In the beginning... God created 7's. Oh sure, He created light and dark, the heavens and earth, too. But for reasons unknown to us, He seemed to have a special affinity for the number 7. The fact that the Torah begins with a verse containing 7 words and 28 letters (divisible by 7) is hardly remarkable. But when placed within the context of the overwhelming number of associations in Judaism with '7', a fascinating tapestry begins to unfurl. Let's take a closer look at this phenomenon. Every spring, Jews around the world celebrate the holiday of Shavuot --commemorating the giving of Torah at Mount Sinai.

Speaking of sevens, some may have been following with attention the contest started by Swiss adventurer Bernard Weber to name the new Seven Wonders of the World – first a little test can you name the previous list of the Seven Wonders of the World?

(ask to for suggestions)

1. Great Pyramids of Giza
2. Hanging Gardens of Babylon
3. Statue of Zeus at Olympius
4. The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus
5. The Masusoleum at Halicarnassus
6. The Colossus of Rhodes
7. The Lighthouse of Alexandria

Yes I had to look them up, and I think we can agree it is time for a new list. So while Mr. Weber is holding his contest which will unveil his new 7 wonders list tomorrow on 7/7/07. I thought tonight it would be interesting and instructive to

look are the 7 wonders of the Jewish world. Did you know that Judaism has such a list. It is not a list of places but rather a list of commandments, a fascinating list of commandments.

First let me clear up a common misconception, the 10 commandments are not in fact a top 10 list of commandments in Judaism, the most important for all to follow. In context the 10 commandments are no more important than any of the other 603 commandments in the Torah, yes we have 613 commandments not just 10. But there is another list, that was at least for a period of time considered a collection of the most important commandments in the Torah. They are known as the 7 laws of the children of Noah, or the Noahite commandments and they are important because, our tradition teaches that while all 613 commandments are incumbent upon all Jews, the 7 commandments know no religious distinction and in fact are incumbent and binding upon all people, regardless of religious preference. They are:

1. Prohibition of Idolatry: - There is only one God. You shall not make for yourself an idol.
2. Prohibition of Murder: - You shall not murder.
3. Prohibition of Theft: - You shall not steal.
4. Prohibition of Sexual Promiscuity: - You shall not commit adultery.
5. Prohibition of Blasphemy: - Revere God and do not blaspheme.
6. Prohibition of Cruelty to Animals: - Do not eat the flesh of a living animal.
7. Requirement to have just Laws: - You shall set up an effective government to police the preceding six laws.

I think you will agree it is a fascinating list, maybe not what you would have expected. Some of these are also in the 10 commandments but a number of those did not make the cut, Honor father and mother, observe the Sabbath, coveting, just to name a few.

Noah that great biblical Doctor Doolittle, portrayed most recently by Steve Carrel in Evan Almighty. Noah the Torah tells us, was a *tzadik b'dorotom*, a righteous, in his generation. As if to say, in comparison to his contemporaries, he was exceptional. The Midrash relates that what made Noah a Tzadik was that Noah realized the shortcomings of his generation, its denial of these Seven Laws. He was righteous because he refused to sink into their mire. In his younger days, he attempted to missionize among his contemporaries, urging them to change their ways and accept the "Seven Noahide" principles. As he aged, he saw the futility of his teachings, but he did not fall into their practices. Though no one listened to him, and he resigned himself to a lonely existence he kept faith with his moral code, and when God looked around with a desire to destroy the world and start over, he saw Noah and because of him, human kind got a second chance.

And so it begs the question: "If God were to repeat the events of this story today, what would be in the ark or in the water? Let's look more closely at what gets Noah and us in the ark:

Law #1: DO NOT COMMIT IDOLATRY.

It is easy for us today to write this off as an ancient practice. However, the truth of the matter is that today far too many of us are still idolaters. We have just exchanged one set of idols for another. Some of us worship the idol of success. Some, the idol of wealth. Some, the idol of pleasure. Others, the idol of power. Still others, the idol of physical beauty of prowess. Indeed, we are so busy identifying other objects of worship in our lives that we have pushed out of our minds and hearts and souls the One who should be our true object of our worship. What greater testimony need there be for our idolatry than the empty seats of this sanctuary tonight, and the empty seats to be found in most houses of worship on whatever Sabbath one's faith observes. People who would never miss a football game or a basketball game or a concert or a show or a social gathering find it all too easy to miss their weekly opportunity to worship God. If we want a place on the ark, we have to start by truly believing in God and living in an active mutual relationship with God.

LAW #2 - DO NOT COMMIT BLASPHEMY

Blasphemy is not just taking God's name in vain and uttering such statements as "God damn it!" Blasphemy is the act of desecrating God; of belittling God. One of my favorite Hasidic stories tells about a Jew who was hitchhiking along a road when a wagon driver pulled up. The driver offered him a ride if he were willing to pay. The Jew paid and mounted the wagon. Along the road, they came across a wheat field. The driver stopped and said, "I am going over to that field, pick some wheat to sell in the next town. You stay here and keep guard to see if

anybody is watching." Not long after the driver got down and was heading toward the field, the Jew started shouting, "Somebody's watching! Somebody's watching!" Well, the driver immediately jumped back on the wagon, whipped the horses, and headed down the road as quickly as possible. A short while later he stopped, looked around and saw no one. "You said someone was watching! Who was watching?" he angrily shouted. "God was watching." When we forget that God is watching; that God is concerned with our every deed and every word, and we need to act accordingly, that is blasphemy.

LAW # 3 - DO NOT SHED BLOOD

It is interesting that while the Talmud text uses the term for bloodshed, most of the subsequent writing on these laws identify this law as being against murder. There is a difference between killing someone and murdering someone. Murder implies malicious intent. A soldier fighting in a war may kill the enemy, but that is usually not considered murder. Jewish law itself makes a clear distinction between killing in self defense and murder.

All that having been said, I prefer the original language. Bloodshed is shedding blood, even if the victim doesn't die. The prohibition against bloodshed is a prohibition against hurting other human beings. And you know what? You don't necessarily have to physically hurt them to shed their blood. There is plenty of bloodless bloodshed that goes on in our world as well as the bloody bloodshed. When we deny people their rights and their freedom, that is bloodshed. When we keep people in poverty and hunger, that, too, is bloodshed. For every human

being - especially the children - who dies of hunger on our planet, we are all guilty of bloodshed. For every life that is lost in places like the Sudan, where genocide is going on while we sit quietly by and allow it to happen, we are guilty of bloodshed. If we want a place on the ark, we must strive to do no harm to others. We must hold life as precious and reserve whatever violence we commit to being clearly in the cause of self defense.

LAW #4 - DO NOT STEAL

This law is not just about grand larceny. It is about our respect for the property of others as well as our honesty in fulfilling our commitments. Indeed, it is the smaller incidents of cheating that destroy our souls. Did we ever cheat on an exam in school, copying off of somebody else's paper? Did we ever write a paper and include somebody else's scholarship but neglect to properly cite them in the footnotes and bibliography? Have we ever fudged on our income tax returns? If we want a place on the ark, we must be honest and fair with all people.

LAW #5 - DO NOT ENGAGE IN SEXUAL IMMORALITY

The traditional Jewish interpretation of sexual immorality includes incest and adultery. One might think that this law speaks for itself, and on one level - the obvious level - it does. But our society has created new ways for us to violate the sanctity of our families. We also damage our children and betray our spouses when we abandon ourselves to our careers; when we consistently put our

professional needs above the needs of our families. Our selfish pursuits of our own ego fulfillment at the expense of those we love can be as devastating a betrayal of our families as any sexual misconduct. If we want a place on the ark, we must keep the well being of those we love as our highest priority.

LAW #6 - DO NOT REMOVE AND EAT THE FLESH OF A LIVING ANIMAL

What's this all about? Unfortunately, in the ancient world it was a common practice to do precisely this. It was considered a delicacy, far superior in taste to replicating the natural body heat of the animal through the cooking of the meat. Well, we don't do that any more, or do we?

Why did the Rabbis prohibit this? Because it is fundamentally cruel. It was an act of placing our pleasure over and above whatever suffering might be wrought in our pursuit of that pleasure. While we no longer tear flesh off of living animals, we still are engaged in similar cruel practices. For example, whenever we purchase of piece of clothing that was produced in some third world sweatshop by workers who are earning mere pennies for their labors, and we enjoy the bargain we have found and the money we have saved, we are violating this law. Our savings on that inexpensive piece of clothing comes out of the flesh of that exploited worker and his or her family. If we want a place on the ark, we have to be ever vigilant that the joys of our lives are not paid for by the suffering of others.

LAW #7 - SET UP COURTS OF JUSTICE

Justice. It is the bottom line. Justice for everyone and not just for ourselves. If we want to fulfill the will of God then we must be engines for justice. We must never rest until justice is universal. As long as one individual in this world is denied justice, the world is innately unjust, and we are responsible. If we want a place on the ark, then we must be tireless in our pursuit of justice for all.

In the end, if we want a place on the ark, what it all will come down to is how well we live in relationship with God and in relationship with our fellow human beings.

And so I ask you two questions:

If these are the criteria which would determine whether or not we are deserving of a place on the ark, then when each of us examines his or her own life, what do we find? As we stand right now, would we be on the ark or in the ?

If we have honestly looked into our souls and have come to the realization that we might stand of chance of finding ourselves in the water rather than on the ark, what are we willing to do to change that fate?

Tough questions, but ones well worth asking. The answers lie within each of us. In the end, may we fashion our lives as to be worthy of our own place on the ark.

AMEN