

Yetser Ha-Ra (“The Evil Impulse”): The Nature of the Beast Within | by Daniel Botkin

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This article originally appeared in the Spring 1991 *Messianic Outreach*, where it was entitled “A Visit to the Island of Dr. Moreau.”

In 1896, H.G. Wells wrote *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, a science-fiction story about a mad scientist who conducted experiments on animals on a remote island in the Pacific. Using his knowledge of genetics, medicine, and surgery, Dr. Moreau attempted to transform various species of animals into human beings.

The success of the experiments was limited. Outwardly, Dr. Moreau’s “Beast People” resembled creatures that were no longer completely animal, yet certainly not completely human. Though extremely dull-witted, they had limited reasoning power and language learning abilities. After recovering from surgery, new creatures were sent to live with other Beast People in huts and caves, where they learned “man’s ways.”

As part of the humanizing process, the Beast Folk were required to learn and obey a set of laws which Moreau taught them. One of the more intelligent of the creatures was appointed to be the Sayer of the Law. His job was to lead the rest of Moreau’s creatures in frequent chanting of Moreau’s laws:

“Not to go on all-Fours; *that* is the Law.”

“Not to suck up Drink; *that is* the Law.”

“Not to eat Flesh or Fish; *that* is the Law.”

“Not to claw Bark of Trees; *that* is the Law.”

“Not to chase other men; *that is* the Law.”

These laws would be chanted in unison as the Beast People swayed from side to side. After reciting each prohibition, the creatures added, “Are we not *Men?*” to further convince themselves of their own humanity. The chanting of the Law was followed by the chanting of facts about Dr. Moreau and his laboratory:

“*His* is the House of Pain.”

“*His* is the Hand that makes.”

“*His* is the Hand that wounds.”

“*His* is the Hand that heals.”

Most of the conversation of the Beast People consisted of these chants, along with frequent reminders to each



other:

“Evil are the punishments of those who break the Law. None escape.”

“None escape.”

If Moreau discovered that one of the Laws had been broken, he would visit the Beast Folk with his whip. Cracking the whip, he would ask, “What is the Law?” After the creatures recited the law that had been broken, Moreau would find the guilty party and take him “back to the House of Pain” (the laboratory) for further treatment to eradicate the beast nature.

The Island of Dr. Moreau is more than just a bizarre, fascinating story. It is an excellent illustration of a profound theological truth: It demonstrates the fact that God’s Law cannot change fallen, disobedient sinners into holy, obedient saints.

Though Dr. Moreau imparted the ability to understand *what the Law required*, he could not impart *an inherent desire to obey the Law*. This was the source of his frustration. He knew his creatures understood the requirements of the Law – they could recite it on demand! And, as long as Moreau made frequent visits with his whip, and reminded them of the House of Pain, there was a limited measure of obedience. But left to themselves, Moreau’s creatures inevitably reverted back to their animal instincts. Moreau could make them look and act some thing like humans, but he could not impart a genuine human nature that would eradicate the beast nature.

Many people, in their sincere attempt to live a Christian life, find themselves in a position similar to that of Moreau’s creatures. They understand the requirements of God’s Law. They can recite the Ten Commandments and are familiar with the Sermon on the Mount. They spend their time talking about the things of God and continually remind one another, “Are we not *Christians*?” And, as long as they are reminded of God’s whip and His House of Pain (chastisement for disobedience), they obey God to some degree. But left to themselves, they inevitably revert back to following their sinful nature.

Dr. Moreau failed in his effort to impart a human nature powerful enough to overcome the beast nature. God, however, never fails. God is able to impart to His creatures His own divine nature, thus enabling man to overcome his sinful nature, the *yetser ha-ra*. The Apostle Paul tells us that God accomplishes this not by the Law, but by His Son:

“For what the *Torah* [Law] could not do by itself, because it lacked the power to make the old nature cooperate, God did by sending his own Son as a human being with a nature like our own sinful one. God did this in order to deal with sin, and in so doing he executed the punishment against sin in human nature, so that the just requirement of the *Torah* might be fulfilled in us who do not run our lives according to what our old nature wants but according to what the Spirit wants” ([Rom.8:3f](#) , Jewish New Testament).

God’s solution for the problem of sin is not memorizing and chanting His Laws, then trying to force our sinful nature to cooperate so we can avoid the House of Pain. God does not improve our *yetser ha-ra*; He does not merely tame the beast in our nature — He kills it:

We know that our old self was put to death on the execution stake with him [Yeshua/Jesus], so that the entire body of our sinful propensities might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin ([Rom.6:6](#) , JNT)

Through the sacrifice of Yeshua, God takes away our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh ([Ezk. 36:26f](#) ). As sons begotten of God’s Spirit, we are “partakers of the divine nature” ([2 Pet. 1:4](#) ). For such people, obedience to God’s Law is no longer dependent on the crack of God’s whip, the chanting of the Law, and the House of Pain. That kind of obedience is “in the old way of outwardly following the letter of the law” ([Rom. 7:6](#) , JNT). In other words, obedience was imposed upon the old nature from outside, as was the case with Moreau’s

creatures. Those with a new heart obey “in the new way provided by the Spirit” (Rom. 7:6 [L](#) , JNT). In other words, obedience results from the inward desire of the new heart. “And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep My laws” (Ezk. 36:27 [L](#)).

Under the Old Covenant, God’s Laws were outside the person, written on tablets of stone. Under the New Covenant, God’s Laws are internalized and written on the “fleshly tablets of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:3 [L](#)) as Jeremiah prophesied:

Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jer. 31:31 [L](#) , 33 [L](#))

This is something neither the Law nor Dr. Moreau could do.

The crack of God’s whip and the House of Pain still exist for law-breakers. But those who view obedience as a privilege, and joyfully obey God’s commandments from the heart are not law-breakers. And because the Torah is internalized, it does not threaten them from the outside. Such people are not “under the law”; rather they embody the Law!

To be “under” something requires that the something be outside the person. If the Law is *inside*, written on the heart, this excludes the possibility of that person being “under” the Law. On the contrary, it is those who do *not* obey the Torah who are in danger of finding themselves “under the Law.”

Like Dr. Moreau’s Beast People, unregenerated and unenlightened people account their Creator’s Laws as little more than rules which urge them to live contrary to their natural instincts. But to those who have been born of the Spirit, the Law is not looked at as just a list of rules; the Law is seen as a list of *opportunities*, a moral guide that reveals how a child of God should conduct himself. Obeying the Torah is more of a privilege than a duty.

Some readers may object at this point and ask, “Aren’t you just attaching different labels to the same thing? You can call them ‘privileges’ or ‘opportunities’ if you wish, but they are still laws, rules, commandments. Just because a person desires to do them doesn’t change the fact that they are still rules.”

This is true. But it is irrelevant to the person who delights in obedience. Perhaps a comparison of physical laws of nature will clarify the subject. In the physical realm, we do many things from a spontaneous, inward desire or compulsion. We eat, drink, and sleep. There are physical laws of nature (“rules”) that say we must do these things. That does not mean we are in legalistic bondage. It is irrelevant to us that there are laws of nature concerning these actions; we simply do them because we have been equipped with the capacity to feel hunger, thirst, and weariness – an inward *desire to* eat, drink, and sleep. We perform these actions because we want to, not because a law or rule tells us we *have* to. In like manner, the person who has been born of the Spirit will begin obeying God’s Laws as naturally as a newborn babe drinks its mother’s milk.

God created the universe (including man) to operate in harmony with His physical and spiritual Laws. If we want a healthy body, it is necessary to eat food. This is why God equips us at birth with an inborn appetite for food. When we are born of the Spirit, we are equipped with an inborn desire to obey God’s Laws. This new birth gives us the power to “not run our lives according to what the old nature wants but according to what the Spirit wants” (Rom. 8:4 [L](#) , JNT).

Dr. Moreau’s Beast People had difficulty understanding and consistently practicing Moreau’s laws. Some believers seem to have a similar difficulty with God’s Laws. Many people mistakenly believe that having God’s Laws written on the heart means that we need nothing more than an inward law of “conscience” or “personal convictions” for moral guidance. This belief results in the same kind of moral anarchy we read about in the book of Judges, when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

When the Lord speaks of writing the Law on the hearts of His people, He makes it very clear that it is *His* laws

([Jer. 31:33](#)) and *His* statutes and ordinances ([Ezk. 36:27](#)), not arbitrary laws based on man's opinions or convenience. God's laws, statutes, and ordinances are recorded in the Scriptures. Therefore, the Law we obey from the heart must line up with the laws, statutes, and ordinances of the Bible.

A person does not need to be a theological wizard to see that some of the laws, statutes, and ordinances of the Bible are ignored by the great majority of believers. Of course animal sacrifices and other practices revolving around the Temple and the Levitical priesthood cannot be practiced, since there is no longer a Temple or a functioning Levitical priesthood. But why are some of God's Laws which *could* be practiced not practiced? Are these particular laws *not* written on the hearts of God's people?

My answer is that these laws *are* written on the heart of every true believer. Some believers, however, do not take the time to read and learn that which God has written on their heart. Simply having something written on one's heart is no guarantee the person will read it. Some do read the Law written on their heart, but they do not read it closely and carefully enough, and thus misread it.

Some people will forever struggle with their Creator's Laws, as Dr. Moreau's creatures did. Hearing the crack of the whip and threatened with the House of Pain, they will obey God's Law to some degree, then later find some excuse to justify breaking it. But the believer who has been enlightened to see the blazing glory of the Torah written on his heart by the Holy Spirit will joyfully practice the Law of God all the days of his life.

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