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ר"ב  
Rabbi Norman Lamm,  
The Jewish Center,  
131 West 86th Street,  
New York, N.Y. 10024,  
U.S.A.

My dear Rabbi Lamm,

I hope this letter finds you well.

Knowing how busy you are, I am hesitant to approach on the subject which follows, but I have an idea, which I hope is correct, that you would welcome this assignment.

I am enclosing herewith an article by Dr. D. Sperber on GENTILES IN THE TALMUD, and I think you will agree that it is a competent article. On the other hand, it restricts itself severely, as he was requested to do, to the Talmudic aspect. Would you agree, taking the existence of this article into consideration, to write a more comprehensive additional article on the general Jewish attitude towards Gentiles as a whole. If you agree, which I earnestly hope you will, we would like an article of up to 2,000 words.

Should you unfortunately find yourself unable to do so, can you immediately by return recommend someone who can do it. In fact, to save time, I would rely on your judgement and request you to ask someone else to do the article.

With grateful thanks in anticipation, and kindest personal regards,

Yours sincerely,

DR. L.I. RABINOWITZ

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Encls.



Article GENTILES IN THE TALMUD

Author DANIEL SPERBER

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1 Attitudes. Since Talmudic literature spans over half a  
 2 millenium, covering a wide geographic area, attitudes towards  
 3 Gentiles expressed in it vary very considerably. In fact, we  
 4 may find revealed in it a whole spectrum of opinions from the  
 5 extreme antipathy of the tormented Jew of Hadrian's time -  
 6 e.g. Simon b. Yohai's statement: The best of Gentiles should  
 7 be killed, (T.J. Kid. iv, 11, 66c) - to the moderate views  
 8 expressed in the more friendly atmosphere of early Sasanid  
 9 Babylon - witness to Samuel's making no distinction between  
 10 Israel and the nations on the Day of Judgment (T.J. R.H. i,  
 11 3, 57a). Thus all such statements must be seen in their spe-  
 12 cific geographico-historical context. Nevertheless, in gen-  
 13 eral it may be said that the Jews' attitude towards the Gen-  
 14 tile was in a great measure conditioned by the Gentiles' at-  
 15 titude towards him (see Esther R. ii, 3), so that a Gentile's  
 16 friendship to a Jew would be warmly and uninhibitedly reci-  
 17 procated, (see B.K. 38a, and witness to the relationships be-  
 18 tween Meir and Avnimos ha-Gardi, Rabbi and Antoninus, Samuel  
 19 and Sapor, etc.).

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20 Jewish antipathy to the Gentile in Talmudic times  
 21 stemmed from a number of causes and functioned on several  
 22 levels. Thus, Gentiles were condemned for their cruelty to  
 23 Jews (see Betzah 32b, B.K. 117a, A.Z. 25b, etc.), their morals  
 24 were considered reprehensible, (Yev. 98a, A.Z. 22b, Cant. R.  
 25 to vi, 8 etc.) and throughout the period one finds reiterated

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1 the (theological) accusation that although they were offered  
 2 the Torah, they rejected it, (A.Z. 2b, Tanh. Berakha 3, etc.).  
 3 Thus, the Jewish antipathy to the Gentile was not due to  
 4 the fact that he was of non-Jewish stock, i.e. it was not a  
 5 racial prejudice, but rather motivated by their idolatry,  
 6 moral laxity and other such faults (see A.Z. 17a b). Those  
 7 that were righteous (by Jewish standards), however, were fully  
 8 entitled to the rewards of the world-to-come, (Tosef. Sanh.  
 9 xiii, 2; cp. B.B.10b), and a further distinction was made by  
 10 Johanan who declared that Gentiles outside Palestine were not  
 11 really idolators, but only blind followers of their ancestral  
 12 customs. (Hul.13b).

13 Terms. In Rabbinic literature the distinction between  
 14 Gentile (Goi, Akum) and Christian (Nozri) has frequently been  
 15 obscured by textual alterations necessitated by the vigilance  
 16 of censors. Thus "Egyptian", "Amalekite", "Zadokite", and  
 17 "Kuti" (= Samaritan) often stand in place of the original  
 18 Nozri, as well as Goi, Akum, etc. (see Pahad Uzhac, s.v. Goi).  
 19 Probably when Resh Lakish stated that a Gentile (Akum etc.,  
 20 in our texts) who observed the Sabbath is punishable by death  
 21 (Sanh. 58b), he had in mind Christians (see Weiss, Bar Ilan,  
 22 ii, 1963, 143-8, xxi-iv). The same may be so in the case of  
 23 Johanan, who ruled that one may not teach a Gentile Torah,  
 24 (Sanh. 59a, Hag. 13a). Numerous anti-Christian polemic pass-  
 25 ages only make real sense after Nozri has been restored in

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1 place of the spurious Kuti or Zedoki, etc.

2 In Law. The Gentile figures very widely in Talmudic  
 3 law, in various legal categories, such as, laws of personal  
 4 status, marriage and inheritance, proselytisation, laws of  
 5 accession, contract, agency, evidence and damages, purity and  
 6 impurity, laws concerning the types of property and offerings  
 7 he may present to the temple, to name but a few. The basic  
 8 assumption is that all non-Jews are subject to certain uni-  
 9 versal laws, religious, moral and social (called the seven  
 10 <sup>o</sup> ~~N~~ahite laws): (1) institution of courts of justice, (2) ido-  
 11 latry, (3) blasphemy, (4) incest, (5) homicide, (6) robbery,  
 12 (7) eating the limb of a living animal, and according to  
 13 other opinions, castration, mixing of breeds, witchcraft,  
 14 etc. (Sanh. 56a b, et al.).

15 Thus the Gentile is a legal personality in Jewish law,  
 16 and though sometimes discriminated against, is generally  
 17 speaking treated equitably. Thus, the Talmud relates that  
 18 once the Roman government sent two officials to learn of the  
 19 Jewish law. After careful study, they said: We have scruti-  
 20 nized all your laws and found them just (emet), except for  
 21 the following instance. You say that if a Jew's ox gores  
 22 that of a Gentile, the owner is free from damages, while if a  
 23 Gentile's ox gores that of a Jew, he is obliged to pay dam-  
 24 ages. But if, as you say, "neighbour" (in Ex. xxi, 35) ex-  
 25 cludes the Gentile, then he should be free even when his ox

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1 gored that of a Jew. And if, on the other hand "neighbour"  
 2 includes the Gentile, then the Jew should have to pay dam-  
 3 ages when his ox gored that of a Gentile,... (B.K. 38a).

4 Where there is legal discrimination against a Gentile,  
 5 it is usually based on objective reasoning, such as the fact  
 6 that he does not subscribe to the Jewish "social contract",  
 7 (non-reciprocity). Thus, the Talmud rules that the command-  
 8 ment to restore lost property to its owner (Deut. xxii, 1-3)  
 9 does not apply when the Gentile is the owner, (B.K. 113b).  
 10 This is because Gentiles do not act reciprocally in such  
 11 cases; furthermore, such restoration can at times be hazard-  
 12 ous. Similarly, a Gentile cannot act as witness (B.K. 15a)  
 13 because (according to one opinion) he is dishonest and un-  
 14 reliable (cp. Bek. 13b). Here it should be noted that Jews  
 15 suspected of the same faults were liable to identical dis-  
 16 crimination.

17 Other apparently discriminating rulings were intended  
 18 to discourage intimacy with the non-Jew, or, in other words, (1)  
 19 primarily to guard the Jews from the dangers of assimilation.  
 20 Hence, the interdict against non-Jewish wines, and cooked (2)  
 21 foods etc. (3)

22 In those cases where the law did discriminate against  
 23 Gentiles, in practice such discrimination was frowned upon, (4)  
 24 as it might jeopardise friendly relations (mipne darke  
 25 shalom, Git. v, 8-9, mipne eva A.Z. 26a) and bring about a

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1 profanation of the Divine Name (Hillul ha-Shem, B.K. 113b).

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2 So much so, that the Talmud enjoins that Gentile poor be  
 3 supported with charity like Jewish poor (Git. 61a, cp. B.B.  
 4 106), and does not even tolerate the charging of interest  
 5 to Gentiles (B.M. 71a).

6 A comprehensive summary of the Gentile's position in  
 7 Jewish law may be found in Encyclopedia Talmudit, v (1953),  
 8 286-336.

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