

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [269]

Will You Accept the Torah? (Insights into Sifrei Devarim 343)



Background of Our Story

An Oldie

God went to the Germans and said, 'I have Commandments for you that will make your lives better.'

The Germans asked, 'What are Commandments?'

And the Lord said, 'They are rules for living.'

'Can you give us an example?'

'Thou shall not kill.'

'Not kill? We're not interested.'

So He went to the Americans and said, 'I have Commandments.'

The Americans wanted an example, and the Lord said, 'Honor thy Father and Mother.'

'We already have for them Father Day and Mother Day! We're not interested.'

Then He went to the Arabs and said, 'I have Commandments.'

The Arabs also wanted an example, and the Lord said 'Thou shall not steal..'

'Not steal? We're not interested.'

Then He went to the French and said, 'I have Commandments.'

The French too wanted an example and the Lord said, 'Thou shall not commit adultery.'

'Sacre bleu!!! Not commit adultery? We're not interested.'

Finally, He went to the Jews and said, 'I have Commandments.'

'Commandments?' They said, 'How much are they?'

'They're free.'

'We'll take 10.'

Deuteronomy 33:2

The Lord came from Sinai;

He shone upon them from Seir;

He appeared from Mount Paran,

And approached from Ribebboth-kodesh,
Lightning flashing at them from His right.

7 Commandments of the Children of Noah (Noahide Laws)



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Laws_of_Noah

The Seven Laws of Noah ([Hebrew](#): שבע מצוות בני נח *Sheva Mitzvot B'nei Noach*), also referred to as the Noahide Laws are a set of imperatives which, according to the [Talmud](#), were given by God as a binding set of laws for the "children of [Noah](#)" – that is, all of humanity.

According to Jewish tradition, [non-Jews](#) who adhere to these laws because they were given by [Moses](#) are regarded as [righteous gentiles](#), who are assured of a place in [Olam Haba](#) (עולם הבא, the [world to come](#)), the final reward of the righteous.

The Seven Laws of Noah include prohibitions against [worshipping idols](#), [cursing God](#), [murder](#), [adultery](#) and sexual immorality, [theft](#), [eating flesh torn from a living animal](#), as well as the obligation to establish [courts of justice](#).

The Text: Sifrei Devarim 343

ד"א ויאמר ה' מסיני בא - כשנגלה המקום ליתן תורה לישראל לא על ישראל בלבד הוא נגלה, אלא על כל האומות: בתחילה הלך אצל בני עשו ואמר להם: מקבלים אתם את התורה? אמרו לו: מה כתוב בה? אמר להם לא תרצח. אמרו: רבש"ע, כל עצמו של אותו אביהם רוצח הוא, שנ' והידיים ידי עשו, ועל כך הבטיחו אביו, שנאמר בראשית כז"ע על חרבך תחיה. הלך לו אצל בני עמון ומואב ואמר להם: מקבלים אתם את התורה? אמרו לו מה כתוב בו? אמר להם לא תנאף. אמרו לפניו: רבש"ע, עצמה של ערוה להם היא, שנ' ותהרן שתי בנות לוט מאביהם. הלך ומצא בני ישמעאל, אמר להם: מקבלים אתם את התורה? אמרו לו מה כתוב בה? אמר להם לא תגנוב. אמרו לפניו: רבש"ע, כל עצמו אביהם לסטים היה, שנא' והוא יהיה פרא אדם, לא היתה אומה באומות שלא הלך ודבר, ודפק על פתחם מה ירצו ויקבלו את התורה, וכן הוא אומר תהלים קכח יודוך ה' כל מלכי ארץ כי שמעו אמרי פיך. יכול שמעו וקיבלו? ת"ל יחזקאל לג"א ואתם לא תעשו, ואומר מיכה ה"עשיתי באף ובחימה נקם את הגוי אשר לא שמעו, אלא אפילו שבע מצות שקיבלו עליהם בני נח לא יכלו לעמוד בהם, עד שפרקום ונתנום לישראל

"The Lord came (from Sinai)" (Deuteronomy 33:2).

When the Omnipresent appeared to give the Torah to Israel, it is not to Israel alone that He [God] appeared, but to all of the nations.

First, He went to the children of Esau, and He asked them: Will you accept the Torah? They asked: What is written in it? He [God] answered: "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13). They answered: The entire essence of our father is murder, as it is written (Genesis 27:22) "And the hands are the hands of

Esau." It is with this his father assured him (Genesis 27:40) "*And by your sword shall you live.*"

He [God] then went to the children of Ammon and Moav and asked them: Will you accept the Torah? They asked: What is written in it? He [God] answered "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:13). They answered: Master of the Universe, illicit relations is our entire essence, as it is written (Genesis 19:36) "*And the two daughters of Lot conceived by their father.*"

He [God] then went and found the children of Yishmael and asked them: Will you accept the Torah? They asked: What is written in it? He [God] answered: "*You shall not steal*" (Exodus 20:13) They answered: Master of the Universe, our father's entire essence is stealing, as it written (Genesis 16:12): "*And he (Yishmael) shall be a wild man, his hand against all.*"

There was none among all of the nations to whom He [God] did not go and speak and knock at their door, asking if they would accept the Torah, as it is written (Psalms 138:4) "*All the kings of the earth will acknowledge You, O Lord, for they heard the words of Your mouth.*" I might think they heard and accepted. Therefore, it is written (Ezekiel 33:31) "*And they did not do them (the commandments).*" And (Micah 5:14) "*And with anger and wrath will I take revenge of the nations because they did not accept (the commandments).*"

Even the seven mitzvot that the sons of Noach took upon themselves they could not abide by, until they divested themselves of them and relinquished them to Israel.



Explaining the Story - What's going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Bonus ? Why is it important for the author of this story to emphasize that God offered the Torah to all the nations *before* He offered it to the Jewish people?

? Why do the nations of the world ask God: “what *is written in it?*” before deciding if they accept the Torah or not?

Bonus ? In principle it is a good idea to “read the fine print” before agreeing to any commitment. Why does our story frown upon the nations of the world who asked: “what *is written in it?*” before deciding if they accept the Torah or not?

Bonus ? Why didn’t the nations of the world accept the Torah?

Bonus ? Why did Israel accept the Torah?

“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts

! At the end of the day, who should get the job? The one who is willing to do it!



Our story emphasizes the contrast between the acceptance of the Torah by the Jewish people and its rejection by the nations of the world. On a deeper level, however, our story can shed light on how people in organizations, communities, and families, relate to a job –a taxing job- that needs to be done. When faced with a taxing job that needs to be done, there are those who ask questions, there are those who talk about the job that needs to be done, there are those who find excuses why they cannot do the job that needs to be done, and finally there are those who get the job done. Our story teaches us when a job needs to be done, the ultimate –and only- test is: who will get it done?