



## Law, Oh Law!

When did homo sapiens become aware of law? Did we *discover* laws or *invent* them or *receive* them? No doubt it was a combination of all three.

Our powers of observation allowed us to *discover* the laws of nature: seasons, sunrises, solar years, lunar months, 26,000-year precession of the equinoxes etc.

And we certainly have *invented* a whole lot. It becomes easier and easier (and almost inevitable) to break one of the plethora of laws which the world's governments have enacted, from speed limits to taxes. In Burlingame California, it is illegal to spit except on a baseball diamond; while in Carmel California, a man can't go outside while wearing a jacket and a pants that don't match; and in that same enlightened city, women may not wear high heels within the city limits. When Clint Eastwood was mayor of Carmel, he repealed a law that had made it illegal to eat ice cream while standing on the sidewalk. Whereas in Lee County Alabama, it is illegal to sell peanuts after sundown on Wednesdays.

But it is the idea of the *reception* of new laws that I find most fascinating i.e., the belief that the gods gave us our laws.

I have a theory about the origin of this phenomenon. I think that once homo sapiens sapiens developed language, which gave the ability to think about thinking, we began to concern ourselves with the great existential questions, including that of our origin. So we discovered or invented sky gods and speculated endlessly about their lives and their dwelling places - and, of course, their relationship to us. I will call this phase the *theological* phase. Next came the idea that we could *interact* with them, so we invented prayer and sacrifice to placate them or manipulate them. Let me call this phase the *priestly* phase. Thirdly came the *prophetic* phase, where individuals within the tribe, or a specific culture within a region, claimed to have a special relationship and mission vis-à-vis these gods. Phase four is where we discover our *inner* divinity and so acknowledge our godhood. I'll call this the *mystical* phase.

This trajectory is a movement from speaking **about** the divine, then speaking **to** the divine, then speaking **on behalf** of the divine and, finally, speaking **as** the divine.

Each of these phases has a shadow side, and the shadow side increases as the journey continues. The shadow of phase one is endless speculation (how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?); that of phase two is cajoling and ritual to bend god's will to human purposes; while that of phase three is the intolerance that leads to inquisitions and crusades. And, of course, the danger in phase four is the temptation to slip into egoic narcissism when coming to the realization that, "I am God!"

One of the results of phase three, I believe, was the claim that the god gave his chosen tribe a set of laws and precepts that dedicated the tribe to him and showed them how to live with each other. It was a compendium of contracts that ensured the

appropriate adulation of the god, and the smooth workings of society. Breaches of these contracts often had dire consequences for the individual and for the group.

The Brehon Laws of Ireland was such a compendium. It is the earliest legal system in northern Europe and governed Irish life until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, though the advent of Christianity in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the coming of the Normans in the 12<sup>th</sup> century cross-fertilized with it. It was quite an enlightened system that didn't use capital punishment even for murderers. It governed marriage, divorce, injuries, politics, kingship and religion.

Older than the Brehon Laws is the Hebrew Code (the Torah), allegedly handed down by the god Yahweh to Moses on Mount Sinai around 1250 BCE. It consists of 613 precepts governing the life of the Israelites and the worship of Yahweh in fine detail. It covered diet (clean and unclean foods), how to build a temple or fashion priestly garments, rules about marriage, divorce and warfare. It operated on the principle of the "Lex Talionis" - an eye for an eye.

Moses was not a monotheist; even Elijah who came 400 years later was not a monotheist. Monotheism didn't flourish within Judaism until some 700 years after Moses' tenure. So when the "first commandment" says, "I am the lord your god, you must not put foreign gods before me", it was an injunction, not to monotheism, but to monolatry - the *worship* of one god, not the belief that only one god existed.

Far older than the Mosaic Law, however, was the Code of Hammurabi, dating to 1780 BCE, and before that the Code of Ur-Nammu, dating to 2025 BCE. These were Babylonian kings. Hammurabi's code, in particular, has been found in full form on a diorite stele, now in the Louvre, which was discovered in Iran in 1901. It is almost an

eight feet high stone in the shape of a finger, written in the Akkadian language (the progenitor of all Semitic languages). Hammurabi declares in the introduction that he was given the code by the Anunnaki, especially the gods Anu, Bel and Marduk.

According to the earliest Sumerian writings, the first human whom the Anunnaki delegated to rule on their behalf was Enmeduranki. To equip him for the task they taught him the *laws of heaven* (astronomy, mathematics, science...) and the *laws of Earth* (governance, religion, agriculture...)

The code consists of 282 precepts, though there is no number 13, since this was considered an unlucky number! About half of these have to do with contracts e.g., wages due to ox drivers and surgeons, or the liability of a builder when the house he constructed collapsed. Another third of the precepts deal with household relationships: inheritance, divorce, paternity, sexual behavior etc. Moses actually borrowed the phrase “an eye for an eye...” from Hammurabi.

In some places the code competes with Lee County Alabama and Carmel California. For example rule number 132 says, “If the finger is pointed at a man’s wife about another man, but she is not caught sleeping with another man, she shall jump into the river for the sake of her husband.” The phrase, “jump into the river” refers to the belief that the Euphrates would act as a judge, allowing her to float if she were innocent and drowning her if she were not.

Whether laws are discovered, invented or revealed we are currently being crippled by them - in spite of Jesus’ admonition, some 2,000 years ago, that humans were not made for law, rather laws were made for humans. In the last 11 years the congress of the USA has created 452 new federal crimes. If you live in the USA, you

are 15 times more likely to be incarcerated than if you live in Japan and seven times more likely than if you lived in China.

As we move from phase three religion (speaking on behalf of god) to phase four religion (speaking as god) we need to shed most of these burdensome decrees and soar in the liberation conferred by practicing true compassion. In one of his letters, St. John hit the nail on the head, "Little children, love and then do as you will."

Those cultures, those individuals and those systems - economic, political, religious etc. - that are demonstrably dysfunctional and have left untold suffering in their wake, will not make the cut. Only those big enough and open enough will survive the transformation and form the DNA of the New Way.

May God continue to hold you tenderly in the hollow of Her hand.

Namasté,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Seán". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally on the page.

Tír na nÓg  
November 2011