



Teaching Benei Noah

*By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok
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We live in miraculous times, a time when great movements in human consciousness are occurring. For thousands of years Torah and the Jewish religion have been a target for scorn and attack. And yet, for just the last few decades a marvel has occurred. One of the hardest mitzvot to perform is actually falling into the laps of many a Jewish leader and Rabbi.

I am referring to the mitzvah, outlined by RaMBaM in his Hilkhot Melakhim 8:10 to reach out and teach our Gentile neighbors the seven laws of universal morality & spirituality, known as the Sheva Mitzvot D'Benei Noah. Now, in our day, we see many a Gentile coming and approaching Rabbis and asking to be taught. Indeed, this is a great and awesome thing. Yet, as to everything there is both a good and dark side.

Even in this great accomplishment, unfortunately, there is an amount of darkness often unknown and often ignored. Not all Gentiles who come and approach Rabbis wanting to learn the Sheva Mitzvot D'Benei Noah are sincere, coming for the right reasons and with the proper motivation. It is unfortunate but I find that we must discuss some examples of Benei Noah "leaders" who have not as yet properly embraced the Torah and the Divinely ordained authority of our Sages both past and present.

While it is good seeing so many sincere Gentiles abandoning idolatry and embracing our Torah, I must emphasize that the only proper embrace of the Torah is an absolute one, not dependant upon one's personal view of things, but rather upon what is correct and true in accordance to Torah law. This is where a problem has developed. Many a Ben Noah have developed their own ideas and conclusions with regards to Torah teachings that are outside the proper Mesorah (authoritative Torah interpretations). As such many in the modern Benei Noah boom are not being taught correct Torah teachings from bonafide and qualified Benei Noah teachers. Worse than this, some so-called Benei Noah laymen and leaders have not given up completely their relationships to idolatry in spite of their public statements to the opposite.

Let me give an example and share with you an episode that happened with me personally. A number of years ago one of the leading Benei Noah personalities was a guest in my home. At the time I invited my local Benei Noah group to meet with him. As our discussions proceeded, the topic of false messiahs came up. I stated that one of the necessary defining factors for a true Ben Noah is a renunciation of false teachings about the Torah including any type of relationship to false messiahs. I made a statement



saying I have no problem renouncing and cursing the false messiah and I did so in front of the whole group. The other Benei Noah each did so in turn with sincerity and enthusiasm.

However, when it came to the turn of this so-called Benei Noah leader to denounce the false messiah, he stated that he refused to do so. We were all shocked, and I felt I had no choice but to confront him on his decision. Through conversation he confessed (although I had to drag it out of him), that he still believed that the false messiah would somehow “return” and be the true messiah. He denounced the Catholic view of the false messiah being a “god-incarnate,” yet he was not willing to embrace the truth of the Torah Sages regarding the true identity of the false messiah.

Bottom line for him was that the false messiah was still in his eyes the true messiah, however much he wanted to shift or alter Christian doctrine on the subject. He wanted to consider himself what he called a “first-century Jewish believer in messiah.” This is nothing other than a misleading term for a missionary. More than this, as our conversation progressed, he stated very clearly how we Rabbis did not understand our own religion and that we needed a Benei Noah man like himself to teach us our own Torah!

This so-called leader was for a long time associated with many Rabbis and welcomed by many in the Torah community. Little did we know that we had a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” amongst us. Now, this story is incredible. I do not know if I would accept it as completely accurate if not for the fact that this happened to me in my own home.

There is another Benei Noah leader, who I personally know to be a fine and good man, but who nevertheless has, in my opinion, “gone off the path” because of his embrace of teachings which contradict the Torah and the teachings of our Rabbis. This otherwise fine and good man unfortunately has become influenced by secular Jewish and Israeli scholars who ascribe credibility to the Dead Sea Scrolls and lends to them an authority rejected by Torah leaders. This places some (but not all) of this Benei Noah leader’s teachings in direct contradiction to Torah.

Of course, everyone is entitled to their own opinions, be they in accordance with Torah or not. However, as a Rabbi I must intervene and speak out whenever an otherwise trustworthy figure expresses teachings in the name of Torah which in fact contradict it. While this individual has no problem with the rejection of a false messiah, he still has to learn to follow the guidelines of the Torah authorities, for without this, how can one lead anyone else in Torah?

If and when a Ben Noah wishes to take on the mantle of leadership to teach and educate other Benei Noah it is imperative that they have the proper education and are firmly



grounded in authentic Torah and Rabbinic authority to accomplish what they set out to do. Failure in this area can lead to numerous souls being misled and misdirected with regards to proper Torah teachings. This does a great disservice to the desiring souls involved in that it causes much confusion about what is and is not kosher Torah teachings.

Torah study in and of itself is a formidable task for Jews. Teaching what is necessary and appropriate to Benei Noah is even a greater more difficult task. There are clear areas of demarcation in Torah where a Ben Noah is permitted and on the other hand forbidden to study. Only a qualified Rabbi well educated himself in the laws and parameters of Benei Noah studies and teaching can properly navigate this very thin razors edge. For a Ben Noah leader to take it upon himself to teach fellow Benei Noah without the proper training and the expressed approval of those Rabbis who trained him is a recipe for disaster and misguidance.

Many Benei Noah leaders today have come out of one or more very powerful religions. Many do not realize just how ingrained the dogma and doctrines of their previous religions are ingrained within them. When they come to study and teach Torah, many do not realize just how much of the subtle teachings and ideas of their past creep into their understandings and interpretations of Torah. As we have seen this very serious and unfortunate course of events leads some of these leaders to find themselves in opposition to Torah teachings and authentic Torah teachers.

It is imperative, therefore, for every aspiring Benei Noah leader and layman to be in a proper student-teacher relationship with authoritative Rabbis who themselves are experts in the laws of Benei Noah and who can properly direct and train them. Mind you, just as not every Benei Noah leader is qualified to teach his peers, so neither is every Rabbi qualified to teach Benei Noah.

There exists many Rabbis today who for whatever reason take upon themselves the mantle of Benei Noah leadership and teach and pass onto the Benei Noah lessons that are most inappropriate for them to learn. Torah Law is clear as to what a Ben Noah is supposed to and what he is not supposed to be learning and doing.

True, there is actually one opinion expressed by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger in his commentary to RaMBaM's Hilkhot Melakhim that states that it is permissible and appropriate to teach to Benei Noah certain Kabbalistic and Hasidic ideas to help them fulfill this first of the seven laws to know G-d. While this is true, this does not mean that all Kabbalah study is applicable and thus open to Benei Noah. I have seen some Rabbis, who I believe to be sincere and of good will yet who cross this line and create much confusion thereby.



Also, it is most important for Benei Noah to remember that they are not Jews, nor should they aspire to be “Jew-wannabes.” In other words, while a Ben Noah must embrace the truth of HaShem and His Torah, this does not mean that a Ben Noah should adopt ethnically Jewish customs and practices. A Ben Noah should not wear a kippah (yarmulke) and it is actually forbidden for a Ben Noah to wear tzitzit (a talit). A Ben Noah is forbidden to observe those areas of Torah Law that pertain exclusively to the Jewish people. Whereas on the other hand a Ben Noah may very well observe those Laws which refine their souls and bodies.

Although a Ben Noah is not commanded to become holy, they may very well choose to embrace this path out of choice, however great or little, depending upon their personal choice. Indeed, according to Tana Dvei Eliyahu (Rabbah 9), a Ben Noah can even receive Ruah HaKodesh (Divine inspiration), depending on their level of sanctity. However, in light of the teachings of other religions that believe that G-d is always speaking to their hearts, a Ben Noah leader coming out of this past might all too often be deluded into believing he has Ruah HaKodesh all the while that he only has Ruah Atzmo (a personal inner voice), i.e., he is listening to his own inner voice and confusing it with “G-d.” This is a typical case of ego aggrandizement, unfortunately all too typical amongst some type of religious leaders. We see this all too often with leaders of other religions, unfortunately some Benei Noah believe that they too are already Divinely inspired, and directed to, as with the example above, teach us Rabbis the truth about our own religion.

Teaching Benei Noah is a precious and special obligation for Benei Torah to adopt and embrace. I remind my fellow Rabbis that to teach the Benei Noah is not an option or a good idea, it is more than this, it is an obligation on our parts, it is Halakha as clearly outlined by RaMBaM. As we Rabbis have taken upon ourselves to teach Torah and to teach it correctly, so must we do with sincere Benei Noah. Just as we must be educated and prepared to serve the Torah needs of our Jewish communities, so must we be Halakhically prepared to serve the needs of our Benei Noah.

Benei Noah also have an obligation upon themselves to make sure that the teachers to whom they turn are qualified to teach them and have appropriate authorization from qualified Rabbis to teach what they are teaching.

I pray that these few words might help clear up a number of important issues facing Benei Noah today.