers to not only spread the teachings of Torah and *chassidus* throughout the Jewish world, but to also spread the *שבע מצוות בני נח* — the Seven Noachide Laws — among the gentile world. Jewish tradition teaches that whereas only Jews are bound by the Torah's laws, all of mankind is expected to abide by the Seven Noachide Laws.¹ The Lubavitcher Rebbe felt very strongly that Jews who are in a position to encourage non-Jews to embrace and follow these laws are obligated to do so. Thus, for example, in an address delivered on 19 Kislev, 5743 (December 5, 1982), the Rebbe issued the following emphatic statements:²

1. The Seven Noachide Laws are the prohibitions of murder, idolatry, sexual immorality, blasphemy, theft, and the consumption of meat taken from a live animal, and the obligation to maintain a fair justice system. See *Sanhedrin* 56a.
2. The transcript, in English translation, is available online at <http://hebrewbooks.org/>

I. Jews' Influence on the Nations

2. בראשית פרק יח פסוק יט

כִּי יִדְעַתִּיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרֹךְ ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הָבִיא ה' עַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עִלָּיו:

2. Genesis 18:19

For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right, in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him."

3. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*, p. ix-x

Although I have spent my adult life as a religious leader, my first love, long before I decided to become a rabbi, was moral philosophy, which I studied at both Cambridge and Oxford... I had meanwhile decided that the best place to begin was within my own tradition of Judaism, which had an almost unbroken conversation on the nature of a good society since the days when Abraham was charged to teach his children "the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just."

4. שמות פרק יט פסוק ו

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֶת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבֹּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

4. Shemot 19:6

but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel."

5. ספורנו שמות פרק יט פסוק ו

ובזה תהיו סגולה מכלם כי תהיו ממלכת כהנים להבין ולהורות לכל המין האנושי לקרוא כלם בשם ה', ולעבדו שכם אחד, כמו שיהיה ענין ישראל לעתיד לבא, כאמרו ואתם כהני ה' תקראו (ישעיהו סא, ו) וכאמרו כי מציון תצא תורה (שם ב, ג):

6. רש"ר הירש שמות פרק יט פסוק ו

"גוי קדוש": כשם שכלפי פנים יהיה כל אחד ואחד מכם כהן, כן תהיה הופעת קהלכם כלפי חוץ הופעה של קדושה לה'. גוי אחד ויחיד הוא יהיה בין הגויים, אשר אינו חי למען תהילת עצמו, גדולת עצמו ותפארת עצמו, אלא למען כינון מלכות שמים ותפארתה עלי אדמות. גוי זה לא יבקש גדולה בעוצמתו, אלא בממשלתו המוחלטת של חוק - המוסר האלוהי - והלא זה משמעה של "קדושה":

7. ישעיהו פרק מב פסוק ו

אֲנִי ה' קְרָאתִיךָ בְּצֹדֶק וְאַחֲזִק בְּיָדְךָ וְאַצְרֶךְ וְאַתְּנֶנְךָ לְבְרִית עִם לְאוּר גּוֹיִם:

7. Isaiah 42:6

I GOD, in My grace, have summoned you, And I have grasped you by the hand. I created you, and appointed you a covenant people, **a light of nations**.

8. רש"י ישעיהו פרק מב פסוק ו

לאור גוים - כל שבט קרוי גוי לעצמו בענין שנא' גוי וקהל גוים:

8. Rashi Isaiah 42:6

Every tribe is called a nation by itself, as the matter is stated (Gen. 35:11): "A nation and a congregation of nations."

9. רד"ק ישעיהו פרק מב פסוק ו

וכן תהיה גם כן לאור גוים, כמו שאמר והלכו גוים לאורך, והאור הוא התורה שתצא להם מציון, וישראל יהיו קיום האומות על שני פנים האחד שיהיה שלום בעבורם בכל הגוים כמו שאמר על המשיח ודבר שלום לגוים, ואמר והוכיח לעמים רבים, וכתתו חרותם לאתים וגו', השנית כי בסבת ישראל יהיו הגוים שומרים שבע מצות וילכו בדרך טובה כמו ויורנו מדרכיו ונלכה באורחותיו וגו':

10. ישעיהו פרק מט פסוק ו

וַיֹּאמֶר נְקַל מִהֵיֹתֶךָ לִי עֲבֹד לְהִקִּים אֶת שְׁבֻטֵי יַעֲקֹב וּנְצִירֵי וּנְצוּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהָשִׁיב וּנְתַתִּיךָ לְאֹר גּוֹיִם לְהִיּוֹת יְשׁוּעָתִי עַד קֶצֶה הָאָרֶץ: ט

10. Isaiah 49:6

And [God] has said: "It is too little that you should be My servant In that I raise up the tribes of Jacob And restore the survivors of Israel: **I will also make you a light of nations**, That My salvation may reach the ends of the earth."

11. אלשיך על ישעיהו פרק מט פסוק ו

והוא כי גם ונתתך לאור גוים שאפילו לגוים ערלי לב תהיה להם לאור, להאיר עיניהם לעשות אותם שפה ברורה, לקרא כלם בשם ה' בתשובה שלימה

12. Rabbi Ari Lamm, "Elevating 'The Office': Judaism and Pop Culture," *The Orthodox Conundrum*, 6/20/21

Everybody fundamentally looks at culture and sees something that operates upon us and that we do not operate upon. Which is to say, either culture is this incredibly powerful thing that we cannot affect and therefore we have to accommodate it or make our peace with it or maybe assimilate to it or at least we have to make concessions to it. The Orthodox denominations took the view that culture is something extremely powerful - more powerful than us by far - and we either have to engage with it delicately to take the good things from it and leave the bad, or we have to hide it. But everybody across the Jewish spectrum fundamentally agrees that culture is too powerful for us and we have nothing to give to it. **I think this is a fundamental failure of nerve and a lack of courage on the part of the Jewish people - the Am Segulah. Our responsibility is actually to bring our values out into the wider world and transform it for the better, and by abdicating the cultural sphere, especially the pop cultural sphere that reaches so many hundreds of millions of people, by abdicating any contribution to or control over that cultural sphere, we are completely abandoning our responsibility to transform the world for the better.**

**II. Case #1: Should Jews Introduce Shabbos to Society?**13. תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף נח עמוד ב

ואר"ל עובד כוכבים ששבת חייב מיתה שנא' (בראשית ח, כב) ויום ולילה לא ישבותו ואמר מר אזהרה שלהן זו היא מיתתן אמר רבינא אפי' שני בשבת

13. Sanhedrin 58b

And Reish Lakish says: A gentile who observed Shabbat is liable to receive the death penalty, as it is stated: "And day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:23), And the Master said (57a) that their prohibition is their death penalty. Ravina says: even on a Monday, he is liable.

14. 24/6: The Power of Unplugging Every Week, Tiffany Shlain

stationary.

Ken introduced me to the idea of Shabbat as a weekly break from work. Most Jews I knew did not observe Shabbat, or if they did, it was just candles, blessings, and a nice meal on Friday night. I remember so clearly being shocked when he said, “I don’t work on Saturdays; it’s Shabbat. I need a day off.” I was impressed. It struck me as profound and sexy. I was drawn to how much this ancient Jewish wisdom guided him.

During our first ten years together, Ken and I were focused on creating a life and a family, and also on our careers. This meant we were really busy—and on our screens a *lot*. But that was a time when screens were mostly stationary. Until smartphones were released around 2007, we couldn’t plug in anywhere, anytime. (It’s hard to remember how different things were.) Back then, it was pretty much just flip phones and the Palm Pilot. Remember those original models with a screen and cool little pull-out stylus that let you both make a call *and* keep a calendar? The Palm Pilot was a huge leap from the oversize bricks that came before.

5

We were ready for something bigger. While Reboot’s plan was for one full day offline annually, the experience made us feel so good and present that we decided to continue the practice weekly. We called it our “Technology Shabbat” because we combined a screen-free twenty-four hours with some Shabbat rituals, like a special Friday-night meal with family and friends. We had no

7

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idea how many years we would continue this weekly Tech Shabbat ritual or how much it would change our lives.

We also had no idea ten years ago how crazy everyone would become with their screen obsessions. Our 24/7 society is a fire hose of media, news, emails, tweets, posts, likes, texts, pings, notifications, and buzzes. We all need a break. This weekly boundary we created around our life not only reconnected us but also enriched our time and space.

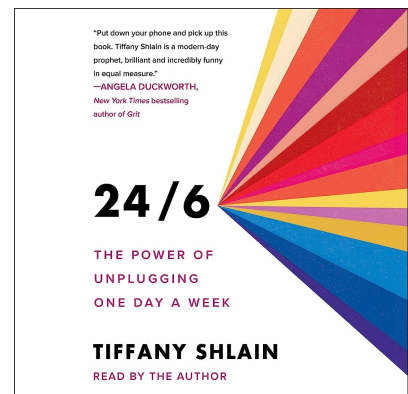
I mean this literally. For many, and definitely our family, the day means treating the house and nature like a sacred space. In his seminal book, *The Sabbath*, the twentieth-century Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel writes, “The seventh day is a palace in time *that we build*” (italics mine). We have to create it,

Some people say to me, “My teenage kids would never do it.” But you are the parent. You can make anything happen. Parenting is about modeling behavior. Insisting that there will be one day a week without devices and knowing that we will have more authentic connection with one another without screens, more time to just be and think in a different way, delivers a powerful message. And whether our kids realize it or not, they need that time offline, too.

If you are single or child-free, just think how much you’d prefer your Saturday as a day focused on friends, relationships, health, and hobbies rather than wondering what you might have missed or stressing about work. I recall how meaningful it was to Ken as a single young adult.

If you don’t think you can get your partner to agree because they’re glued to their phone, this is pretty hard evidence that they need to unplug more than anyone. I will share strategies to get them on board. Once they are, I doubt they’ll want to go back.

The point is, you can come up with a lot of reasons not to try it. But I’ve found that there are many more compelling reasons why you should. Things will come up, and you’ll need to make adjustments; life can be messy and we are all only human. However, what you gain by having this practice in your life is transformative. Our Tech Shabbat is a force field of protection that gives us the strength, resilience, perspective, and energy for the other six days. It lets us achieve the balance we need to live in both the online world and real life. It is our favorite day, and we look forward to it all week.



15. Kelsey Osgood, "Why Your Digital Shabbat Will Fail," *Wired*

I understand that everyone is hungry for boundaries around tech usage, which are sorely needed and have proven very difficult to formulate and enforce. **But efforts to invent a Shabbat outside the religious paradigm are largely doomed to fail**, for a host of small practical reasons and one really giant, philosophical one.

First, the observant Jewish community has successfully maintained Shabbat over thousands of years **precisely because it's practiced in a community**, one that operates with particular norms and expectations.

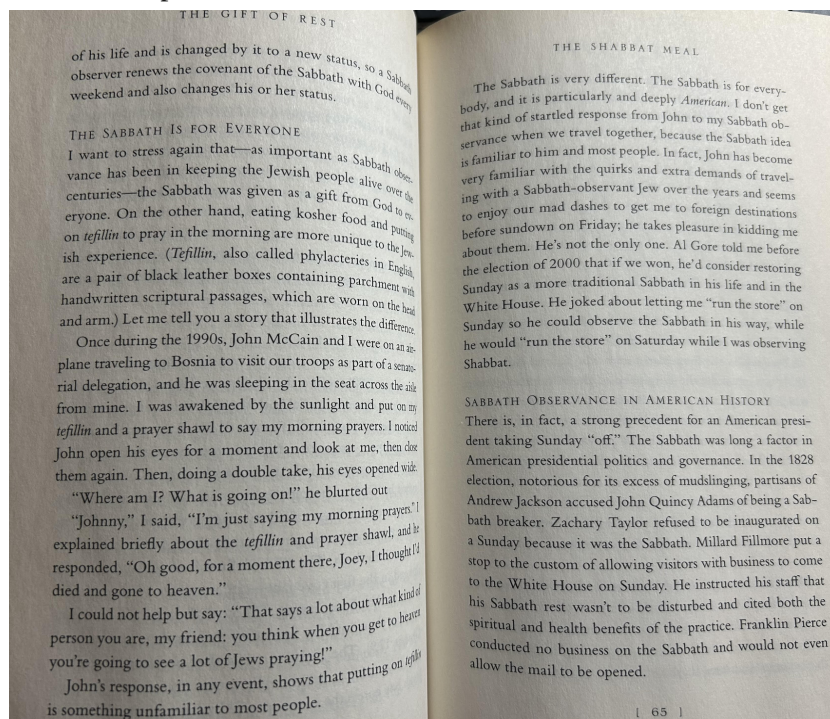
But a shallow knowledge of the practice will likely lead to its ultimate collapse because you'll be aiming for the wrong thing, the rest itself. I've always thought that "rest" was a rather misleading shorthand for the purpose of the day because when people hear it, they think of "relaxing," which isn't exactly correct. Shabbat is restorative, but it isn't necessarily *relaxing*, in part because the lead-up to it tends to be frenetic—ironing tablecloths, cooking multiple meals in advance—but also because it usually involves a lot of socializing. Instead, **I think of Shabbat as more like exercise: It can feel daunting to carve out time for it**, you don't always instantaneously achieve a meditative flow state, **but you recognize it as an objective good**, and you always feel better when you've done it...

But if Shabbat is not designed for your own mental flourishing, then what is it about? Herein lies the potentially insurmountable problem with trying to secularize the practice. Orthodox Jews do not observe Shabbat as a way to spend more time with their families or to prevent burnout induced by living under the tyranny of modern capitalism or to stick it to Zuckerberg once a week. Shabbat *does* allow us to do those things, and it's an extremely effective tool for all the above. **But no, we do it for a very unfashionable, very simple, supremely awesome reason: because God told us to.**

When the people doing the appropriating are of the very-much-online, Goop-product-loving, allergic-to-God variety, the prophetic nature of the religious ideas they're borrowing often goes unacknowledged. In 2012, for example, thousands of Haredi Jews gathered at Citi Field in New York City to "protest" the internet, to the round mockery of the plugged-in class; seven years later, those same denouncers were singing the praises of Jenny Odell's *How to Do Nothing* while tweeting about "Digital Shabbats" and streaming Tristan Harris's TED Talk on how to make tech less addictive and more ethical (how's that going?), all while en route to phone-free weekend retreats.



16. Sen. Joseph Lieberman, *The Gift of Rest*



III. Case #2: Introducing Noachide Laws

17. תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף נט עמוד א

ואמר ר' יוחנן עובד כוכבים שעוסק בתורה חייב מיתה שנאמר (דברים לג, ד) תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה לנו מורשה ולא להם

17. Sanhedrin 59a

And Rabbi Yoḥanan says: A gentile who engages in Torah study is liable to receive the death penalty; as it is stated: “Moses commanded us a law [*torah*], an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob” (Deuteronomy 33:4), indicating that it is an inheritance for us, and not for them.

18. Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: The Hebrew Bible in the United States, A Sourcebook, xxvi-xxvii

We also believe the Hebrew Bible should remain an integral component of the American future. National continuity entails that change take place within the framework of a national tradition. That tradition is, of course, flexible. America is a nation that cares about equality and freedom, for instance, but what equality and freedom mean may change over time. However, it is our commitment to those concepts that provides the framework in which debate and change can take place. So too the Hebrew Bible. It provides a part of the framework in which we understand and debate our national destiny, our place in world history, and our understanding of our own past. The American story integrates Hebraic insights, and this volume hopes to make it easier to uncover a fuller and more accurate version of the American past, and therewith, the American prospect.

19. תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא קמא דף לח עמוד א

מאי דרב יוסף דא"ר יוסף עמד וימודד ארץ ראה וכו' מה ראה ראה שבע מצות שקיבלו עליהם בני נח ולא קיימום עמד והתירן להם. איתגורי אתגר א"כ מציינו חוטא נשכר אמר מר בריה דרבנא לומר שאפילו מקיימין אותן אין מקבלין עליהן שכר ולא והתניא ר"מ אומר מנין שאפילו נכרי ועוסק בתורה שהוא ככהן גדול ת"ל (ויקרא יח, ה) אשר יעשה אותם האדם וחי בהם כהנים ולוים וישראלים לא נאמר אלא אדם הא למדת שאפילו נכרי ועוסק בתורה הרי הוא ככהן גדול. אמרי אין מקבליים עליהן שכר כמצווה ועושה אלא כמי שאינו מצווה ועושה דא"ר חנינא גדול המצווה ועושה יותר ממי שאינו מצווה ועושה:

19. Talmud Bava Kamma 38a

What is Rav Yosef's exposition? It is as Rav Yosef says: “He stood and shook the earth; He beheld.” What did He see? **He saw the seven mitzvot that the descendants of Noah accepted upon themselves and did not fulfill, so He arose and permitted their prohibitions to them.**

Did they thereby profit, in that their prohibitions became permitted to them? If so, we have found a transgressor who is rewarded. Mar, son of Rabbana, says: This is not to say that for them to transgress their mitzvot is no longer a sin; rather, it is to say that even if they fulfill them, they do not receive reward for fulfilling them. But do they not receive reward for fulfilling those mitzvot? But isn't it taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Meir says: From where is it derived that even a gentile who engages in Torah is considered like a High Priest? The verse states with regard to the mitzvot: “Which if a person does, he shall live by them” (Leviticus 18:5). It is not stated: Which if priests and Levites and Israelites do, they shall live by them, but rather: A person, indicating that all people are included. You have therefore learned that even a gentile who engages in Torah study is considered like a High Priest. The Sages said in response: **Rav Yosef meant that they do not receive the reward as does one who is commanded to perform a mitzva and performs it, but as does one who is not commanded to perform a mitzva and performs it anyway.** As Rabbi Ḥanina says: One who is commanded and performs a mitzva is greater than one who is not commanded and performs it.

20. ספר המצוות לרמב"ם מצות עשה ג

והמצוה השלישית היא שצונו **לאהבו** יתעלה... וכבר אמרו שמצוה זו כוללת גם כן שנדרוש ונקרא האנשים כולם לעבודתו יתעלה ולהאמין בו. וזה כי כשתאהב אדם תשים לבך עליו ותשבחהו ותבקש האנשים לאהוב אותו... ולשון סיפרי (שם) ואהבת את י"י וכו' **אהבהו על הבריות כאברהם אביך שנאמר ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן**. ר"ל כמו שאברהם בעבור שהיה אוהב השם כמו שהעיד הכתוב (ישעי' מא) אברהם אוהבי שהיה גם כן לגודל השגתו דרש האנשים אל האמונה מחוזק אהבתו כן אתה אוהב אותו עד שתדרוש האנשים אליו:

20. Sefer Hamitzvot, Positive Commandments #3

And we have already clarified that this commandment also includes that we call all people to His service, may He be exalted, and to believe in Him. And that is since when you love a person, you will recount his praises and magnify him, and call on other people to love him... And the language of the Sifrei (Sifrei Devarim 32:2) is, "And you shall love the Lord, your God" - cause Him to be loved by the creatures, like your father Avraham (did); as it is stated (Genesis 12:5), 'and the souls that they had made in Charan.'" And it means to say: Like Avraham who loved [God] - as Scripture testifies, "Avraham, who loves me" (Isaiah 41:8), and this was from his great comprehension - to the point that he called people to Him.

21. תשובות והנהגות כרך ג סימן שיז

שאלה: אם מותר לקרב עכו"ם ללקיים שבע מצוות קבלתי מכתבו ששואל אם מצוה לקרב האומות ללקיים שבע מצוות, ורוצה לשמוע בזה דין תורה.

והנה לדעתי לנוצרים **יש בזה איסור חמור**, שהנצרות גופא אינו רק שיתוף שלכמה פוסקים עכו"ם לא מוזהר, רק האמת שהם מגשימים אלקינו ית"ש, עם ע"ז שלהם בתואר "בן" ר"ל, ואין לך ע"ז כמותו,



וכשמכריזים שמוכנים ללקיים שבע מצוות, ואנו מקבלים דבריהם בכך שיקיימו, או אנו מכריזים על פעולות שיקיימו שבע מצוות ליהוי כעין גר תושב, אף שמחזיקים אמונתם בנצרות, **מכשילים אותם כאלו עבדי בהיתר וכרצונו ית"ש, בשעה שלפי דין תורה וחיובי בן נח הם מחזיקים עוד בע"ז**, ואנו ח"ו נותנים להם יד שע"ז שלהם בהיתר, ונקראים מקיימי שבע מצוות, בשעה שדעתם ואמונתם כע"ז לפי דעת הפוסקים וכמ"ש.

לכן מוטב לנו לשתוק, או נשפיע עליהם לחיות חי צדק ויושר, אבל אסור לנו להטעותם או להחניף להם שהם מקיימים מצוותם שנותנים בזה יד לע"ז, וברגע שאנו עסוקים להשפיע עליהם קרוב הדבר שמחניפים להם בסוף שמקיימים חובתם, ונכנסים אנו ח"ו לחמורות שבחמורות לסייע לאיסור ע"ז, שעיקר אמונתנו תלוי ביחוד השם, ומה לנו להכניס עצמינו אפילו כמלא נימה לזה, ומסתברא שזהו הטעם שאבותינו אפילו במקום שהיה להם חופש עד להשפיע לא עסקו בזה

וביותר אני גם חושש שאסור לנו לפעול בזה, שאמרו חז"ל (ב"ב ב) שביבש קצירה תשברנה, דהיינו כשתכלה זכות שבידן אז ישברו שלכן אין לנו להרבות להם זכויות, ואמנם כשהם תחת ידינו ובכחינו לכוף גם להם, כופין, **אבל כהיום כשאין מקיימין שבע מצוות ימהר הקדוש ברוך הוא מפלתם שנתמלאה סאתם...**

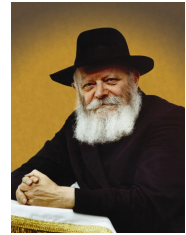
וכבר ביארנו שלהשפיע עליהם לעזוב את הנצרות, אף אם היינו מצווין, מ"מ כהיום מסכנים אנו בזה את קיומנו ח"ו, ורק לטובת האנושיות נוכל לדרוש מהם כמה דינים שגם ב"נ מצווה, שיעזבו גניבה ורציחה ועריות וסמים וכדומה, **אבל אין להעמיד הדברים לחייבם על בסיס דתי, שאין אנו מתערבים בדתם כמלא נימא, ותקותינו שגם הם לא יתערבו בנו ויניחו אותנו לשמור תורת אלקינו כרצוננו.**

22. Lubavitcher Rebbe, *Sichos in English*, Kislev-Nissan 5743, Vol. 16

3. The necessity to influence non-Jews to fulfill the Seven Noachide Laws is not just to ensure that the world be a decent place to live, but principally because G-d has commanded so. This obligation applies not just to those Jews who have influence in government circles, nor does it apply only when a special opportunity arises. It applies to all Jews, and it is an obligation to actively influence non-Jews.

This is particularly so in the time of exile and in the places of exile, where Jews and non-Jews come in contact with each other in any case, such as in business, etc. It is a mistake to think

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that the only purpose in such contact is to earn a living. The Torah directs that "all your deeds should be for the sake of heaven" and "in all your ways you shall know Him." Thus, after concluding the business deal, a Jew should explain to the non-Jew that the principal purpose of their meeting is so that he can tell him about his obligation to observe the Seven Noachide Laws - and the merit and reward he receives for this observance both in this world and the World to Come.

Moreover, because the Jew has been enabled to make a living through the non-Jew, he must pay him back - by enabling the non-Jew to gain life in the World to Come by telling him about the Seven Noachide Laws.

The ability of every Jew to influence a non-Jew in this respect is demonstrated by a story that happened this year in the U.S.A. Although this story seems like a chance event, everything in the world happens by Divine Providence - in this generation more so than in previous ones.

The story concerns a Jew, blessed by G-d with great wealth, who owns a yacht. He occasionally spends his vacation time on his yacht, and employs a captain to sail the yacht. When the time for prayer arrived, he knew that during Shemoneh Esreh one must face toward Yerushalayim - toward the east. He did not know in which direction was east on the yacht, and, not being ashamed of his Judaism, he would ask his non-Jewish captain where east was.

The first time this happened, the captain paid no special attention, thinking it was a chance occurrence. When it happened a few times, the captain asked him: "You are not the captain, not even a sailor. Why, then, are you so interested in

STUDENTS' TRANSLATION - UNEDITED

YUD-ALEPH NISSAN

287

knowing in which direction is east?"

Because the Jew was not ashamed of his Judaism, he explained the reason to the captain: He wants to pray to G-d. Since prayers pass through the site of the Bais Hamikdosh in Yerushalayim, he must face in that direction - which in that part of the world is in the east direction. That's why he needs to know where east is.

The captain was very excited and impressed, and said: "If you, a successful man, who employs others (including the captain), consider it proper to bond yourself with G-d three times a day through prayer, and are ready to interrupt your activities to face east to pray properly - I too shall begin to think of G-d!"

This story teaches that every Jew can influence non-Jews to observe the Seven Noachide Laws - to the extent, as seen in this story, that when a Jew conducts himself properly, his influence is automatically felt. This Jew did not intend to fulfill the Rambam's ruling to influence non-Jews. He merely was steadfast in his Judaism - and this conduct resulted in a positive change in a non-Jew's life.



National Day of Reflection

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Amid the distractions and concerns of our daily existence, it is appropriate that Americans pause to reflect upon the ancient ethical principles and moral values which are the foundation of our character as a nation.

We seek, and steadfastly pursue, the benefits of education. But education must be more than factual enlightenment—it must enrich the character as well as the mind.

One shining example for people of all faiths of what education ought to be is that provided by the Lubavitch movement, headed by Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, a worldwide spiritual leader who will celebrate his 80th birthday on April 4, 1982. The Lubavitcher Rebbe's work stands as a reminder that knowledge is an unworthy goal unless it is accompanied by moral and spiritual wisdom and understanding. He has provided a vivid example of the eternal validity of the Seven Noahide Laws, a moral code for all of us regardless of religious faith. May he go from strength to strength.

In recognition of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's 80th birthday, the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled have issued House Joint Resolution 447 to set aside April 4, 1982, as a "National Day of Reflection."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim April 4, 1982, as National Day of Reflection.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 3rd day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-two, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and sixth.

Ronald Reagan

23.

מסורת משה חלק א עמוד תקד-תקה

האם יש עניין ללמוד לגויים ז' מצוות בני נוח

כ"ח] ומר שאול טוויל^{כא}, ביקש שאשאל רבינו אם יש ענין להודיע לגויים הז' מצוות, לשלוח זה לכל הדתיים שלהם וכו'. וע"י זה יועיל להצילם ממלחמה וכו'.
 והשיב רבינו שאשיבו בהחלט שלא כך לעשות, דבגלות בכלל אסור לנו להוציא טענות על הדת שלהם, ולדינא אין לנו שום התחייבות של תוכחה וכדומה על גויים.
 ובכלל דבר זה הוא ממלאכת משיח, ומי שמתחיל להתעסק בדבר כזה יכול מלאכה זו לגרום להוציאו מהדרך. ושוב פעם הדגיש רבינו שכל הדתות ישארו עד משיח, ההיפים^{כב} ג"כ ישארו עד ביאת משיח!

23b. Sefer Chasidim

When one sees a Noahide sinning, if one can correct him, one should, since God sent Jonah to Nineveh to return them to his path.

23a. Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik

There may be an additional reason for Jonah's association with Yom Kippur, ... Nineveh was the capital city of pagan Assyria ... It was a country which would later, under Sennacherib in 722 B.C.E. besiege Jerusalem and exile the ten tribes. Yet God's compassion embraces all of humanity. ... It is, therefore characteristic of the universal embrace of our faith that as the shadows of dusk descend on Yom Kippur ... the Jew is alerted ... that all of humanity are God's children. We need to restate the universal dimension of our faith, especially when we are sorely persecuted and are apt to regard the world in purely confrontational terms.

Our Mission

T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights brings the Torah's ideals of human dignity, equality, and justice to life by empowering rabbis and cantors to be moral voices and to lead Jewish communities in advancing democracy and human rights for all people in the United States, Canada, Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territories.

Our Strategies

- We **organize** rabbis, cantors and their communities to make an impact through specific human rights campaigns.
- We **train** rabbinical and cantorial students and rabbis and cantors to be powerful human rights leaders.
- We **amplify** the voices of rabbis and cantors on the pressing human rights concerns of our time.

Our Name

The name T'ruah – one of the sounds of the shofar (ram's horn) – calls us to take action to create a more just world and indicates our belief in the possibility of liberation.

Today, we associate the shofar primarily with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when we sound it during synagogue services. The shofar wakes us up, demands that we examine our past behavior, and calls us to action.

In the Torah, the sound of the shofar also heralds the beginning of the Jubilee Year, when debts are forgiven and indentured servants go free. Shofar blasts also announce the beginning of the revelation at Mount Sinai. **The shofar, then, symbolizes liberation, as well as the presence of the divine.**

The **T'ruah blast** consists of nine staccato notes. This halting sound reminds us of the brokenness of the world, while also calling us to be partners with God in healing this brokenness.

Who We Are

The Coalition for Jewish Values (CJV), the largest Rabbinic Public Policy organization in America, articulates and advocates for public policy positions based upon traditional Jewish thought. We lead the fight against those who cloak their own secular, left-wing ideals in the mantle of “Judaism,” misrepresenting Judaism’s actual beliefs and values.

We know that Biblical values are the nurturing roots of first-world civilizations, and recognize the efforts of the American pioneers to give expression to those ideals in the founding documents of the United States. We promote these same values today, through education, advocacy, and mobilization of support within and beyond the Jewish conservative community.

The CJV is keenly sensitive to our people’s history. We understand that the scourge of anti-Semitism hides behind many facades, and recognize it in the contemporary anti-Israel movement. We appreciate the friendship displayed by pro-Israel conservative groups towards the Jewish People, rather than regarding it with unjustified suspicion.

Rabbinic Authority and Public Policy

Today, the West calls its bedrock values “Judeo-Christian ethics.” While often not laid out explicitly, it is understood that ideals such as valuing human life, peace, universal education, family, social responsibility and equal justice all find their earliest expression in the Jewish Bible.

This gives disproportionate authority to a Jewish voice in American public policy. Priests, imams, ministers and monks – as well as regular citizens and government officials – often give extra weight to the opinions of rabbis, even over those of their co-religionists. Thus it is especially unfortunate for all, not just for Jews, when the name of Judaism is employed to advocate for the abandonment of eternal Jewish values.

Furthermore, there is a disturbing trend today of leftists invalidating religious viewpoints as violating the separation of church and state – even (or especially) on issues of morality and ethics. This is the subtext behind efforts to pigeonhole traditional viewpoints as “Christian perspectives.” The CJV rebuts the false notion that core traditional, Biblical values are only appreciated by one segment of the US population.

To Return the Crown to its Place

The Rabbinic leaders at the beginning of the Second Temple era were called “the Men of the Great Assembly.” The Talmud records that they were given this title because they restored recognition of God’s true attributes, “returned the crown to its place,” when others had clouded vision.^[1] At a time when many Americans, Jewish and not, have a distorted perception of Jewish views on basic questions of values, ethics and morality, we similarly hope to return the crown to its rightful place.

In practical terms, the CJV employs three methods to promote and share genuine Jewish values:

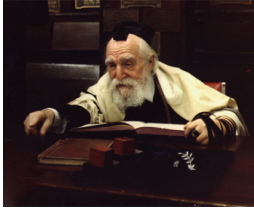
- Educating the general public via press releases, open letters, interviews, op-eds and other communications;
- Advocacy with government officials and the court system, through meetings, letters, Amicus Curiae briefs, and personal interaction;
- Mobilization within the rabbinate and Jewish community, encouraging citizens to support government policies that best accord with our values.

The CJV is able to function as a hybrid between a public policy and grassroots organization, as it expresses positions sourced in traditional Judaism and thus common to traditional Jews.

IV. Should Halacha Influence Legal Policies?

24. שו"ת אגרות משה, חושן משפט ב:סח

עתה אשיב בקצרה, כי בעצם נאמרו בתורה עונשי מיתה לעבירות החמורות מאד כרציחת נפש אדם, ומיני גניבת אדם, ומיני עריות, ועל אחד שעובד עבודה זרה... יש הדגשה על חשיבותו של כל נפש, ועוד חשבונות, ולכן נצטוונו שלדון דיני נפשות אינם כשרים אלא על פי סנהדרין שנסמכו לזה ואין סומכין לזה אלא לגדולים ביותר בחכמת התורה וגם גדולים בשאר חכמות... וגם לא אפשר לדון דיני נפשות אלא כשביהמ"ק = כשבית המקדש = היה קיים וישבו סנהדרין של ע"א שהם עוד יותר גדולים בלשכת הגזית בביהמ"ק, שלכן לא דנו דיני נפשות אף במדינות שהיה רשות מהמלכות שידונו היהודים לעצמן בדיני התורה, ומ"מ לא היה נמצא כמעט בכל הדורות רוצחים ביהודים מפני חומר האיסור ומפני מה שנתחנכו ע"י התורה וע"י עונשי התורה להבין חומר האיסור... וכל זה הוא כשלא הופקר איסור הרציחה אלא שבשביל איזה תאוה גדולה או איזה מריבה על טענת ממון וכבוד עשה זה, אבל מי שהורג נפשות מחמת שהופקר אצלו איסור הרציחה והוא אכזרי ביותר, וכן כשנתרבו רוצחים ועושי רשעה היו דנין למיגדר מלתא למנוע מעשה רציחה שהוא הצלת המדינה.



25. Tradition 38:1 2004. "Judaism and the Death Penalty: Of Two Minds but One Heart", page 78. Letter from Rabbi Ahron Soloveitchik to David Luchins at the Orthodox Union, 1970's

[I]t is irresponsible and unfair to submit a statement in favor of capital punishment in the name of Orthodox Jewry. **In my humble opinion, from a Halachik point of view, every Jew should be opposed to capital punishment.** It is true . . . that the Torah recognizes capital punishment. However, the Torah delegates the authority to mete out capital punishment only to Sanhedrin, not to anyone else. Even Sanhedrin are [sic] not able to mete out capital punishment if there is no Beis Hamikdash.



26. Rabbi Jeremy Wieder, "Clarifying Abortion In Halacha – And Reasons Not To Favor Overturning Roe V. Wade," *The Jewish Press*, June 2, 2022

Halachic View of Abortion for Gentiles

Most *poskim* adopt Maimonides's view, cited earlier, that feticide for a non-Jew, in cases other than danger to the mother's life, is capital murder. Some hold this view even when feticide is not murder for a Jew, leading to cases when a permissible abortion according to the lenient view of Tzitz Eliezer for a Jew is capital murder for a non-Jew. Resolving this seeming paradox is beyond the scope of this article but regardless, we obviously cannot advocate that American law treat Jews and non-Jews differently.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Noahide Law Approach and Contemporary Context

The Lubavitcher Rebbe was in favor of Jews' doing everything possible to encourage adherence to Noahide law on the part of gentiles, including advocacy for legislation that would enforce Noahide law. He seems not to have been concerned about possible negative implications of this approach.

Those who adopt this halachically legitimate, logically consistent position, founded on the view that a fetus is a life, have a principled and practical obligation to do whatever they can to stop the murder of hundreds of thousands of lives each year. (Those who disagree with this position must recognize that those holding it consider their obligation to oppose abortion as identical to the duty, agreed upon by all, to forcefully advocate against murder of a baby after birth.) Indeed, many contemporary proponents of overturning Roe v. Wade are quite clear that they seek a national ban on abortion.

Rav Moshe Feinstein's View and Contemporary Context

His stringent position on abortion notwithstanding, Rav Moshe Feinstein disagreed with the Lubavitcher Rebbe and opposed legislation prohibiting abortion. **In general, Rav Feinstein opposed legislation in any area that might give any religion a voice in government matters.** He felt that for a small religious minority such as the Jewish people, supporting a firm church-state divide was absolutely necessary even when such legislation might coincide with a Torah viewpoint since any breach of that divide could result in government interference in Jewish religious practice.

A Pragmatic Approach

In the end, I believe that Rav Moshe's approach is the prudent one. Ideally, all non-Jews would observe all of the Noahide laws. Nonetheless, halacha does not require Orthodox Jews or Jewry to ensure that observance by our fellow American citizens. On the contrary, we are best served by civil laws allowing maximum flexibility so that every Jew can follow the counsel of her or his *posek*. We would be wise to allow our fellow citizens the same freedom to follow their own beliefs or religious traditions.



Beyond these considerations, religious freedom in the United States has allowed Orthodox Jewry, despite being a tiny minority, to flourish religiously without government persecution even in eras when the United States was an overwhelmingly religious, Christian country. This setting makes me historically and ideologically uncomfortable with imposing my religious beliefs on fellow Americans.

27. Prof. Chaim Saiman, "Our Current Political Station: Might This Be Modern Orthodoxy's Moment?"

The Lehrhaus, January 10, 2017

The needs of the hour present a unique challenge, but perhaps also an opportunity for Modern Orthodoxy. **America is in desperate need of healing, and with some hopeful optimism, there are several reasons to think that Modern Orthodox Jews are well-positioned to show leadership in this process.**

First, Modern Orthodoxy already lives between the two Americas. From a demographic perspective, we seem "blue": we tend to live in or near large, coastal cities, have high rates of college and graduate-school education at elite schools, and are well represented in the learned professions. At the same time, we also have much in common with "red" America. We are religious believers who value faith and faith communities; believe in strong, traditional families; and support Israel and its specifically Jewish identity.

Second, we are a divided community, which in this context, is beneficial. Much of the post-election analyses showed that America's polarization is caused by the fact that we increasingly live, work, and socialize among those we identify with politically. Add in media fragmentation, and red and blue Americans simply live in ecosystems. In many ways, this applies to American Judaism as a whole, **but Modern Orthodoxy is a particularly tight community that divides more evenly between liberals, moderates, and conservatives.**

Finally and most importantly, it is in our spiritual DNA. Our greatest teachers, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, were rarely fans or fanatics, but almost always strove to embrace opposing principles that seemed in conflict. **Modern Orthodoxy is characterized by its**

commitment to dualities such as Torah and science, yeshiva and military service, wisdom and piety, particularism and universalism, worshipping God and acting on behalf of man, individual and society, and so on. Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Lichtenstein taught that at the fundamental level, **each side expresses a true and compelling value. It is only at a second stage, when these come into conflict, that we must employ local and contextual factors to mediate between them. From the philosophical perspective however, we aim to live both rather than vindicate one at the expense of the other.**

While these great rabbis initially formulated their approach in the context of Talmud study and then extended it to religious thought, **I have come to see its relevance in the political realm as well.**

Serious discussions about politics involve balancing values. Environmental policy, for example, centers on tradeoffs between our long-term ability to survive on the planet and the more immediate needs of jobs and fueling economic growth. In consumer finance, the core tradeoff is between offering cheap yet potentially harmful products that can land consumers in inescapable cycles of debt, versus fewer but safer products that may lock some out of credit markets entirely. Almost any policy debate can be similarly discussed in terms of the costs and benefits of competing values.

But unlike our current political culture, which demands that one pick a side and then defend it to the end of the earth, a dialectal analysis does not assume one side is always right and the other wrong. Rather, each side reflects a truth about the world, and we should always seek the optimal balance in light of the evidence and arguments in the individual case....

At present, **Modern Orthodox Jews are assimilating into American culture by folding their Jewish identity into a political** one. I have tried to argue that this runs counter to our sociological identity, which shares commonalities with both “red” and “blue” value systems; counter to our demographic reality as a politically divided community; counter to our self-interest, in that polarization fosters extremism, and anti-Semitism tends to flourish at the extremes; and counter to our spiritual DNA, which guides us to embrace plural, opposing values.

...And yet, what happens next is not predetermined. It will be based on decisions we make individually and how they aggregate.

Small as it may be, Modern Orthodoxy is poised to exemplify behavior that can bring us together and maybe point a way forward. **We are well positioned to play a leading role in this effort. It is our time to become an or la-goyim, a beacon of light for the United States of America.**



28. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense*

II

*Future Tense: The Voice of Hope
in the Conversation of Humankind*

The future for Jews and Judaism, in Israel and the Diaspora, is fraught with risk. That is one reason why I called this book *Future Tense*. But there is another and more fundamental reason. We will not understand Judaism, or the Jewish people, or the trajectory of Jewish history, until we ask: 'What made Jews different?' Everyone is different. Each culture has its characteristic voice, each faith its distinctive vision. Lose it, and the culture begins to fade, the faith begins to falter. What, then, is Judaism? What are Jews called on to do? And why, in the twenty-first century, does it matter? The answer, I will argue, has to do with the future tense. Judaism is supremely the religion of the *not-yet*. In this chapter I want to explain what that means and why it is important.

Judaism, I have argued, is not for Jews alone. If it were, it would make no sense. The God of Abraham is not a tribal God. He is the creator of heaven and earth. The God of Israel is not only the God of Israel. He made all human beings in his image. The God of the Hebrew Bible did not limit his blessings to one nation. After the Flood, he made a covenant with all humanity. Abraham and his descendants are not the only people in the Bible to encounter God. Abraham's family are not the only moral heroes. So is Pharaoh's daughter. So is Job. The Israelites are not the only people to whom God sends prophets. So were the people of Nineveh to whom God sent Jonah. 'Through you,' said God to Abraham, 'all the families on earth will be blessed.' How that will happen is not made clear in the Bible, yet the prophets were agreed that it would one day happen. Judaism is not for Jews alone.

Future Tense

can do but may not do. Jewish law is an assemblage of those limits. Without great care, the rich will exploit the poor, the strong will dominate and crush the weak. That was the burden of the prophetic message in ancient times. It should be so now.

To be a Jew is to be an agent of hope. Every ritual, every command, every syllable of the Jewish story is a protest against escapism, resignation and the blind acceptance of fate. Judaism, the religion of the free God, is a religion of freedom. Jewish faith is written in the future tense. It is belief in a future that is not yet but could be, if we heed God's call, obey his will and act together as a covenantal community. The name of the Jewish future is hope.

Somehow, in a way I find mysterious and moving, the Jewish people wrote a story of hope that has the power to inspire all who dare to believe that injustice and brutality are not the final word about the human condition, that faith can be more powerful than empires, that love given is not given in vain, that ideals are not illusions to give us comfort but candles to light our way along a winding road in the dark night without giving way to fear or losing a sense of direction.

The Jewish story is not for Jews alone. From the very beginning it was meant to be shared. When God said to Abraham, 'Through you all the families of earth will be blessed', when Moses said, 'This is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nation', they were signalling that, improbably yet certainly, this journey across the wilderness of time in search of the Promised Land would be one from which all who believe in God, Jew and non-Jew alike, would draw courage. They too would walk it, each in their own way, towards their own field of dreams, their own destination of hope.

Was there ever a less likely hero than Abraham, a man who performed no miracles, led no nation, delivered no great sermon to be inscribed on the hearts of future generations, a man who was promised so much yet saw so little fulfilled in his lifetime? Was there ever a less likely candidate for immortality, or witness to the power

of faith, than the people whose name, Israel, means 'One who wrestles with God and with men and yet survives'? For though Jews love humanity, they continue to wrestle with it, challenging the idols of the age, whichever the idols, whatever the age. And though Jews have loved God with an everlasting love, they have never stopped wrestling with him nor him with them. And still Jews survive.

And still Jewish faith survives, a difficult, austere yet honest faith that refuses to make its peace with the evil men do; a faith that sees God as a teacher and humanity his disciples, that believes in freedom and human responsibility and that, when asked, 'Has the Messiah come?' has consistently answered, 'Not yet.'

No faith has endowed the human person with more dignity, seeing us all, whatever our faith or lack of it, as the image and likeness of God, holding all human life sacred, believing that we all have within us the power to defeat the evil that lives in each of us, and insisting on the most improbable of all religious beliefs: that more than we have faith in God, God has faith in us and will never lose that faith.

Jews suffered for that faith, deeper, longer and in more lands than any other, yet they never lost their ability to challenge and argue and question, never sacrificed the critical edge of their intelligence. They did not define themselves as victims, nor did they lose hope or their sense of humour. And though many Jews, during and after the Holocaust, lost faith in God, they never lost their faith in life itself, here on earth with all its pain and loss.

The state of Israel is testimony to that faith. Which other people, exiled for so long, would retain the faith that one day they would return? Which other people would fight so defiantly against those who believe that Jews have no right to their own land where they can defend themselves against those who, throughout history, have sought to destroy them, often in the name of the very God to whom Jews dedicated their lives, knowledge of whom they first introduced to the world?

The world in the twenty-first century needs that faith. In an age of ecological devastation, it needs the Jewish reminder that

Future Tense

we are placed on earth, as was Adam in the garden, to 'serve and conserve' it. In an age of economic inequalities, it needs the Jewish insistence on *tzedakah*, charity-as-justice. In an age of terror, it needs the Jewish insistence on the sanctity of life. In an age of religious extremism, it needs to hear the Jewish denial that you can win your place in heaven by murdering the innocent on earth. Martyrdom is the willingness to die for your faith, not the willingness to kill for your faith.

The world needs that difficult, often misunderstood and reviled, Jewish belief that though its religion is not the religion of all humanity, its God is the God of all humanity, so that the righteous of all faiths have a share in the world to come. For if we do not find a way for religions to live together peaceably and with mutual respect, we may yet betray God's image and destroy God's world.

Jews have turned inwards; they need to turn outwards. They are conscious of being different, but so is every member of a minority, and in a global age every group is a minority. Our uniqueness is our universality, and it is precisely by sharing our uniquenesses that we enlarge the heritage of humankind. Jews are not the only people to seek God, live lives of faith, work for the betterment of humanity or count themselves blessed by God's love. They are not alone. Jews have friends among many faiths, and among secular humanists, and they should cherish them all, making common cause with them in defence of freedom, human dignity and moral responsibility. They should not take every criticism as a form of antisemitism. They should rest secure in their unparalleled past and face the future with vigilance but without fear.

I have argued for a Judaism that has the courage to engage with the world and its challenges. Faith begets confidence, which creates courage. That is how Jews lived in the past and should live in the future. For they are the people of the journey to a distant destination, begun by Abraham, continued by a hundred generations of ancestors, and it still beckons. Judaism is faith in the future tense. Jews were and are still called on to be the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind.

29.

Our Light unto the Nations



BY RABBI HERSHEL SCHACHTER

In *Parashat Ki Tavo*, we are commanded *והלכתם בדרךיו*, “And you should go in His ways” (Devarim 28:9). What does this mean? How and why should we go in the ways of Hashem?

Hashem created humanity *בצלם אלוקים* – “in the image of G-d” (Bereishit 1:27) and He wants us to preserve that *צלם*, even here in this complicated, physical world. So He commanded us to “go in His ways,” for by following His example, we will preserve our G-dliness. But to truly understand the ways of Hashem and how to follow them, we must study the Tanach and learn the Gemara.

The verse continues *וראו כל עמי הארץ* – “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that Hashem’s name is proclaimed over you” (Devarim 28:10). The other nations will see that *Bnei Yisrael* have succeeded in preserving the *צלם אלוקים*.

The *Navi* Yishayahu says that we are an *Or LaGoyim* – “A light unto the nations” (Yishayahu 49:6). But our role as a “light unto the nations” was not discovered by Yishayahu, for all the teachings brought forth by the prophets must be rooted in the Torah. The original source for our people’s role as “light unto the nations” comes from the verse *וראו כל עמי הארץ*.

What does it mean to be a “light unto the nations”? When all the nations of the world will see that we have succeeded in preserving our *צלם אלוקים*, they will learn from our people how to live with *yirat shamayim* – with fear of Heaven.

Rav Soloveitchik explains that being an *Or LaGoyim* does not result from our keeping the *mitzvot* of Shabbat, *kashrut* and *taharat hamishpacha* (family purity), but rather by preserving our *צלם אלוקים* following the ways of Hashem with honesty, integrity and work ethic.

This is one of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks’ extraordinary accomplishments. For so many years, the Jewish people did not function as an *Or LaGoyim*. But Rabbi Sacks published and spoke so much in public about the meaning of *צלם אלוקים*, and how to live with *midot tovo*t and *derech erez*t. Rabbi Sacks represented the Jewish people to the nations of the world, and through his teachings and the way he lived his life, taught humanity the meaning of *צלם אלוקים*.