

THE NOAHIDE CHAIN
 RABBI TANI BURTON
 SUKKAT SHALOM-BNEI NOACH

Noahides often feel like a man without a country, because unlike the Jewish people, whose connection to Torah is accompanied by millenia of heritage, there does not seem to be, at first glance, a parallel Noahide tradition. Is it possible, by retracing our steps through the Bible, through history to the present day, to determine a Noahide spiritual chain, a heritage that is available by reconnecting with it?

A question was asked, why hasn't there been a campaign to spread these teachings amongst humanity throughout history? As we examine the sources, we may discover that in fact, there has been a campaign. Of sorts.

We know that the Seven Laws were given to Adam and to Noah. They have been with humankind since the dawn of time. What is less spoken about is the fact that the personalities of the Book of Genesis can all be considered Bnei Noach, because the only revealed spiritual code in the world—until the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, was the Noahide Code.

The Forefathers Were Bnei Noach

a. Abraham

1. Rashi, TB Avoda Zara 3a

<p>Nimrod threw Abraham our father into a furnace in Kasdim because he did not accept upon himself the obligation to worship idols, for this was forbidden to Bnei Noach, and Abraham was a Ben Noach, for he was not present at the time of the Giving of the Torah. Therefore, Nimrod is referred to as Amrafel, because he spoke [<i>amar</i>], and Abraham was thrown [<i>hifil</i>] into the furnace.</p>	<p>נמרוד - השליך את אברהם אבינו באור כשדים על שלא קיבל עליו לעבוד עבודת כוכבים שנאסרה לבני נח ואברהם בן נח הוא שלא היה בשעת מתן תורה ועל שם כך נקרא אמרפל בכיצד מעברין (עירובין נג.) שאמר והפיל אברהם בכבשן האש:</p>
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b. Jacob

2. Rashi, Ibid.

<p>For he was not suspected of stealing: as the verse states, “what have you found, from all the utensils of your house—not a knife, not a needle?!”, and a son-in-law who dwells in his father-in-law’s home for twenty years, when he leaves, he doesn’t take even a small item? Yet, Bnei Noach had been commanded</p>	<p>שלא נחשד על הגזל - דכתיב מה מצאת מכל כלי ביתך אפי' סכין אפילו המנקה אפילו מחט והחתך הדר בבית חמיו עשרים שנה כשיוצא אינו נוטל עמו כלי קטן ובני נח נצטוו על הגזל ויעקב קיים:</p>
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concerning theft, and Jacob fulfilled this commandment.	
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c. Joseph

3. Rashi, *ibid.*

With regard to Joseph, who was not suspected of transgression—sexual relations with another’s wife was forbidden to Bnei Noach, as the verse states, “and he shall cleave to his wife”, i.e., and not his friend’s wife (TB Sanhedrin 58a), and Joseph fulfilled this commandment.	ביוסף שלא נחשד על העבירה - אשת איש נאסרה לבני נח דכתיב ודבק באשתו ולא באשת חברו (סנהדרין דף נח.). ויוסף קיים:
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Rashi’s commentary clearly indicates that the status of these people—people we normally (and rightly) refer to as the forefathers of the Jewish nation—was Noahide!

Were there attempts to expose others to the Noahide Laws?

Outreach

Genesis 12:5

And Avram took Saray his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had acquired in Haran; and they went forth to go to the land of Kena’an; and into the land of Kena’an they came.	ויקח אברם את שרי אשתו ואת לוט בן אחיו ואת כל רכושם אשר רכשו ואת הגפוש אשר עשו בחרן ויצאו ללכת ארצה כנען ויבאו ארצה כנען:
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The verse actually says, “the souls that they *made* in Haran”.

Rashi, *loc. cit*

“Which they had made in Haran” – for they brought these souls under the Wings of the Divine Presence. Abraham converted the men, and Sarah converted the women, and the verse regards it as if they created them.	אשר עשו בחרן. שהכניסן תחת כנפי השכינה; אברהם מגיר את האנשים ושרה מגירת הנשים, ומעלה עליהם הכתוב כאלו עשאוהו
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The question we can ask is, exactly what were Abraham and Sarah converting people to? At the very least, it was to the consciousness of One G-d. Is that actually a conversion? We can speculate, although we can't say for sure, that it may not only have been the idea of monotheism that was promulgated by Abraham and Sarah, but also a path in serving Him, in accordance with the revelation that had taken place generations before: the Seven Laws.

Post-Sinai Outreach

Esther Rabbah 6:2

<p>Some say that he was the equivalent of Abraham in his generation. Just as Abraham allowed himself to be put into the fiery furnace and went about causing people to acknowledge the greatness of the Holy One blessed be He – that is what is written: “And the souls they had gotten in Haran” (Genesis 12:5), so too, Mordechai, in his time, people acknowledged the greatness of the Holy One blessed be He. That is what is written: “Many of the peoples of the land became Jews, as the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them” (Esther 8:17). He unified the name of the Holy One blessed be He, and sanctified it.</p>	<p>יש אומרים שיהיה שקול כאברהם בדורו, מה אברהם אבינו מסר את עצמו לתוך כבשן האש והחזיר והפיר לבריות גדלתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, הנא הוא דכתיב (בראשית יב, ה: (וְאֵת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן, אִף מִרְדְּכָי בְּנִמְיו הַפִּירו הַבְּרִיּוֹת גְּדֻלְתּוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, הֲנָא הוּא דְכָתִיב (וְרַבִּים מֵעַמִּי הָאֲרָץ מִתְיַהֲדִים, וַיִּיחַד שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְקִדְּשׁוֹ, וּלְפִיכָּה נִקְרָא יְהוּדִי, דְכָתִיב: אִישׁ יְהוּדִי, אֵל תִּקְרִי יְהוּדִי אֱלֹא יְחִידִי.</p>
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In a Post-Sinai world, we have a later example of Mordechai, whose demonstration of G-d-consciousness caused many people to accept not only the 7 laws, but all 613 laws of the Torah.

Non-Jewish Prophets

TB Bava Batra 15b

<p>There were seven prophets who prophesied to the nations of the world, and these are they: Balaam, his father, Job, Eliphaz HaTeimani and Bildad HaShuchi, and Tzofar HaNa'amati, and Elihu ben Barachel HaBuzi. He said to him, “but, Elihu ben Barachel— was he not from the people of Israel? After all, the verse states that he was from the family of Ram!” Rather, he was from the</p>	<p>שְׁבַע נְבִיאִים נִתְנַבְּאוּ לְאוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם – וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: בַּלְעָם וְאָבִיו וְאֵיּוֹב, אֵלִיפַז הַתֵּימָנִי וּבִלְדָד הַשׁוּחִי וְצוֹפָר הַנְּעֻמָּתִי וְאֵלִיהוּא בֶן בְּרַכָּאֵל הַבּוּזִי! אָמַר לֵיהּ: וְלִיטְעָמִיד, אֵלִיהוּא בֶן בְּרַכָּאֵל – לָאוּ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה? וְהָא כְּתִיב “מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת רָם”! אֱלֹא אֵינְבוּ? אֵינְבוּ לְאוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם; הֲכִי נִמְי אֵיּוֹב – אֵינְבוּ? אֵינְבוּ [לְאוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם]. אִטּוּ כּוֹלְהוּ נְבִיאֵי מִי לָא אֵינְבוּ לְאוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם? הָתָם – עֵיקַר נְבִיאוּתֵיהוּ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, הָכָא – עֵיקַר נְבִיאוּתֵיהוּ לְאוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם.</p>
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<p>people of Israel, but prophesied to the nations of the world. But Job also prophesied to the nations of the world! Whom amongst any of the prophets did not prophesy to the nations of the world?! Rather, with regard to the other prophets their prophesies were mainly about Israel, whereas the prophesies of these seven were mainly about the nations of the world.</p>	
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Prophets serve a specific purpose, namely to tell people what is going to happen, what G-d has decreed, usually to bring people in line because they want to avert the impending disaster. In other words, to cause people to do teshuvah, repentance. Chazal are telling us here that there were actually seven non-Jewish prophets who prophesied specifically to the nations of the world. Usually the prophets are from the people of Israel, who may mention the nations of the world, but usually as portents that they are relating specifically to the people of Israel.

Rashi, loc. Cit

<p>We have to say that, since the verse identifies him by his name and the name of his father, and his family name, he was an Israelite from the Ram family, meaning, from the family of Abraham.</p>	<p>אליהוא - על כרחך מדייחסייה קרא בשמו [ושם אביו] ושם משפחתו ישראל הוה ואית דאמרי ממשפחת רם היה היינו אברהם:</p>
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There are other opinions as to the identity of Elihu, that he may have been descended from Nahor, the father of Abraham.

Examples of Jewish prophets who prophesied to non-Jews

Jonah 1:2

<p>Arise and go to Nineveh, the great city, and call upon it, for their evil has risen before Me.</p>	<p>קום לך אל נינוה וקרא עליה כי עלתה רעתם לפני. רעתם לפני:</p>
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Radak, loc. cit

<p>Arise and go to Nineveh, the great city, and call upon it, for their evil has risen before Me – But the verse does not state what he should say. And Nineveh was overturned—this teaches us that Hashem commanded Yona to make this “call” because the evil of Nineveh was noticed by Him. We learn from here that</p>	<p>קום לך אל נינוה. וקרא עליה כי עלתה רעתם לפני. ולא כתב מה יקרא עליה אלא ממה שקרא עליה בסוף ונינוה נהפכת למדנו כי זאת הקריאה אמר לו שיקרא עליה כי עלתה רעתם לפני למד כי האל יתברך משגיח אף באומות העולם כשתגדל רעתם בחמס וכן בדור המבול ובאנשי סדום כי מלאה הארץ חמס, והחמס מפסיד היישוב והאל יתברך רוצה ביישוב העולם אבל</p>
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G-d oversees the nations of the world, particularly when their evilness reaches a certain point, like the chaos of the Generation of the Flood. Chaos destroys civilization and G-d desires the world to be a settled, civilized place.	בשאר עבירות אינם חשובים לפניו שישגיח עליהם אלא בישראל לבדם כמו שאמר רק אתכם ידעתי מכל משפחות האדמה כמו שפי' בנבואת עמוס
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Eliphaz

Genesis 36:12

Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. Those were the descendants of Esau's wife Adah.	וַתִּמְנַע אֵלֶּה פִּילְגֶשֶׁת לְאֵלִיפַז בֶּן-עֵשָׂו וַתֵּלֶד לְאֵלִיפַז אֶת-עַמְלֵק אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עֵדָה אִשְׁתּוֹ עֵשָׂו:
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Targum Yonatan loc. cit

And Timna was the concubine of Eliphaz bar Esau, and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek. <u>He is Eliphaz the companion of Job.</u> These are the sons of Adah wife of Esau.	וַתִּמְנַע הַנֶּת פִּילְקֶתָא לְאֵלִיפַז בַּר עֵשָׂו וַיֵּלֶד לְאֵלִיפַז אֶת עַמְלֵק הוּא אֵלִיפַז סְבָרִיָּה דְאִיּוֹב אֵלִין בְּנֵי עֵדָה אִישְׁתּוֹ עֵשָׂו
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Rashi, Job 4:1

Eliphaz was Esau's son, and because he grew up in the home of Isaac, he merited to have the Divine Presence dwell upon him.	מענה אליפז. (אליפז בן עשו היה ועל ידי שנתגדל בחיקו של יצחק זכה שתשרה עליו שכינה:
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We also know from Midrash Lekach Tov that because Eliphaz grew up with Job, he did not fight against the Children of Israel as his father had commanded him. His son, Amalek, asked him, “Father, who will inherit This World and the next?”, and Eliphaz answered, “the Children of Israel. Go and dig wells for them, and repair their roads, and if you do so, your portion will be as good as that of the least of them, and you will merit Olam HaBa” (Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot 247:268). Hashem said to Eliphaz after he rebuked Job, “I will bring forth prophetic offspring from you, someone who will prophesy retribution against the house of your father”—and this we see in the vision of the prophet Obadiah, who speaks of the downfall of Edom. We also see in the midrash that Job answered by saying to Eliphaz, “look at the face of your father”, and Eliphaz answered, “I have no business with him”. However, based on his name HaTimni, there are those who say that Eliphaz was a descendant of Teiman the son of the original Eliphaz. Thus, we find a dispute as to the dating of the Book of Job—did the events of Job happen in Jacob's day, or during the life of Moses? There is also a midrash that states that Job was one of Pharaoh's three advisers, the other two being Balaam and Jethro. One is destroyed, one is afflicted, and one becomes part of Israel.

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According to the gemara in tractate Avoda Zara (3a), Bildad was a descendant of Keturah, Abraham’s second wife. Thus, we see in the verse:

Genesis 25:2

She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.	וַתֵּלֶד לּוֹ אֶת־זִמְרָן וְאֶת־יָקֹשָׁן וְאֶת־מִדְיָן וְאֶת־מְדָן וְאֶת־שׁוּחַ וְאֶת־יִשְׁבָּק וְאֶת־שׁוּחַ׃
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If you descended from Shuah, you would be called HaShuchi.

Job 2:11

When Job’s three friends heard about all these calamities that had befallen him, each came from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him.	וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת ׀ רֵעֵי אִיּוֹב אֶת כָּל־הַרָעָה הַזֹּאת הַבָּאָה עָלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אִישׁ מִמְקוֹמוֹ אֶל־יֹצֵן הַתִּימְנִי וּבִלְדָד הַשׁוּחִי וְצוֹפָר הַנַּעֲמָתִי וַיּוֹעְדוּ יַחְדָּו לָבוֹא לְגִיד־לוֹ וּלְנַחֲמוֹ׃
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Ibn Ezra, loc. cit

“HaShuchi” – of the sons of Keturah, the wife of Abraham	השוחי - מבני קטורה אשת אברהם את ישבק ואת שוח.
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The end of prophecy amongst non-Jews

Tosefot, loc. cit

Wasn’t Elihu an Israelite? – The implication is that Elihu ben Barachel was an Israelite. Thus we find in the first chapter of Avoda Zara (3a), that it says, “let Bildad HaShuchi and Tzofar HaNa’amati come and testify about Israel that they fulfilled the entire Torah”. Note that the statement does not include Elihu ben Barachel. It seems that the passage there goes along with the notion that Job lived during the time of Jacob, as we discover later that from the time of Moses and onward, the Divine Presence did not rest upon non-Jews.	אליהוא לא מישראל הוה. משמע דפשיטא דאליהוא בן ברכאל מישראל הוה לכך נראה דבפ"ק דע"ז (דף ג.) דאמר יבא בלדד השוחי וצופר הנעמתי ויעידו בהן בישראל שקיימו כל התורה כולה ל"ג התם ואליהוא בן ברכאל ונראה דשמעתתא דהתם סברה כמ"ד איוב בימי יעקב הוה דהא אמר לקמן דממשה ואילך לא שרתה שכינה על עובדי כוכבים׃
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Now let's look at the Rambam in light of what we just learned

Rambam, Kings and Wars 8:11

<p>Anyone who accepts upon himself the fulfillment of these seven mitzvot and is precise in their observance is considered one of 'the pious among the gentiles' and will merit a share in the world to come. This applies only when he accepts them and fulfills them because the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Torah and informed us through Moses, our teacher, that Noah's descendants had been commanded to fulfill them previously. However, if he fulfills them out of intellectual conviction, he is not a resident alien, nor of 'the pious among the gentiles,' nor of their wise men.</p>	<p>כָּל הַמְקַבֵּל שִׁבְעַת מִצְוֹת וְנוֹזֵק לַעֲשׂוֹתָן הָרִי זֶה מִחֲסִידֵי אַמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם. וַיֵּשׁ לוֹ חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְהוּא שֶׁיִּקְבֹּל אוֹתָן וַיַּעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָן מִפְּנֵי שִׂצְוֹהָ בְּהֵן הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בַּתּוֹרָה וְהוֹדִיעָנוּ עַל יְדֵי מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ שֶׁבָּגֵי נֹחַ מִקִּדְמָה נִצְטוּוּ בָּהֶן. אֲבָל אִם עָשָׂאן מִפְּנֵי הַכָּרַע הַדַּעַת אִין זֶה גֵר תּוֹשֵׁב וְאִינוּ מִחֲסִידֵי אַמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם וְלֹא מִחֲכָמֵיהֶם:</p>
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Why is it so important to accept the Seven Laws because the Holy One, Blessed be He, informed us through Moses? Because that was the last revelation given to a Noahide! After this point, prophecy only occurs amongst the people of Israel, and this too, eventually ends. Intellectual conviction does not compare to prophecy.

Next time we meet, we will look at the Noahide heritage as we move further along in history.

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