



A Study on Determining Halacha: “Should I Be Afraid of ‘Tradition’?”

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NOTE: I will use the term ‘tradition’ primarily for the audience, yet for the purpose of this paper and task assignment, the word ‘halacha’ is interchangeable here.

Summary

- You may not agree with me in some of this study. That is OK. We are not looking for uniformity. We are trying to establish a systematic approach to tradition.
- Our goal in this study is not to be “more original” or to be “less traditional” – we have simply one goal: unity, and how can we use tradition in the way that brings unity.
- We will not allow our goal of unity to cause us to compromise on purity.
- We simply want to be identified with the *singular* People of G-d: Israel. We are family. We need to look and act like it.

Modern man has a contentious relationship with tradition. Since the Age of Enlightenment, we have often viewed tradition and traditional thinking as hampering our advancement both personally and corporately. That is part of the message of “Fiddler on the Roof” where the lead role of our dear Tevye navigates through the societal changes of early twentieth century Russian Jewry. “On the one hand...” tradition is presented as the agent that produces cohesiveness in the community, but “on the other hand”, it is depicted as incapable of providing all the necessary answers to ‘modern’ life.

Those of us in Messianic Judaism have an uneasy relationship with Jewish tradition in much the same way as the characters in Fiddler on the Roof. We experience unnecessary confusion, hurt, and even have relationships severed because the biblical application of Jewish tradition is misunderstood. Is any tradition authoritative? Does each person have to decide what tradition to follow or reject? Are traditions merely sociological or are they God-given traditions, and doesn't that very notion violate the definition of tradition? After all, isn't there a difference between traditions and God's commandments?

The Mishnah promotes the concept that Jewish traditions are merely the “unwritten” commandments given by HaShem to Moshe (Moses), and handed down orally for millennia until about 200 C.E. when the compilers of the Mishnah wrote down the “Oral Torah.” Tractate Avot records the ‘transmission’ in this way:

-m.Pirkei Avot 1:1 – “Moshe (Moses) received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Y'hoshua (Joshua), Y'hoshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of

the great synagogue. The latter used to say three things: Be patient in [the administration of] justice, rear many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah.”

The questions regarding tradition are settled for Orthodox Judaism. For the most part, Orthodox Judaism simply accepts them as God-given. Those of us who are disciples of Messiah Yeshua are struck with a dilemma, while wanting to benefit from tradition in the same way that we perceive normative Judaism has done, producing community and cohesiveness, we are faced with the persistent notion that Yeshua is an anti-traditionalist, or at least it seems that way to the anti-traditionalist.

Mattityahu/Matthew 15:1-9 CJB - Then some P'rushim and Torah-teachers from Jerushalayim came to Yeshua and asked him, "Why is it that your talmidim break the Tradition of the Elders? They don't do n'tilat-yadayim before they eat!" He answered, "Indeed, why do you break the command of God by your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say, 'If anyone says to his father or mother, "I have promised to give to God what I might have used to help you," then he is rid of his duty to honor his father or mother.' Thus by your tradition you make null and void the word of God! You hypocrites! Yesha`yahu was right when he prophesied about you, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.'"

And yet in what manner are we to keep the commandments if we do not have some traditions? Did Yeshua want his disciples to be anti-traditionalists? Is there really such a thing as “tradition-free” faith?

Those who despise tradition have established a ‘new’ tradition, a tradition of ‘non-traditionalism.’ Whether we embrace the traditions of Judaism or not, we all have traditions. While clinging to the false notion that man can be tradition-free, some are tempted to promote conspiracy theories advanced by dubious sources which are certainly not friendly to followers of Yeshua accept to assist in attacking “rabbinicism.” In such circles, anything that has the hint of “rabbinic” origin is supposedly jettisoned. They desire a pure relationship to the commandments, and their literal application is indeed laudable, yet they demonstrate that the non-traditionalist has truly not abandoned tradition as they suppose. They are merely following a different set of man-made rules. It seems that anti-traditionalism doesn’t really mean being against man-made tradition, it just means having a different tradition from “Rabbinic” Judaism.

Is that the approach HaShem wants? Are we meant to distinguish ourselves as distinct from ‘greater’ Israel? You see, the traditions we follow or reject are **a visible indicator of who we think we are.** They speak volumes about our humility or our arrogance, and there is plenty of arrogance to go around! The anti-traditionalist might arrogantly assume they might know more about what HaShem intends than the “Rabbis”, and the traditionalist often arrogantly retorts that the others are “not Torah observant” unless they keep the commandments in the “traditional” way (“You aren’t really keeping the Torah, because you don’t keep that commandment like I do.”) Really? Do we say such things with a straight face? Everyone needs to settle down a bit. It isn’t like we are talking about Scripture, or is it?

Ahhhh... We all think it is about Scripture. We all think we are right (even when we change our minds). We all think Scripture supports **our** position. But is that how it is supposed to work?

This brings us to the most important element regarding tradition: How do we **traditionally** treat **Scripture?**

The Protestant Reformation gave us “Sola Scriptura” [Scripture alone]. To their credit, the Reformers threw off the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and its view that the Church’s man-made decrees were on par with Scripture. Laudable, yes, BUT far from complete. The Reformers only eliminated SOME catholic traditions. They kept many that were clearly pagan in origin, but more importantly they kept the **hermeneutic** tradition of the Catholic Church. They still read the Scriptures in the same way the church had read it for over a thousand years. Though they claimed to be guided by “Sola Scriptura”, ironically they still interpreted the Scriptures to say that Messiah and His Apostles had the authority to do what the Catholic Church did not have the authority to do which is **to remove and add to the words of HaShem**. How else can we explain the tradition that “Jesus” and His disciples started a ‘new religion’? At least Catholics are consistent when they seem to say, “We can change the Sabbath to Sunday, because Jesus came up with his own new commandments, and He gave his Apostles that same magical power!”

Fast-forward to the Messianic movement. Within the movement, we have similar representatives of the Catholic versus Protestant debate. The hyper-traditionalists among us may claim some sort of divine mandate and authority extended to the “Oral Torah”, while the hyper-anti-traditionalist among us claim “Sola Scriptura” as their guiding principle. The argument is similar to the issue between the Protestant Reformers and the Catholic Church. Can we remove or add to the words of HaShem? Both sides will claim that the other is doing that very thing.

Which side is correct? Or are both wrong? Does it really matter as long as we have our own little group? Those hermit monks had the right idea, didn’t they? (sarcasm intended) You can have complete agreement, at least until you lose your mind and start to disagree with **yourself**.

YES! It does matter. It matters to our Master. A primary cause of division in any sociological group is divergence and disagreement in custom. Having a “similar way of walking” (halacha!) is an important element to unity. A case in point is the controversy of “Gentile inclusion” both in the first century and today. In the first century, it was a matter of distinction for the followers of “the Way” that Gentiles were **included**. This was scandalous to some of the other Judaisms of the day. Simply reading the 21st and 22nd chapters of Acts will reveal much about the chaos surrounding this very subject.

Today that controversy continues in Messianic communities. In an effort to maintain a unique “Jewish” identity, some have claimed that Torah observance is only for **genetic** Jews. Some, in an effort to maintain ‘distinct’ “Jewish” and Gentile identities have “invited” Gentiles to some Torah elements, and simultaneously they have defined “Torah Observance” to be Torah **plus** the traditional methods of observance. Thus defined, they consider obedience to HaShem’s commandments as dependent upon 1) genetic origin and 2) man-made traditions.

Of course, this flies in the face of the **unity** of Jew and Gentile in Messiah. The work of Messiah brought an end to this kind of division. Equally damaging is the confusion between the commandments of HaShem and the “halacha” that this approach causes.

At the heart of this controversy is how we treat Scripture. Is it supreme in authority? How did Yeshua treat tradition? How did He treat Scripture? What was the authority for Him? What authority did he give his disciples?

The Protestant Reformers latched onto the image of “Jesus” the reformer taking on the mighty religious establishment. In their eyes they saw Jesus as the Protestant. In the Reformers’ minds, Jesus was a rabid anti-traditionalist. As an added benefit, He was halo-free! (a joke :o)

This is a false view (not the halo part, He really is halo-free!). Yeshua was not opposed to traditional ways of keeping commandments. As Messianic believers, we often find ourselves arguing against

this incorrect view, because it forms the foundation of an incorrect view of the Torah among some of our friends and family. The Protestant tradition has compared the “evils” of “salvation by works” as represented by Roman Catholicism (in their minds at-least) to “Pharisaic Judaism”, where to the Protestant, the “Law” is the antithesis of grace, and an enemy of true salvation.

Those anti-traditionalists among us are also holding onto the erroneous bias that “Jesus” was an anti-traditionalist. The fact is Messiah Yeshua’s lifestyle is best reflected in the Pharisaic lifestyle! As a righteous “chased”, Yeshua’s view of Scripture is best represented by what some call “rabbinicism.” Beloved, clearly understand this – Yeshua was very traditional! Yes, He had some differences with some traditions, and it is those differences we will examine in order to better determine what role tradition and the application of halacha should take in our lives as His followers.

Today, we will be attempting to determine the correct use of traditions and discern the best way to apply halachah for ourselves within the framework of our believing communities. Let’s examine the biblical background for traditions in general, and the particulars of the most distinguishing Jewish traditions compared to the Scriptures. Any of the traditions we study will be based on some of the clearer biblical commandments. It is important that we learn to distinguish the difference between the commandments and the traditions, but keeping in mind that we should never doubt that the commandments apply to us (all of us) in some practical way.

So then, the paramount question is this: was Yeshua a traditionalist in His halacha? After all, without Yeshua being our ultimate example, the rest of our endeavor would be in vain. It is vital that before anything is taught concerning halacha and tradition that we understand our Master’s position and seek to make Him our head and primary teacher in these ways.

Let’s revisit our Master’s words. Earlier we read Mattityahu 15:1-9. Now let’s look at a blistering rebuke He gave in the 23rd chapter.

Mattityahu 15 - Then Yeshua addressed the crowds and his talmidim: "The Torah-teachers and the P'rushim," he said, "sit in the seat of Moshe. So whatever they tell you, take care to do it. But don't do what they do, because they talk but don't act! They tie heavy loads onto people's shoulders but won't lift a finger to help carry them. Everything they do is done to be seen by others; for they make their t'fillin broad and their tzitziyot long, they love the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and they love being greeted deferentially in the marketplaces and being called 'Rabbi.' "But you are not to let yourselves be called 'Rabbi'; because you have one Rabbi, and you are all each other's brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'Father.' because you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to let yourselves be called 'leaders,' because you have one Leader, and he is the Messiah! The greatest among you must be your servant, for whoever promotes himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be promoted. "But woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P'rushim! For you are shutting the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces, neither entering yourselves nor allowing those who wish to enter to do so. Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P'rushim! For you swallow up widow's houses while making a show of davening at great length. Because of this your punishment will be all the worse! "Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P'rushim! You go about over land and sea to make one proselyte; and when you succeed, you make him twice as fit for Gei-Hinnom as you are! "Woe to you, you blind guides! You say, 'If someone swears by the Temple, he is not bound by his oath; but if he swears by the gold in the Temple, he is bound.' You blind fools! Which is more important? the gold? or the Temple which makes the gold holy? And you say, 'If someone swears by the altar, he is not bound by his oath; but if he swears by the offering on the altar, he is bound.' Blind men! Which is more important? the sacrifice? or the altar which makes the sacrifice holy? So someone who swears by the altar swears by it and everything on it. And someone who swears by the Temple swears by it and the

One who lives in it. And someone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and the One who sits on it. "Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P'rushim! You pay your tithes of mint, dill and cumin; but you have neglected the weightier matters of the Torah -- justice, mercy, trust. These are the things you should have attended to -- without neglecting the others! Blind guides! -- straining out a gnat, meanwhile swallowing a camel! "Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P'rushim! You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self indulgence. Blind Parush! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside may be clean too. "Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P'rushim! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look fine on the outside but inside are full of dead people's bones and all kinds of rotteness. Likewise, you appear to people from the outside to be good and honest, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and far from Torah...

Now, let us compare this observation our Master made to one of the Prophets:

Y'hezkel/Ezekiel 22:26 - Her cohanim have done violence to my Torah, profaned my holy things, made no difference between the holy and the common, not distinguished between unclean and clean, hidden their eyes from my Shabbats, and profaned me among themselves.

Some read this passage where Yeshua is remarkably critical of **some** of the Pharisees, and then think that His repudiation of **hypocrisy** is a repudiation of Pharisaism. Because the Pharisees are seen as major practitioners of religious traditions, some think that because Yeshua criticizes some Pharisees the He is critical of religious tradition.

In the Apostolic scriptures, the word used in Mattityahu 15:1 for "tradition" is the Greek word "paradosis" which comes from the root word "didomi" which means "to give." Paradosis literally means "that which is received." this is a good Greek representation of of the Hebrew word "kabalah" which comes from the root "kabal" which means "to receive." It is only used a few times in Scripture, and only once regarding the passing of information from one person to another.

Mishlei/Proverbs 19:20 "Listen to counsel and receive [kabal = take hold] instruction [musar = disciplined tradition], that you may be wise in your latter days.

Here is an interesting observation by Bible scholar Richard Spulock: "Although a biblical word, the word "kabalah" is not used in the Hebrew Scriptures as proof for divine authority for received traditions. Unfortunately, for us, the word is primarily used outside of Scripture to describe certain mystical concepts in Judaism. Sadly, this taints the biblical usage of the Hebrew word in some people's minds. Ironically, it is the Greek "paradosis" that best represents the concept of "received tradition" [kabalah], and that usage is found only in the Apostolic Scriptures and not in the Tenakh. This gives evidence that the concept of the "received tradition" was not a mature concept until the Second Temple period. That the writers of the Apostolic Scriptures were well acquainted with the idea, which influenced their thinking regarding "kabalah", is represented for us in the usage of the word "paradosis." When compared to the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds, the contextual usage of "paradosis" is further evidence of the authenticity of the Apostolic Scriptures! In a way, the Talmuds provide a path for authenticating the Apostolic writings because of the way those writings describe "received traditions" in general, and in some of those very traditions in particular. "

So then, to best understand how Yeshua treats tradition, it is best to see how the Apostolic writings use the Greek word "paradosis" [received tradition]. By examining how His disciples treat received traditions, we can have a better understanding of the practice of our Master Yeshua Himself in the matter. Did He practice Orthodoxy? Did He follow any traditions that were handed down by the Elders?

Let's read the following passages where the word "paradosis" can be found to determine if Yeshua or his disciples are against traditions in *general* or in *particular* in each of the passages:

Mattiyahu/Matthew 15:2-9: "Why is it that your talmidim break the Tradition of the Elders? They don't do n'tilat-yadayim before they eat!" He answered, "Indeed, why do you break the command of God by your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say, 'If anyone says to his father or mother, "I have promised to give to God what I might have used to help you," then he is rid of his duty to honor his father or mother.' Thus by your tradition you make null and void the word of God! You hypocrites! Yesha`yahu was right when he prophesied about you, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.'"

What tradition is not being followed by Yeshua's disciples here?

Mark 7:2-13: and [the P'rushim] saw that some of his talmidim ate with ritually unclean hands, that is, without doing n'tilat-yadayim. The P'rushim and the Torah-teachers asked him, "Why don't your talmidim live in accordance with the Tradition of the Elders, but instead eat with ritually unclean hands?" Yeshua answered them, "Yesha`yahu was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites -- as it is written, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. Their worship of me is useless, because **they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.**' "You **depart from God's command** and hold onto human tradition. Indeed," he said to them, "you have made a fine art of **departing from God's command** in order to keep your tradition! For Moshe said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say, 'If someone says to his father or mother, "I have promised as a korban (that is, as a gift to God) what I might have used to help you," ' then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus, **with your tradition** which you had handed down to you, **you nullify the Word of God!** And you do other things like this." Then Yeshua called the people to him again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand this! There is nothing outside a person which, by going into him, can make him unclean. Rather, it is the things that come out of a person which make a person unclean! Anyone who has ears that can hear, let him hear!" When he had left the people and entered the house, his talmidim asked him about the parable. He replied to them, "So you too are without understanding? Don't you see that nothing going into a person from outside can make him unclean? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and it passes out into the latrine."

How about Shaul/Paul? [Later we will see the ingredient Paul uses in his tradition keeping now verses what he used before.]

1Corinthians 11:1-2: try to imitate me, even as I myself try to imitate the Messiah. Now I praise you because you have remembered everything I told you and **observe the traditions just the way I passed them** on to you.

Paul kept and taught traditions. Where did he receive these traditions? ["How" did he pass them on? What was the method?]

Galatians 1:11-16: Furthermore, let me make clear to you, brothers, that the Good News as I proclaim it is not a human product; because neither did I receive it from someone else nor was I taught it-it came through a direct revelation from **Yeshua the Messiah**. For you have heard about my former way of life in [traditional] Judaism - how I did my best to persecute God's Messianic Community and destroy it; and how, since I was more of a zealot for the traditions handed down by my forefathers than most Jews my age, I advanced in [traditional] Judaism more rapidly than they did. But when God, who picked me out before I was born and called me

by his grace, chose to reveal his Son to me, so that I might announce him to the Gentiles, I did not consult anyone;

Paul received the **good news** [repentance to Torah, driven by love] by revelation from HaShem. Formerly, he was zealous in the traditions of the fathers. [Dogmas surrounding Torah void of love with a legalistic observance] [Very important to note that later in the same letter Shaul proclaims that he did these things (traditional Judaism) for the purpose of obtaining righteousness legalistically and recognizes that something in his motive was missing...]

Colossians 2:6-7: Therefore, just as you received the Messiah Yeshua as Lord, keep living your life united with him. Remain deeply rooted in him; continue being built up in him and confirmed in your trust, **the way you were taught**, so that you overflow in thanksgiving.

2Thessalonians 2:15: Therefore, brothers, stand firm; and hold to the traditions you were taught by us, whether we spoke them or wrote them in a letter.
Paul taught tradition by word and by example.

2Thessalonians 3:6: Now, in the name of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah we command you, brothers, to stay away from any brother who is leading a life of idleness, a life not in keeping with the tradition you received from us.
Paul taught others to shun those who did not keep the traditions they received from **him**.

1Kefa/Peter 1:17-19: Also, if you are addressing as Father the one who judges impartially according to each person's actions, you should live out your temporary stay on earth in fear. You should be aware that the ransom paid to free you from the **worthless way of life which your fathers passed on to you** [legalistic observance in order to receive righteousness] did not consist of anything perishable like silver or gold; on the contrary, it was the costly bloody sacrificial death of the Messiah, as of a lamb without defect or spot.

Paul's emphasis is to remind that or traditions are not to be simply a 'dogma' and that we are not **redeemed** [traditions are for the redeemed, not become redeemed] with the **aimless** conduct received from your fathers.

So, as we can see, there appears to be both good and bad in the usage of the word "paradosis." Apparently there are good traditions, and bad ones. ~OR~ could it better be said that there are good **applications** of traditions and bad **applications** of traditions? Let's take a look at how Yeshua Himself participated in a couple of traditions.

Mattityahu/Matthew 3:13-17: Then Yeshua came from the Galil to the Yarden to be immersed by Yochanan. But Yochanan tried to stop him. "You are coming to me? I ought to be immersed by you!" However, Yeshua answered him, "Let it be this way now, because we should do everything righteousness requires." Then Yochanan let him. As soon as Yeshua had been immersed, he came up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, he saw the Spirit of God coming down upon him like a dove, and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; I am well pleased with him."

- Where in the Torah is the specific practice of immersion mentioned?
- Is it specifically mentioned at all in regard to repentance?
- Is Yeshua referencing a commandment from the Torah when He asks Yochanan to immerse Him?
- Is there a prophecy in the Tenakh that Yeshua is referring to when He says: "...we should do everything righteousness requires."?

- Is Yeshua following a tradition, or a commandment?
- Should we consider this as significant to the beginning of His ministry?

Mattityahu/Matthew 14:19: After instructing the crowds to sit down on the grass, he took the five loaves and the two fish and, looking up toward heaven, made a b'rakhah. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the talmidim, who gave them to the crowds.

- Where in the Torah is it commanded to bless HaShem **before** eating?
- Should we consider it significant that we are told that Yeshua says a bracha (blessing) before eating bread, and yet after specifically saying “they all ate and were filled”[vs.20] there is no mention of blessing HaShem after eating as commanded in D’varim/Deuteronomy 8:10? If so, why?

Luke 4:16-20: Now when he went to Natzeret, where he had been brought up, on Shabbat he went to the synagogue as usual. He stood up to read, and he was given the scroll of the prophet Yesha`yahu. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of ADONAI is upon me; therefore he has anointed me to announce Good News to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the imprisoned and renewed sight for the blind, to release those who have been crushed, to proclaim a year of the favor of ADONAI." After closing the scroll and returning it to the shammash, he sat down; and the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him.

- What did Yeshua do as “usual”? Was this traditional, or commanded?
- If Yeshua wanted to merely declare the prophecy of Y’sha’yahu was being fulfilled, why bother doing it in a synagogue on the Sabbath? Why not do it in an open field, on Sunday?

Mattityahu/Matthew 12:2-8: On seeing this, the P'rushim said to him, "Look! Your talmidim are violating Shabbat!" But he said to them, "Haven't you ever read what David did when he and those with him were hungry? He entered the House of God and ate the Bread of the Presence!" -- which was prohibited, both to him and to his companions; it is permitted only to the cohanim. "Or haven't you read in the Torah that on Shabbat the cohanim profane Shabbat and yet are blameless? I tell you, there is in this place something greater than the Temple! If you knew what `I want compassion rather than animal-sacrifice' meant, you would not condemn the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of Shabbat!"

- The Parushim say that Yeshua’s disciples are doing that which is “not lawful” to do on the Sabbath. Does Yeshua dispute with them? Is this specifically commanded, or forbidden on the sabbath?
- Why does Yeshua say, “For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?” Where in the Torah does it say that the altar sanctifies the gift?
- Does any passage in the Torah specifically address the transference of holiness in this way?

Mattityahu/Matthew 24:20: Pray that you will not have to escape in winter or on Shabbat.

- It is understandable that one would want to avoid taking flight in the winter, but why would Yeshua tell his disciples to pray that their flight not take place on the Sabbath?
- Where in the Torah is it specifically commanded not to flee on the Sabbath?

Hopefully we are beginning to see that sorting out the issue of tradition in the halacha (walk) of a disciple of the Messiah is not as easy to dismiss as saying, “we only keep the commandments”, or as simple as “we keep all the traditions of Judaism.”

With Yeshua as our example, we have seen that He uses some traditions and rejects others. Hopefully, when we return to our homes we can begin to explore this more deeply, and then perhaps begin to see a real pattern the we can follow!

Our master is so skillful to address the common traditions of the day, to work very often within the existing framework of them, yet also with great wisdom, know exactly when to discern when the tradition has become greater than a commandment and when the commandment needs to be remembered before the tradition. Not as simple as we all might think!

Yeshua's treatment of tradition depends upon a well-developed principle of command precedence, that is determining which commandment would take precedence over a competing commandment, and in specific cases, should a tradition take precedence over a commandment? Or, in some cases, had tradition *become* a commandment. It can get very tricky indeed, if the traditional way to keep a commandment is so tightly intertwined with the commandment that there often generates some confusion, especially if there is an unhealthy amount of pride in the tradition that it risks obscuring the commandment. A small example might be, does the commandment of circumcision on the eighth day take precedence over the Sabbath? The Rabbinic method of determining this rationale was not completely resolved in the first century, mainly because of great disagreements between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel; however, Yeshua is masterful in His use of it.

Earlier we read Mattityahu/Matthew chapter 15 and a great part of Mark chapter 7. It is the principle of command precedent Yeshua uses to argue with His antagonists. Yeshua answers the Pharisees' question with a question about the tradition regarding vows, and whether honoring father and mother took precedence over the fulfillment of a vow. Yeshua shows how the greater commandment is to honor father and mother, and how it should take precedence. In the first century and early second century, the Pharisees would adopt Yeshua's very position! They even changed their tradition accordingly:

Mishnah b.Nedarim 64a. R. Eliezer said: One may suggest to a man as an opening [a method of getting out of a vow] the honor and mother, but the sages forbid it. Said R. Zadok: Instead of giving the honor of his father and mother, let us suggest the honor of the Almighty as an opening [escape]. If so, there are no vows. But the sages admit to R. Eliezer that in a matter concerning himself and his father and mother their honor is suggested as an opening. (In other words, you may use honoring father and mother as an opening to annul a vow made to honor the Almighty because one is a commandment and the other a tradition.)

In the Mattityahu/Matthew 15 and Mark 7 examples; Yeshua clearly pointed out that a tradition was being used as a "loop-hole" in competing commandments (fulfill a vow vs. honor father and mother) to excuse the behavior of unmerciful and unloving behavior. In other words, a tradition was being used to justify a lack of love and also to provide the justification to choose that tradition over the commandment and also claim righteousness in the very act!

What was the key ingredient missing in the observance of the tradition over the command? What was the ingredient that was the major defining difference in the "gospel" of repentance preached by Paul compared to what he "received" from his fathers before him? What is the element that makes the difference between an act of legalism versus taking hold of a tradition in order to form a walk of endearing obedience to our Master? In a word.....LOVE! Love for HaShem! Love for our neighbor! In the case of Mattityahu 15 and Mark 7; LOVE was the key ingredient missing in the decision to allow a tradition to trump a command. Had there been a fervent love for HaShem and a fervent love for father and mother, the desire to risk damage to the written mitzvah by allowing a traditional vow to overrule it, would never have been allowed to become a temptation. We must always be sure that our observance of any halacha by way of any tradition that we keep in mind, and do our very best to preserve, the very character of HaShem, and that it is His character that our traditions will seek to demonstrate.

So then, by the example set in Mattityahu 15 and Mark 7, maybe we can establish the concept commandment precedence to validate or invalidate a tradition. Perhaps we can use a similar logical approach for all traditions by asking a series of questions that are based upon principles in Scripture.

As we all begin to take hold of Torah commands, along with them we will begin to determine the way that we will “walk in” those commands. That is defined as “our halakha”. And as we begin to determine our halacha, we will inevitably become exposed to traditions and even the rejection of traditions. Once you have identified a tradition that makes the halacha identified as being an effort to be obedient to a command, yet you still aren’t sure about it...ask yourself these questions:

1. Does this tradition, in helping keep one commandment, obscure a more important commandment?
 - Keeping in mind our text from Mattityahu 15 and Mark 7 as our proof text.
2. Does this tradition turn us away from commandments?
 - **Devarim/Deuteronomy 12:32-13:4** - "Everything I am commanding you, you are to take care to do. Do not add to it or subtract from it. "If a prophet or someone who gets messages while dreaming arises among you and he gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder comes about as he predicted when he said, 'Let's follow other gods, which you have not known; and let us serve them,' you are not to listen to what that prophet or dreamer says. For ADONAI your God is testing you, in order to find out whether you really do love ADONAI your God with all your heart and being. You are to follow ADONAI your God, fear him, obey his mitzvot, listen to what he says, serve him and cling to him...
 - **Colossians 2: 8** - Watch out, so that no one will take you captive by means of philosophy and empty deceit, following human tradition which accords with the elemental spirits of the world but does not accord with the Messiah.
 - **Y'erimiyahu 16:19** - ADONAI, my strength, my fortress, my refuge in time of trouble, the nations will come to you from the ends of the earth, saying, "Our ancestors inherited nothing but lies, futile idols, completely useless."
3. Does this tradition deny Yeshua as Messiah?
 - **1 John 2:22-23** - Who is a liar at all, if not the person who denies that Yeshua is the Messiah? Such a person is an anti-Messiah - he is denying the Father and the Son. Everyone who denies the Son is also without the Father, but the person who acknowledges the Son has the Father as well.
4. Does this tradition cause division between Jew (Jewish believer) and Sojourner (gentile believer)?
 - **Acts 10:28, 34-35** - He said to them, "You are well aware that for a man who is a Jew to have close association with someone who belongs to another people, or to come and visit him, is something that just isn't done. But God has shown me not to call any person common or unclean ... Then Kefa addressed them: "I now understand that God does not play favorites, but that whoever fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what people he belongs to.
 - **Galatians 3:26-28** - For in union with the Messiah, you are all children of God through this trusting faithfulness; because as many of you as were immersed into the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah, in whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female; for in union with the Messiah Yeshua, you are all one.
 - **Romans 14:1-13** - Now as for a person whose trust is weak, welcome him - but not to get into arguments over opinions. One person has the trust that will allow him to eat anything, while another whose trust is weak eats only vegetables. The one who eats anything must not

look down on the one who abstains; and the abstainer must not pass judgment on the one who eats anything, because God has accepted him - who are you to pass judgment on someone else's servant? It is before his own master that he will stand or fall; and the fact is that he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand. One person considers some days more holy than others, while someone else regards them as being all alike. What is important is for each to be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes a day as special does so to honor the Lord. Also he who eats anything, eats to honor the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; likewise the abstainer abstains to honor the Lord, and he too gives thanks to God. For none of us lives only in relation to himself, and none of us dies only in relation to himself; for if we live, we live in relation to the Lord; and if we die, we die in relation to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord - indeed, it was for this very reason that the Messiah died and came back to life, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. You then, why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For all of us will stand before God's judgment seat; since it is written in the Tanakh, "As I live, says ADONAI, every knee will bend before me, and every tongue will publicly acknowledge God." So then, every one of us will have to give an account of himself to God. Therefore, let's stop passing judgment on each other! Instead, make this one judgment - not to put a stumbling block or a snare in a brother's way.

- **Ephesians 2:11-3:7** - Therefore, remember your former state: you Gentiles by birth - called the Uncircumcised by those who, merely because of an operation on their flesh, are called the Circumcised - at that time had no Messiah. You were estranged from the national life of Isra'el. You were foreigners to the covenants embodying God's promise. You were in this world without hope and without God. But now, you who were once far off have been brought near through the shedding of the Messiah's blood. For he himself is our shalom - he has made us both one and has broken down the m'chitzah which divided us by destroying in his own body the enmity occasioned by the Torah, with its commands set forth in the form of ordinances. He did this in order to **create in union with himself from the two groups a single new humanity** and thus make shalom, and in order to reconcile to God both in a **single body** by being executed on a stake as a criminal and thus in himself killing that enmity. Also, when he came, he announced as Good News shalom to you far off and shalom to those nearby, news that through him we **both have access in one Spirit** to the Father. So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers. On the contrary, **you are fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's family**. You have been built on the foundation of the emissaries and the prophets, with the cornerstone being Yeshua the Messiah himself. In union with him the whole building is held together, and it is growing into a holy temple in union with the Lord. Yes, in union with him, you yourselves are **being built together** [believing Jews and believing Sojourners] into a spiritual dwelling-place for God! ... the Spirit is now revealing it to his emissaries and prophets, that in union with the Messiah and through the Good News the Gentiles were to be joint heirs, a joint body and joint sharers with the Jews in what God has promised.

5. Does this tradition (or rejecting of this tradition) make us distinct from greater Israel?

- **Romans 11:18, 24-29** - then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you. ... For if you were cut out of what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree! For, brothers, I want you to understand this truth which God formerly concealed but has now revealed, so that you won't imagine you know more than you actually do. It is that stoniness, to a degree, has come upon Isra'el, until the Gentile world enters in its fullness; and that it is in this way that all Isra'el will be saved. As the Tanakh

says, "Out of Tziyon will come the Redeemer; he will turn away ungodliness from Ya'akov and this will be my covenant with them, . . . when I take away their sins." With respect to the Good News they are hated for your sake. But with respect to being chosen they are loved for the Patriarchs' sake, for God's free gifts and his calling are irrevocable.

And lastly, if we can answer "no" to all those above ...

6. Does this tradition unnecessarily burden us (in other words, are there ways to keep the commandment[s] in question)?
 - **Mattityahu/Matthew 11:28-30; 23:2-5** - "Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." ... "The Torah-teachers and the P'rushim," he said, "sit in the seat of Moshe. So whatever they tell you, take care to do it. But don't do what they do, because they talk but don't act! They tie heavy loads onto people's shoulders but won't lift a finger to help carry them. Everything they do is done to be seen by others; for they make their t'fillin broad and their tzitziyot long ...
 - **Luke 11:46** - Yeshua said, "Woe to you Torah experts too! You load people down with burdens they can hardly bear, and you won't lift a finger to help them!"

In conclusion; we saw an example of tradition that Yeshua opposed as one that used loop-holes of competing commandments in order to achieve the opposite effect of what HaShem intends. Let us meditate on this passage from the Torah. as we seek to obey HaShem, and keep His commandments without compromise, let us always keep His character and love in mind.

Sh'mot/Exodus 34:5-9 - ADONAI descended in the cloud, stood with him there and pronounced the name of ADONAI. ADONAI passed before him and proclaimed: "HA SHEM!!! Ha SHEM [ADONAI] is God, merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in grace and truth; showing grace to the thousandth generation, forgiving offenses, crimes and sins; yet not exonerating the guilty, but causing the negative effects of the parents' offenses to be experienced by their children and grandchildren, and even by the third and fourth generations." At once Moshe bowed his head to the ground, prostrated himself and said, "If I have now found favor in your view, Adonai, then please let Adonai go with us, even though they are a stiffnecked people; and pardon our offenses and our sin; and take us as your possession."

One final reminder... A warning if you will... May it be that no one here would seek to master tradition with a corrupt heart devoid of LOVE. Love HaShem! Love your neighbor! As we learn to become family within the framework of our neighboring Judaisms, in order to not boast against the natural branches, let us listen to a voice that may cause us to pause and be challenged:

b. Avodah Zara 3b - R. Jose says, In time to come, idol worshippers will come and offer themselves as proselytes. But will such be accepted? Has it not been taught that in the days of the Messiah proselytes will not be received; likewise were none received in the days of David or Solomon? Well, they will be self made proselytes, and will place phylacteries on their foreheads and on their arms, fringes in their garments, and a Mezuzah on their doorposts, but when the battle of Gog-Magog will come about they will be asked, "For what purpose have you come?" and they will reply: "Against G-d and His Messiah" as it is said, "Why are the nations in an uproar, and why do the peoples mutter in vain," etc. Then each of the proselytes will throw aside his religious token and get away...

May this not be said of any of Messiah's disciples! May it not be said of us!

Shalom.