

Seven Laws for a Beautiful Planet

The Noahide Tradition

By Tzvi Freeman

We are a single organism, a tenuous membrane stretched over a vast but delicate globe, every cell sharing every breath of air, every sip of water, every microbe—even every byte of knowledge. Vast webs of communication and trade have forged us together, much as proteins bond the elements of life.

We are humankind.

But not so fast. We are not cells—we are human beings, each an entire world. We have families and cultures, beliefs and religions. We value these distinctions, for without them each of us is no more than another solitary amoeba floating aimlessly upon the waves of a meaningless universe.

Distinctiveness is vital, for in this universe, without diversity there is no life.

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So here lies the problem: Can we find a new consciousness that will allow each of us to retain our unique heritage while playing in tune with humanity's grand orchestra?

Sounds like a fairy-tale. If it were not for one thing: The path has been here as long as we have. It is the one thing we all share. Because none of us made it up.



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The Un-Religion

There is an ancient teaching that has no houses of worship, no priests, no conversion ceremony. No one needs to abandon his or her heritage to embrace it; only to return, to dig deep, back to the essential truths that are buried within every belief system known to humankind and to discard the outer layers that may have distorted its message.

You may have heard of this teaching, preserved and transmitted over the millennia by the Jewish People —although it is older even than that ancient nation: That all religions sprouted from a single seed and share a single root.



According to this tradition, Noah, the father of us all, planted that seed, a gift he received from the Creator of All Things. It is based on a set of laws he had received from Adam, renewed and expanded for Noah's time. It is a guide from beyond to show humankind how to create a sustainable world that would never again face destruction.

"We Mongols believe in one G-d, by whom we live and by whom we die and toward Him we have an upright heart. Just as G-d gave different fingers to the hand, so has He given different ways to men."—Genghis Khan

And it is a teaching that brings many voices into harmony, for it is the essence of all of them, yet does not deny to any its own unique beauty. After all, once you have found truth in your own backyard, that doesn't mean no one else is allowed a backyard. Rather, in each backyard is another glowing ember of the truth known to Noah. Each people has cultured and developed a certain wisdom, a certain beauty that others lack.

So that's all we're presenting here: A guide to finding the truths within the traditions we already have. For in those latent truths lie all that we need to breathe together as one harmonious humankind embracing one healthy Planet Earth.

Power From Beyond

The power behind these seven laws is that none of us made them up. You could say they're from "outside the system." That's important. Because, as everyone knows, no system can support itself.

Think about it:

Can you make a perpetual motion machine? No. Because a machine can't run itself.

Can you make a system of logic with no assumptions? No. Because logic can't explain itself.



Can humankind determine how to live together in peace and harmony for all time? No. Because we didn't put ourselves here. We need to tap into something beyond us, infinitely higher than us, to do that.

We need a set of principles based not on human reason, but on the essential sanctity of life and justice. So here are seven laws that are not relative truths that can change as society changes. They are absolutes; solid ground upon which the world can firmly stand.

The Seven Laws of Noah:

1. Embrace the Relevance of Oneness

The first principle of Noah is that the Essence of Being cares about what we are doing and wants something from us.

Noah looked upon Planet Earth and saw that every life upon it breathes with purpose and meaning. He saw himself and his children as its stewards, charged with a duty and a mission.

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Every culture has its names for this essential oneness behind reality. One thing is agreed by all: We are not talking about a being, physical or spiritual, that can be known or defined in any way. After all, this essence is responsible for all being and all form—so it itself transcends all being and form. Even the terms of “existence” or “non-existence” could not apply.



Nevertheless, the Noah tradition insists that this unknowable oneness cares about our reality and is accessible to us through prayer and deeds; that reality is not an accident—every detail of life is deliberate and is filled with purpose and meaning.

The Essence desires to be found in each thing. Why? It is a passion beyond reason. Reason, after all, is just another idea that this Essential Oneness sustains.

That essential consciousness spoke from within the first members of humanity. From its voice, we learned that acts of kindness, caring, prayer, wisdom and enlightenment put us in harmony with the universe. Murder, theft, adultery, incest and wanton cruelty to living creatures—all these and everything associated with them are destructive to that relationship. And we were told to administer justice.

How were these laws forgotten? As time progressed, people came to rely more on their own meek understanding and less on that voice from beyond. They understood that there is only one Supreme Essence, but they decided that the many forces of nature were also worth considering as conscious, semi-autonomous beings. “After all,” they said, “how can you talk to the Essence of Being? How could such a being care about us? We need something we can relate to.”

That’s how the idea of a pantheon of gods first became popular. It wasn’t long before temples were raised to those many forces and beings. Soon there were physical representations, so that people could focus their minds and hearts on manipulating the cosmic flow. Later, another generation arose that only knew the outer rituals, completely blind to the inner meaning.

Eventually, humanity deteriorated to the point that the common man and woman knew only the wood and stone and believed these to be the gods who controlled their lives. Those seekers and hermits who knew the truth dared not share it save with their closest disciples.

With idolatry, came the downfall of human dignity. Rulers claimed to be gods and treated their subjects as inferior beings. The only lives that were valued were those that were considered close to the gods.

Until a lofty soul entered the world and turned the tide. His name was Abraham and he too was raised in the idolatry and superstition of the time. But he took these practices seriously, pondered their meaning, and realized they were lies.

With no teacher to guide him, he perceived that all the forces of nature worked in synchronous harmony. He chose to bond his soul not with the fire and not with the sun, not with the sky and not with the wind, not with the heavenly constellations and not with the invisible spirits, but with the singular divinity that breathes within them all. Eventually, he came to understand that this great force of nature, as well, was only a manifestation of the all-transcendent Source of Being from which all existence originates.

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Abraham's ideas threatened the authority of the god-kings and their appointed priests. He defied them openly, declaring that every human being could call directly upon the Ultimate Authority for all his needs, for compassion and for justice.

The ancient Greeks and Egyptians mention Abraham as a great sage and astronomer. Three great religions consider him their patriarch. Some Jewish teachings trace the monotheistic concept of Brahman—which seems closely related to his name—derives from his teachings. Without his conviction that there is harmony in the many opposites of nature, the quest of science would not be possible.

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After Abraham's passing, the world slipped back into darkness. His children carried on his path in a hostile world. Eventually they, too, as slaves in Egypt, became steeped in falseness and the seedling Abraham had planted almost withered and died.

It was then that another revolutionary arose. Moses liberated the children of Abraham and brought them to the desolate peninsula of Sinai. There, he arranged a meeting of heaven and earth, so that all the people would not only understand, but also see for themselves that all of reality is sustained by a single Being, one that imbues all life with meaning. They received laws by which to guide their lives and the lives of their children after them. And they were appointed to a mission: to preserve Noah's teaching and Abraham's message, spreading it to all peoples and nations wherever their travels would take them.

Mount Sinai was a watershed event for humankind. Until that point, Abraham's message was the conviction of a single man, arrived at by his own intuition. Abraham was a man reaching upward, to connect with the light beyond. At Sinai, it was that Infinite Light itself that reached inward, touching humankind, asking us to let It in.

The difference is crucial: The foundation was no longer human reason, but the will of that which transcends all reason. Human reason provides a shifting foundation; eventually it must fail—as Abraham's message withered after his passing. The foundation of Sinai came from beyond space and time.

Today, over 50% of the world acknowledges Abraham as the father of their belief systems. Yet Abraham's vision has still yet to ripen. We are standing on the threshold of that dream. The rest is up to us.

2. Do Not Deny That Oneness

The second principle of Noah is not to profane that oneness in any way.

In a simple sense, that means not to damn or curse the one who conducts this universe, or deny that there is one.

This, too, is an essential part of creating a sustainable world for humankind on our planet. If the magnificent plethora of life that surrounds us is nothing more than an accident, why should we bother to make the sacrifices necessary to preserve it? Recognizing that this world has a master who has made us its stewards is a vital step in taking responsibility for our environment in the long term.

It's also an essential part of building a sustainable society. The bedrock of the morality of healthy societies is the human intuition that there is meaning and purpose to life, that this purpose serves as an absolute measure of good and evil, and that the choice is up to us whether or not to work towards fulfilling that purpose.

Purpose requires a higher context. Just as an automobile can have no purpose without a road and a destiny, just as a hammer can have no purpose without a nail and structure to be built, so our world and the life within it cannot have purpose without a higher consciousness that chooses a destiny for the world and gives it meaning.

But without a context greater than itself, life can have no purpose. And when purpose is robbed from human beings, the very fabric of their morality swiftly crumbles.

If there is no meaning, then all courses of life are equally purposeless.

If there is no purpose, then all efforts to defend our values are a joke.

If there is no absolute good or evil, then morality is left to each person to decide, according to his or her whims and benefit.

If we have no free will to choose between good and evil, then all is justified—because no justification is necessary. There is no “me” who did anything wrong. There is only a relentless, blameless, mindless chain of cause and effect. Anything can happen.

And it does.



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The 20th century provides us with a laboratory demonstration. When human beings abandoned a higher authority to serve the icons of their own making then the most atrocious acts of inhumanity, mass slavery, hatred and genocide ever known to humankind spread across the planet. Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Maoist China and Pol Pot's Cambodia are prime, but not lone, specimens of this truth. These were not the acts of barbarians, but cold and calculated acts perpetrated in the name of godless human ideologies.

This is the crucial importance of the second law of Noah: It tells us that to actively and explicitly deny the existence of a single, deliberate and purposeful conductor of this universe is a serious, irresponsible and reckless crime against humanity. Because it undermines the very foundation of responsible human conduct—the knowledge that there is a singular reality beyond our own that gives us purpose and to whom we are held responsible.

3. Guard the Sanctity of Human Life

The third principle of Noah is that the value of human life cannot be measured.

Noah was not simply told, “Do not murder.” He was given a reason: Because the human being is made in the divine image.

Just as it is vital to know that there is only one force behind the universe, so it is vital to know that this force breathes within each human being.

We are not just functional machines made of meat and standing on two legs; each of us contains the entire universe—each one contains the very soul of the universe. This is what the Book of Genesis calls “the Divine Image.”

“When one human being perishes, for that human being the entire universe has perished.” —the Maharal of Prague



To destroy a single human life is to destroy the entire universe—because, for that person, this reality has ceased to exist. And so it follows that by sustaining a single human life, you are sustaining an entire universe.

No idea in human history has caused as much upheaval and progress as this basic tenet. Abraham and Moses were its great proponents, but it was not until it finally resurfaced in Europe 500 years ago that the world was transformed beyond recognition. It is the basis of the American Bill of Rights and of the constitution of every progressive nation today.

4. Honor the Sanctity of Measured Consumption

The fourth principle of Noah has to do with how we exploit the life and resources of our world.

This principle is stated clearly in Genesis, “Do not eat meat while its soul is still within it.” Quite simply, 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.

Everywhere on the planet, a grand symphony of life unfolds. Oxygen, carbon and hydrogen are fused by the sun to give life to plants and trees; a multitude of swimming, crawling, running and flying beings each plays its part as simple organisms are consumed by more complex, intelligent and conscious beings.

Which way is up and which is down? There is no way to tell. For it is the simple that gives life to the more complex and each depends on the other—until all together they present a masterful, integrated whole.

The chain of life continues into the non-physical realm, for the human being stands as a bridge between the material and the spiritual. We are meant to live with our feet on the earth and our hearts towards the heavens, tending to the most mundane matters of eating and sleeping in a mindful way, consuming our food with care and respect for the life that brought it to us. In this way, we carry the life we consume one step higher, from the material to the spiritual.



This is a challenge for every human being: To choose harmony with the

With every bite we eat, every calorie of energy we burn, we can choose to continue dragging our environment into greater disarray—or to bond heaven and earth, connecting the life of this planet with a higher purpose.

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Since the Source of all things is an essential oneness, so every detail of the world around us expresses a magnificent unity. As the Kabbalists explain, in every event, every life and every creature an infinite light can be found, because the truth within each thing is divine.

Humankind has the capacity to reveal that divinity within all earthly things and to connect them to the infinite light. But we also have the capacity for the opposite, to cause acrimony and unbalance. This is a challenge for every human being: To choose harmony with the soul of the universe and reveal the harmony of all of the creation.

And this begins with acknowledgment of the world's master and awe for the masterwork we inhabit.

5. Respect the Sanctity of Private Property

The fifth principle of Noah is about respecting the property of others.

In other words, not stealing. But there's much more to stealing than you might have imagined.

Each of our lives has its unique purpose—and those things that enter our lives and become our possessions are key to that purpose. You can't steal purpose from anyone's life, no matter how much you take away from him. But another person's property in your possession becomes a heavy weight that does not allow your own purpose to be fulfilled.

"Politicians may reiterate a thousand times that the basis of the new world order must be human rights, but it will mean nothing as long as it does not derive from respect for the miracle of Being."--Václav Havel



Thinking about it this way, you'll realize that there are many ways of stealing without even taking your hands out of your pockets. How about the person who gets ahead by putting someone else down, for example? Isn't that also a form of taking something that's not really yours? The same with laughing at

someone else's expense. Or gossiping about someone else just for entertainment.

Whatever benefits you receive in this world, make sure that none of them are at the unfair expense of someone else.

6. Harness and Sublimate the Human Libido

The sixth principle of Noah is about harnessing and sublimating the human libido. Incest, adultery, rape and other licentious practices are forbidden by this principle.

Sexuality is the fountain of life and so nothing is more divine than the sexual act. So, too, nothing can be more debasing and destructive to the human being.

The union of man and woman is a reflection of the cosmic dance by which all things come to be. It is the union of heaven and earth, spiritual and material, soul and body, energy and matter, oneness and diversity.

“A man shall cleave to his woman and they shall become one flesh.” — Genesis

When man and woman unite in a harmonious, caring way, their union rings throughout the universe like a song resonating in a vast chamber. All of reality plays along as an orchestra plays a grand concerto. They bring healing and blessing to the world, just as they bring new souls, dressed in pure and pristine light.

Yet, as with any art, to achieve such harmony is a struggle. As the artist must master his craft, choosing the beautiful and rejecting the ugly; as a musician disciplines his fingers and a dancer her limbs—so to this primal art of human union has its own rules and discipline.

As art is a supernatural act of the human being, so is marriage. It is not nature, but higher than nature. For some people this requires a superhuman effort. That is what the beauty of human sexuality is all about: The ability to be supernatural. In the long run, nothing could be more satisfying and create more beauty.



7. Create Mechanisms to Ensure Justice

The seventh principle of Noah demands that we ensure justice in our world.

No other creature on the planet but the human being requires a court to enforce law and order. The fish know their place in the sea, the birds their pathways in the skies and the animals know the laws of their kingdoms.

Only the human being must have a score set before him so he will not play in grinding discord. Only the human being has the ability to disrupt the order of the entire planet, to step out of synch with his own purpose and the divine plan.

“The world is sustained by three things: by acts of justice, by acts of truth and by acts of peace.” — Teachings of the Fathers



If the Creator has a purpose for humankind, why doesn't He Himself rein humankind in? Let Him meet out justice Himself—why should we meddle into His business?

But this itself is the reason—both for our freedom and for our responsibilities: We are meant to be partners in the Creation. And that, most of all, is through determining and delivering justice.

We are not meant to passively observe oppression, inequality and injustice and accept this as fate. We are meant to be outraged, to cry out to the Creator of all things, “How could this be?” And then to do something about it.

Even a small act of justice for a single human being impacts every other human being on the planet. We are restoring harmony to our reality, placing it in synch with a higher reality, a supernal order. In that order, every life is an entire world, no one is insignificant. And so, in establishing justice for one person, all the world is healed.

The Goal

Why have these seven principles become so crucial today? Because today we stand at the doorstep of a whole new world. All our technology, all our advances in science and social justice, all drive us up a steady track towards an age promised by the prophets and described by the sages—an age of wisdom and of peace.

The know-how is in place. We can feed everyone. We can teach everyone. We can all join together in dialog and creativity. We only need a common ground. Not one that any human being can establish for us, not one that can arise from our consensus. That's just more dusty topsoil, easily blown away by the first wind. The common ground we need must be the ground from which we were formed, at the essence of humanity's purpose and the meaning of reality.

And that lies only in the hand of the Infinite Light that formed us. The voice that Noah heard.



By Tzvi Freeman



Tzvi Freeman is the author of *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth* and, more recently, *Wisdom to Heal the Earth*. Subscribe to *The Daily Dose of Wisdom* and *Freeman Files* for regular updates.

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