



Sh'ma! Chazak! Bible Studies

hB

B'ezrat HaShem

Tradition!

A Study on the Biblical Principles for Using Tradition

All Scripture Quoted is from the New King James Bible, unless otherwise noted

Although the most Holy Name of God is not included, because of other references to God please treat this workbook with the requisite respect

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To the scholars, who relentlessly search the Scriptures, who are not content with mere explanation... who desperately desire the truth.

Tradition!

The Torah Teaches Purity *and* Unity

Common traditions, even more so than common laws, are the most effective sociological tool for community unity. All cultures either confirm this by having multi-generational traditions, or when they do not, by their eventual extinction. Traditions can either create or destroy unity.

The Messianic movement is somewhat fragmented by its very nature and design. It appears that in these Last Days, the Almighty is awakening thousands around the world, not by the sound of a preacher or a dynamic leader – but by the simple call of the Bible. Many are picking up their Bibles and asking the questions that their pastors or rabbis never let them ask. These eclectic people are scattered around the globe, perhaps by some divine plan for revival of the ancient path.

The Messianic movement also fragmented by personal choice. The people who would dare question their pastor or rabbi often are not “team players.” This is not good. The Torah was meant to be lived out as a part of a cohesive community. The disagreements and disputes were to be worked out by careful application of the commandments. Without a community, the commandments are not fully realized. While it is understandable that because of the geographic scattering of those in the Messianic Movement, they do not experience much community life – in this day of instant communication, that should not result in isolation. Many Messianics are living in self-imposed halachic isolation where it is often a case of “*each one did what is [interpreted] in his own eyes.*”

Some in the Messianic movement see everything in terms of a rabbinic conspiracy. This is fueled by dubious groups which foist a new form of anti-Semitism upon people who have left the anti-Semitic theology of the church. While there is clear fallibility on the part of “the rabbis” – there is a problem that many who hold to the anti-rabbinism view may not have considered. These modern protesters assume some variation of the following two points:

- The modern seeker is more informed, more dedicated, and less biased by conflicting sources than an accumulation of thousands of years of Jewish students of the Torah.
- A massive conspiracy on all levels exists in “rabbinism” – whereby its adherents are deceived or deceiving – in order to hide the truth of the Torah and the revelation of HaShem’s righteousness.

I profoundly disagree with both of those points. Paul did as well.

What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.

Romans 3:1-2

Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

Romans 11:28

This study is not about changing your mind. It is not about trying to get you to adopt any given halachah or tradition. It is about teaching a systematic approach to adopting, or not adopting, various traditions. I have chosen certain traditions to study, not because they are the most controversial, but rather because they are traditions that either enhance or detract from unity. Unity with whom? Israel. While some feel comforted by the fact that their source for “Jewish tradition” is “original” – we are not as concerned with claims of originality. The Roman Catholic Church claims originality. It is not the claims that matter – but the history, the Scriptures, and ultimately the effect. Is Karaite Judaism “original”? Is Rabbinic Judaism “original”? Is there such a thing as “original” in modern practice? We cannot completely know the answer to those questions – but we do know the effect. Rabbinic Judaism’s thousands of years of unity in the midst of disagreement is a remarkable achievement and something we should consider.

It is my position that thousands of years of faithful observance of the commandments is not to be so easily discarded as some have chosen to do. Does this mean that I take every tradition of Rabbinic Judaism and adopt it? No. But I am not guided by a subtle anti-Semitism that sees “rabbinism” as the enemy of true faith. It is safe to assume that if someone considers the Scriptures to be inspired, they also care about purity of doctrine and practice. Let us be fair-minded toward one another and assume the best of motives.

This study is primarily for congregational leaders. It is about developing a systematic approach for determining community halachah. This study is for families and individuals that want to take personal responsibility for unity in their communities. Above all, it is about unity. It is not about conformity, but truly working at making each community of believers a shining city on a hill.

I may make you angry– but that is not my goal. My goal is unity. Examine the Scriptures and see if it is so... then ask yourself if unity is your goal too. Remember... it is about unity, **with Israel**.

Rick Spurlock
Bereans Online

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Tradition!

Introduction

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

2Timothy 3:16-17

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 endearing figure, Tevye, navigates through the societal changes of early Twentieth-Century Russian Jewry. On the one hand, tradition is presented as a cohesive agent, 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 of *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 to reject? Are traditions merely sociological, or are there 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 God to Moses, and handed down orally for millennia – until about 200 CE when the compilers of the *Mishnah* wrote down the “Oral Torah.” Tractate *Avot* records the transmission in this way:

MOSES RECEIVED THE TORAH AT SINAI AND TRANSMITTED IT TO JOSHUA, JOSHUA 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 ROUND THE TORAH.

m.*Pirkei Avot* 1:1

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 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 (at least it seems that way to the anti-traditionalist).

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Yeshua, saying, “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”— then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

Matthew 15:1-9

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

The Non-Traditional Tradition

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 promote conspiracy theories advanced by dubious sources which are certainly not friendly to followers of Yeshua except to assist in attacking “rabbinism.” 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 certainly laudable. And yet it is demonstrable that the non-traditionalist has not abandoned tradition. 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 approach what God 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 know more about what God intends than the “Rabbis” – and the traditionalist often arrogantly retorts that others are not Torah Observant unless they keep the commandments in the traditional way (translation = “*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 lighten up a bit. It isn’t like we are talking about Scripture, is it?

Ahhh... 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?

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

The Tradition of Scriptural Interpretation

The Protestant Reformation gave us *Sola Scriptura* [Scripture alone]. Laudably, the Reformers jettisoned 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 jettisoned 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 millennia. 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 they claimed the Catholic Church did not have the authority to do: to remove and add to the words of God. How else can you 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 traditionalists among us claim some sort of Divine authority extended to the “Oral Torah” – and the anti-traditionalists 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 God? Both sides claim 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? You can have complete agreement, at least until you lose your mind and start disagreeing with yourself.

Yes, it does matter. It matters to our Master. A primary cause of division in any sociological group is divergence in custom. Having a similar “way of walking” 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 the other Judaisms of the day (Acts 21-22).

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 unique “Jewish” and Gentile identities have “invited” Gentiles to keep 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 God's commandments as dependent upon:

- Genetic origin
- 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 God and the traditions of men 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 authoritative for Him? What authority did He give His Apostles?

Jesus, the Anti-Traditionalist

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 (there is a joke about the King James Bible somewhere in that). In the Reformers' minds, Jesus was a rabid anti-traditionalist. As an added benefit, he was halo-free.

This is a false view (not the halo part, He really is halo-free). Yeshua was not opposed to traditional ways of keeping the 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 transposed the "evils" of "salvation by works" as represented by Roman Catholicism (in their minds) 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 *chasid*, Yeshua's view of Scripture is best represented by what some call "rabbinitism." 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 should take in our lives as His followers.

In this study, we will be trying to discern the correct use of traditions. We will be examining the biblical background for traditions in general, and the particulars of the most distinguishing Jewish traditions compared to the Scriptures. All of the traditions we will study are based on a clear biblical commandment. It is important that we learn to distinguish the difference between the commandments and traditions – but in the process we should never doubt that the commandments apply to us in some practical way.

Lesson One: Was Yeshua a Traditionalist?

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Yeshua, saying, “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”— then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

Matthew 15:1-9

Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of HaShem your God which I command you.

Deuteronomy 4:1-2

Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

Ezekiel 22:26

As You Begin

As you begin this study, ask the Father to reveal His perfect word to you. Ask Him to open your eyes to your personal bias and to give you the desire to change in areas of your life that He brings to His perfect light.

Some Questions to Ask

- Did Yeshua come to destroy religious traditions?
- Can tradition serve any purpose other than to puff up?
- How can I know the difference between the commandments and tradition?

Background on Tradition

Some read Matthew 23, where Yeshua is remarkably critical of some of the Pharisees, and 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 that He is critical of religious tradition.

In the Apostolic Scriptures, the word used in Matthew 15:1 for “tradition” is the Greek word “*paradosis*” – which comes from the root “*didomi*” which means “to give.” *Paradosis* literally means “that which is received.” This is a good Greek representation 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.

Listen to counsel and receive [קַבַּל = kabal = take hold] instruction [מוֹסָר = musar = disciplined tradition], that you may be wise in your latter days.

Proverbs 19:20

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 TaNaKh. 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 Scriptures because of the way the Apostolic Scriptures describe received traditions in general, and some of those very traditions in particular.

What Scripture Says

To best understand how Yeshua treats tradition, it is best to see how the Apostolic Scriptures 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 Yeshua Himself in this matter. Was He orthopraxic? Did He follow the traditions handed down by the Elders?

Read the following passages that use the word “*paradosis*” and determine if Yeshua or His disciples are against traditions in ***general*** or in ***particular*** in each of these passages. The

Lesson One: Was Yeshua was a Traditionalist?

following are all the passages in which the word “*paradosis*” [received tradition] is found in the Apostolic Scriptures:

Matthew 15:2-9:

Mark 7:2-13:

1Corinthians 11:1-2 (Where did Paul receive these traditions?):

Galatians 1:11-16:

Colossians 2:6-7:

2Thessalonians 2:15:

2Thessalonians 3:6:

1Peter 1:17-19:

As you 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 possibly good applications of tradition and bad applications. Let’s take a look at how Yeshua Himself participated in tradition. Read the following passages and then answer the questions that follow.

Matthew 3:1-17

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 John to immerse Him?

Is there a prophecy in the TaNaKh that Yeshua is referring to when He says, “...*for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*” (vs 15) ?

Is Yeshua following a tradition, or a commandment? Do you think that this is significant to the beginning of His ministry?

Matthew 14:19-21

Where in the Torah is it commanded to bless HaShem before eating?

Do you think 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” there is no mention of blessing HaShem after eating as commanded in Deut 8:10? If so, why?

Luke 4:16-20

What was Yeshua’s “custom” – was this traditional, or commanded?

If Yeshua wanted to merely declare that Isaiah’s prophecy was being fulfilled, why bother doing in a synagogue on the Sabbath? Why not do it in an open field, on Sunday?

Matthew 12:2-8

The Pharisees say that Yeshua's disciples are doing what is "not lawful" on the Sabbath. Does Yeshua dispute this with them? Is this specifically commanded, or forbidden on the Sabbath?

Why does Yeshua say, "*Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?*" (vs 5). Does the Torah really say that?

Matthew 23:16-22

Yeshua says, "For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?" (vs 19). 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?

Matthew 24:20

It is understandable that one would want to avoid taking flight in the winter. Why would Yeshua tell His disciples to pray that their flight not take place on the Sabbath?

Where in the Torah is it commanded not to flee on the Sabbath?

Hopefully, you can see that sorting out the issue of traditions in the walk of a disciple of 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, as we begin to explore this more deeply, we will begin to see a real pattern that we can follow. Let us close our lesson with the example seen in Matthew 15:2-9 and Mark 7:2-9. Although the original discussion involved eating bread with unwashed hands (we will deal with that later in our study), Yeshua uses a common first century Pharisaic tradition to show the important principle of "commandment precedence." Later, Judaism would codify this principle when comparing competing (that is, which commandment took precedence over a conflicting one). An example that is used in rabbinic sources is whether the commandment of circumcision on the eighth day should take precedence over the Sabbath (the answer is yes). The rabbinic method of determining this rationale was not completely resolved in the First Century, mainly because of great disagreements between the Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel.

In Matthew 15 and in Mark 7, 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 late First Century and early Second Century, the Pharisees would adopt Yeshua's very position, and change their tradition accordingly.

MISHNAH. R. ELIEZER SAID: ONE MAY SUGGEST TO A MAN AS AN OPENING [a method for annulling a vow] THE HONOUR OF HIS FATHER AND MOTHER BUT THE SAGES FORBID. SAID R. ZADOK: INSTEAD OF GIVING THE HONOUR OF HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, LET US SUGGEST THE HONOUR OF THE ALMIGHTY AS AN OPENING. 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 HONOUR IS SUGGESTED AS AN OPENING.

b.Nedarim 64a

Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus suggested that one was not obliged to keep a vow if it meant dishonoring his father and mother. Rabbi Zadok suggested rather that such a vow could be void simply as a matter of *honoring God*, which effectively made all vows unenforceable. Hence, the Sages ruled with Eliezer. The deciding factor? Love for, and the honoring of, father and mother.

In the Matthew 15 and Mark 7 examples, a tradition is discussed that used a loop-hole of competing commandments (fulfill one's vows versus honor father and mother) to excuse unmerciful and unloving behavior. In other words, tradition was being used to not only justify a lack of love, but to provide the justification to consciously choose it, and to claim righteousness in the very act.

The key ingredient that was missing in the tradition? Love. Love for HaShem – and hence obedience to His commandment to honor father and mother.

Test-A-Tradition Questions

By using the example of Matthew 15 and Mark 7, we can establish the concept of 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 examples in Scripture. Comment on each of the following Scripture passages and the associated "test-a-tradition" question.

- Matthew 15:2-9; Mark 7:2-9: Does this tradition, in helping keep one commandment, obscure a more important commandment?

- Deuteronomy 12:32-13:4; Colossians 2:8; Jeremiah 16:19: Does this tradition turn us away from commandments?
- 1John 2:22: Does this tradition deny Yeshua as Messiah?
- Acts 10:28, 34-35; Romans 14:1-13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-3:7: Does this tradition cause division between Jew and Gentile?
- Romans 11:18, 24-29: Does this tradition (or rejecting of this tradition) make us *distinct* from greater Israel?

And lastly, if you can answer “no” to all those above,

- Matthew 11:30; 23:2-5; Luke 11:46: Does this tradition unnecessarily burden us (in other words, are there other ways to keep the commandment[s] in question)?

Conclusion

We saw an example of a tradition that Yeshua opposed as one that used loop-holes of competing commandments in order to achieve the opposite effect of what HaShem intends.

In conclusion, 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 in mind.

Now HaShem descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of HaShem. And HaShem passed before him and proclaimed, “HaShem,

HaShem God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.

Exodus 34:5-8

In the space below, write your conclusions on the topic of how Yeshua treated traditions.

Prayer Focus

In the *shacharit* [morning] prayers, the Siddur has us recount the Akeidah, the binding of Isaac. After reading the Scripture passage, some might think that it is on the basis of Abraham's and Isaac's merit that we find ourselves accepted by God. For this reason, the Siddur adds the following prayer – a prayer that relies simply upon the mercy of our covenant-keeping God:

Master of all worlds! Not in the merit of our righteousness do we cast our supplications before You, but in the merit of Your abundant mercy. What are we? What is our life? What is our kindness? What is our righteousness? What is our salvation? What is our strength? What is our might? What can we say before You, HaShem, our God, and the God of our forefathers – are not the heroes like nothing before You, the famous as if they had never existed, the wise as if devoid of wisdom, and the perceptive as if devoid of intelligence? For most of their deeds are desolate and the days of their lives are empty before You. The preeminence of man over beast is non-existent for all is vain.

But we are Your people, members of Your covenant, children of Abraham, Your beloved, to whom You took an oath at Mount Moriah; the offspring of Isaac, his only son, who was bound atop the altar; the community of Jacob, Your firstborn son, whom – because of the love with which you adorned him and the joy with which You delighted in him – You named Israel and Jeshurun.

ArtScroll Complete Siddur p. 27

Lesson Two: Biblical Interpretation or Hermeneutics?

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

2Peter 1:19-21

My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures;

Proverbs 2:1-4

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

Acts 17:10-11

As You Begin

Do you fancy yourself as one who can “interpret” Scripture? Prayerfully consider Peter’s admonition, “... *no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation...*” and then ask HaShem to remove any conceit that would have us hold onto any Scripture passage as *your* proof text.

Some Questions to Ask

- Does the way someone studies (or explains) Scripture itself constitute a “tradition”?
- Is it possible to study Scripture without the bias of *our own way* of studying Scripture?
- Won’t the Holy Spirit cut through our bias and teach us from God’s Word?
- Why is so much attention given to “hermeneutics” in Christian Seminaries?

Background on Tradition

Early in the Second Century CE, as “Replacement Theology” began to be accepted by the church, a number of heresies began to take root in Christianity. Hegesippus, the Second Century church historian, said it was directly related to the passing of the last of the Apostles:

*Up to that period the church had remained like a virgin pure and uncorrupted: for, if there were any persons who were disposed to tamper with the wholesome rule of the preaching of salvation, they still lurked in some dark place of concealment or other. **But, when the sacred band of apostles had in various ways closed their lives, and that generation of men to whom it had been vouchsafed to listen to the Godlike wisdom with their own ears had passed away, then did the confederacy of godless error take its rise through the treachery of false teachers, who, seeing that none of the apostles any longer survived, at length attempted with bare and uplifted head to oppose the preaching of the truth by preaching "knowledge falsely so called."***

Fragments of Hegesippus – Roberts-Donaldson Translation

It is understandable that after Replacement Theology had successfully abrogated the literal observance of the commandments of the “Old Testament,” there developed a real difficulty in maintaining orthodoxy [right doctrine]. When the concept of new revelation was accepted, it set the stage for ever-new revelations from all manner of false prophets. Without the Apostles, and without the “Old Testament” principle of “do not add to, and do not take away from” (Deuteronomy 4:2), there was a void in maintaining orthodoxy.

Because of that void, early church leaders developed their primary way of combating heresy, a doctrine they referred to as “Apostolic Succession.” Later coupled with Papal Succession, this doctrine provided the stop-gap against heretical teachings. Eventually, the Roman Catholic Church would incorporate these into an iron-clad defense of the infallibility of the Church. A complex hierarchy of authoritative teachings was formed in what is now known as “the Magisterium.” The Magisterium is the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church. In other words, what the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church decides is orthodox, is orthodox. This is how the First Vatican Council defined its authority.

*Wherefore, by divine and Catholic faith all those things are to be believed which are contained in the word of God as found in Scripture **and tradition**, and which **are proposed by the Church as matters to be believed as divinely revealed**, whether by her solemn judgment or in her ordinary and universal Magisterium.*

*First Vatican Council *Dei Filius* 8*

The Magisterium is ultimately derived from the Roman Catholic view of Matthew 16:18-19:

*“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and **whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**”*

Matthew 16:18-19

From this passage, the Roman Catholic Church believes it not only has the authority to create new traditions, it has the authority to create law, and annul previous laws – that God Himself is bound by Church decree.

This “authority” looks like this:

Jesus → Peter and the other 11 → Pope and other Bishops

The Protestant Reformation challenged this view. The Reformers rejected the notion that Peter received this kind of authority in Matthew 16. One of the principles of the Reformation was *sola scriptura* [only Scripture] – that is, only Scripture could provide the necessary authority for believers. However, theologically they still held onto some vestiges of Apostolic Succession regarding how the Scriptures should be interpreted. Obviously, *sola scriptura* was not enough, someone had to authoritatively speak as to what the Scriptures *meant*. Even though many modern Protestant denominations do not hold to the doctrines of Apostolic Succession or the Magisterium, they still reserve all interpretation for the theological experts. Whether they be denominational seminaries, or pastors, or bishops – the effect is the same as the Magisterium. What *they say* the Scriptures say, stands. Anything else is heretical. So much for *sola scriptura* – it is a sham. Even though there are no papal bulls or *ex cathedra* decrees, the overall effect is the same: to keep the definition of what the Scriptures *mean* under the jurisdiction of the ruling authorities *only*.

The problem of heresy is real. Heresy is not to be taken lightly. To allow the average person to read and interpret the Scriptures as they see fit will only result in the greatest heresy of all, “*where every man did what is right in his own eyes.*” On the other hand, history has shown that the men who occupy the positions of the Magisterium (whether official in the case of Roman Catholicism, or unofficial in the case of Protestantism) are fallible.

Clearly, there must be a way to keep heresy at bay, and still not resort to these man-made methods. There is. ***It is in the Torah.*** Sadly, because of the rejection of the authority of the Torah, Christianity had to find other means to defend orthodoxy.

What Scripture Says

In the modern age, we have the cyclic redundancy check (CRC). This is a method of validating data on a computer network or a storage device. The way CRC works is each block of data that

is sent contains a short sequence that mathematically describes the data that follows. Any data that does not match the CRC computation is rejected as being in error. In other words, every time information is sent, the information is accompanied by a validation code – so the data is **self-validating**. Computers demand this kind of validation. Certainly the Scriptures must contain some sort of self-validating feature. They do. ***It is in the Torah.***

Read the following passages and answer the questions.

Deuteronomy 4:1-2

Who is permitted to “add to” or “take away from” the commandments given by God?

Is there anything in this passage that indicates whether God might amend those commandments Himself?

Deuteronomy 4:36; Numbers 12:5-8

How did Israel receive this “revelation” of God – His commandments?

How does God describe this revelation, when compared to the way other prophets receive instruction from Him? Was this revelation superior or inferior?

Deuteronomy 12:32-13:11

What is the mark of a true prophet?

What is the mark of a false prophet?

How do the commandments relate to true or false prophecy?

Deuteronomy 18:9-19

In the phrase “HaShem your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me” (verse 15), who do you think “me” is speaking of?

Acts 3:22

Who is this “Prophet” that would be like Moses?

John 1:45; John 5:30; John 12:49-50

Did Yeshua teach anything that was not first *given* to Him?

Did Yeshua teach anything contrary to what had already been given?

Based upon Deuteronomy 13, 18, and John 12, was Yeshua a false prophet, or a true prophet, and how can you tell?

Galatians 1:10-12; Acts 17:10-11

Where did Paul receive his revelation?

Did he ask that his readers take him at his word, or did he expect that they would measure his revelation against the standard?

What was the standard used to validate Paul?

Now let's look at that important passage in Matthew 16:18-19. We need to see if the Apostles really were given the authority to "make it up" as Roman Catholics assert, and Protestants promote. What exactly does it mean to have the keys to the Kingdom and the authority to bind and loose? Read Matthew 16:18-19 and then read and comment on the following:

Matthew 19:27-28:

1Corinthians 5:12-6:7:

Matthew 18:15-20; Deuteronomy 19:15:

Now read the "Binding and Loosing" article located in the Appendix and write your opinion of the authority given to the Apostles. Be specific – for instance, did the Apostles have the authority to create new law, or overturn Scriptural commandments?

Conclusion

Many think that because they have cast off previous traditions that they are tradition-free. There is no such thing as being tradition-free, for even that is a tradition. We have seen that traditions define not only rituals, but also the interpretation of Scripture. Once an interpretive model finds its way into seminaries and yeshivas, it becomes invisible to its adherents. For example, those who read the Scriptures in metaphors may be blind to the literal words that they read. Those who read literally may be blind to idioms. The adage of "rose colored glasses" really does apply to one's tradition of interpretation.

Is ***the way*** you read Scripture biblical – or is it merely a man-made tradition?

Test-A-Tradition Questions

Hopefully, we are beginning to see that some traditions are good, some are bad, and some are neutral. Here some questions to ask about any tradition. Any “yes” answer should be a red flag.

- Does this tradition, in helping keep one commandment, obscure a more important commandment?
- Does this tradition turn us away from commandments?
- Does this tradition deny Yeshua as Messiah?
- Does this tradition cause division between Jew and Gentile?
- Does this tradition (or rejecting of this tradition) make us *distinct* from greater Israel?

And lastly, if you can answer “no” to all those above,

- Does this tradition unnecessarily burden us (in other words, are there other ways to keep the commandment[s] in question)?

Prayer Focus

Birkat HaDin [Blessing for Justice, from the *Shemoneh Esrei*]

Restore our judges as in earliest times and our counselors as at first; remove from sorrow and groan; and reign over us – You HaShem, alone – with kindness and compassion, and justify us through judgment. Blessed are You HaShem, the King Who loves righteousness and judgment.

ArtScroll Complete Siddur, p 107

Lesson Three: Shabbat – What is Work, What is Rest?

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of HaShem your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days HaShem made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore HaShem blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

Exodus 20:8-11

As You Begin

Knowing the difference between work and rest may not be as easy to determine as you think. Yeshua declared Himself to be “Lord of the Sabbath.” Pray that as His follower, you will correctly view the Sabbath commandments, and that you will be able to distinguish between what is God-breathed and what is man-made.

Some Questions to Ask

- Are “work” and “rest” used literally when referring to the Sabbath?
- Is rest the absence of effort?
- What exactly is work? What is rest?
- Why did God give some commandments that are time-dependant?

Background on Tradition

Classical Christianity has defined work and rest in ways that are somewhat consistent with Judaism, although in a much broader way. It was not until the past 100 years that Christianity has abandoned the notion of a day of rest. Those sects of Christianity that are the most pious have contributed the most to the concept of Sunday being a day of rest, and reserved for religious endeavors. Putting aside for a moment the switch to the first day of the week from the seventh day, where did Christianity get the notion of rest and work? Considering the fact that they quickly abandoned the biblical seventh day, we can only assume that they borrowed the concepts of rest and work from Judaism. This is exemplified by the historic evidence of “blue laws” in Western cultures that prohibited certain activities on Sunday.

Judaism has a deep understanding of the sanctification of things, people, and time. Sanctifying the seventh day is not only commanded by Scripture, it has become the ultimate sign of Jewish

identity and piety. To be “*Shomer Shabbat*” [guarder of the Sabbath] is to be identified as one that keeps all the commandments.

Traditional Judaism identified Sabbath rest mostly in terms of what it is not. Namely, rest is a cessation of work. Work is defined in 39 categories, all derived from Exodus 31 and the actions necessary to build the Tabernacle. The logic goes like this: Exodus 31:1-11 gives the basic outline of the work needed to build the Tabernacle. Exodus 31:12-17 follows with instructions about the Sabbath. In other words, they were to build the Tabernacle, but do not continue construction on the Sabbath. It is easy to see how some might construe that any work in building the Tabernacle would not be considered work because it was done for a holy cause, hence the implied restriction of working on the Tabernacle on the Sabbath. Additionally, some of the 39 categories are based upon the Creation account. Anything that is creative in nature – or gives one control over the environment – is seen as work. In other words, what God ceased doing on the seventh day is the type of thing we should cease doing as well. Have you created any sun, moon, or stars recently? No? Well, maybe you created something within your abilities? You get the point.

The human mind always finds ways built upon the adage, *the end justifies the means*. This is especially true with things we might regard as holy causes (and thus exempt from the cessation of work). Example: “*I am helping to pay for a mission trip, so working overtime on Saturday is for a holy cause.*” However, Scripture gives us ample evidence of the opposite truism: the *means* are important to the *result* – or, ***how you obey will ultimately determine the outcome.***

Generally, the traditional 39 prohibited *melachot* [works, activities] comprise activity that is creative or exercises control over one’s environment.

Lamed Tet Melachot

[Thirty-Nine Activities]

MISHNAH. THE PRIMARY LABOURS ARE FORTY LESS ONE, SOWING, PLOUGHING, REAPING, BINDING SHEAVES, THRESHING, WINNOWER, SELECTING, GRINDING, SIFTING, KNEADING, BAKING, SHEARING WOOL, BLEACHING, HACKLING, DYEING, SPINNING, STRETCHING THE THREADS, THE MAKING OF TWO MESHES, WEAVING TWO THREADS, DIVIDING TWO THREADS, TYING AND UNTYING, SEWING TWO STITCHES, TEARING IN ORDER TO SEW TWO STITCHES, CAPTURING A DEER, SLAUGHTERING, OR FLAYING, OR SALTING IT, CURING ITS HIDE, SCRAPING IT, CUTTING IT UP, WRITING TWO LETTERS, ERASING IN ORDER TO WRITE TWO LETTERS, BUILDING, PULLING DOWN, EXTINGUISHING, KINDLING, STRIKING WITH A HAMMER, CARRYING OUT FROM ONE DOMAIN TO ANOTHER: THESE ARE THE FORTY PRIMARY LABOURS LESS ONE.

b.Shabbat 73a

Here they are listed in more modern language:

Planting, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing wool, beating wool, dyeing, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving at least two threads, separating two threads, tying, untying, sewing at least two stitches, tearing for the purpose of sewing, trapping, slaughtering, flaying, salting meat, curing hide, scraping hide, cutting hide into pieces, writing two or more letters, erasing, building, tearing something down, extinguishing a fire, igniting a fire, using a tool, and transferring or carrying between domains.

While some of the listed activities seem foreign to our everyday activities, remember that most of these come from the tasks needed to build the Tabernacle. From these 39 *Melachot*, an even greater list of prohibitions have been traditionally derived. Here are some examples:

- Turning on or turning off of electric switches or appliances (hence, no cooking)
- Starting or stopping an automobile engine (by extension, driving an automobile)
- Using electronics such as computers, televisions, video games, iPods, CD players, etc.
- Tearing off toilet paper

Of course, there are ways around some of these prohibitions, such as the traditional use of “Shabbat timers” that automatically turn off or turn on electric lights; always-on warming plates, etc. As well, the prohibition against carrying from one domain to another is dealt with by creating an *eruv* – a contiguous enclosure around a home or community. An entire tractate of the Talmud is named for the concept of *Eruvim* (plural). This concept was under development during the First Century, which is where we get the controversies in the Gospels regarding the lame man carrying his mat after being healed by Yeshua, as well as the use of the phrase, “a Sabbath-day’s journey.”

If you were not raised in an Orthodox home, some of these prohibitions may appear silly, but do not be so quick to dismiss them without seeing what Scripture says.

What Scripture Says

Discovering what the Scriptures say regarding the Sabbath may be difficult. It is not that the Scripture passages are obscure, it is because they are so sparse. The word [שַׁבָּת= *Shabbat*, Sabbath] is only used thirty-seven times in thirteen passages in the Torah. In those passages there are several clear commandments given that relate to the weekly Sabbath. We need to list those commandments as literally as possible. In the table that follows the Scripture passages are all those in the Torah that relate to the weekly Sabbath. List the literal commandments associated with the weekly Sabbath. Try and avoid concepts or extrapolations. Just list what it says we should do, or not do on the Seventh Day Sabbath.

Passages	Literal Commandments
Exodus 16:23-29	
Exodus 31:13-16	
Exodus 35:2-3	
Leviticus 23:3	
Leviticus 24:1-9	
Numbers 28:4-10	
Deuteronomy 5:12-15	

Now take the commandments that you have written out, and list them here, removing all the repeated commandments.

It is clear that the list is not long. But wait, there is evidence in Scripture the list contains within it concepts that are every bit as important as the literal commandments. Comment on the following passages and how they relate to Sabbath commandments. Which literal commandment does each passage relate to?

Numbers 15:32:

Nehemiah 10:28-31:

Nehemiah 13:15-22:

Isaiah 56:2-6:

Isaiah 58:13:

Isaiah 66:23:

Jeremiah 17:21-27:

Amos 8:5:

Can you begin to see that the traditional enumeration of 39 categories of “work” has some Scriptural support? Some might be able argue about the precedence of some commandments over others, and from that derive a list that would differ from the traditional 39 *Melachot*. An example might be to give precedence to the commandment to “assemble” (Leviticus 23:3, from the phrase שְׁבֵת שְׁבֵתוֹן מְקַרְא־קֹדֶשׁ [*sabbath of solemn rest, a holy assembly*]) – above the commandment “each man remain in his place” (Exodus 16:29). Most forms of Orthodox Judaism do not give the assembly commandment that precedence, and hence the focus on *eruvim* [contiguous areas that represent a “place” to be larger than a home]. Regardless, the Scriptures clearly contain instructions about the Sabbath far beyond simply making it the Seventh Day derivative of the average Christian’s “Sunday.”

How did Yeshua deal with the emerging Sabbath traditions in the First Century? Let’s look at the positive and negative. Read and comment on the following passages:

Matthew 12:1-13; Luke 6:1-10:

Matthew 24:20:

Mark 6:2:

Luke 13:10-16:

Luke 23:56:

John 5:5-19:

John 7:21-24:

John 9:1-17:

Acts 1:12:

Did Yeshua break the Sabbath? ***Of course not!*** Did some of those in the First Century think that He did? Yes. That tells us that there is some difference between the commandments and tradition. That tells us also that there may have been “commandment precedence” at issue in Yeshua’s keeping of the Sabbath. Regardless, you can see that the issue is not nearly as easy to determine as those who abrogate all of the Sabbath commandments – but neither is it easy for those who simply rely on the 39 *Melachot* to determine their Torah walk.

Go back to your lists of Sabbath commandments, and write the positive commandments in the space that follows. Be sure to include anything you find from the Apostolic Scriptures:

Now list the negative commandments in the space that follows:

Test-A-Tradition Questions

Any “yes” answer should be a red flag.

- Does this tradition turn us away from commandments?
- Does this tradition, in helping keep one commandment, obscure a more important commandment?
- Does this tradition deny Yeshua as Messiah?
- Does this tradition cause division between Jew and Gentile?
- Does this tradition (or rejecting of this tradition) make us *distinct* from greater Israel?

And lastly, if you can answer “no” to all those above,

- Does this tradition unnecessarily burden us (in other words, are there other ways to keep the commandment[s] in question)?

Conclusion

Keeping the Sabbath is not merely a concept or a metaphor. It involves real faith, followed up with real action. The Bible presents the Sabbath not as a burden, but as a gift from our loving Father.

It is safe to say that the average Christian does not keep the Sabbath in any way consistent with the Scriptures. What about you? Are there things that you do not do on the Sabbath, that you should be doing? Are there things that you should not be doing that you are doing? In the space that follows, affirm what you will do regarding the Sabbath from now on:

Prayer Focus

K'dushat HaYom [“Holiness of the Day” from the Sabbath *Shemoneh Esrei*]

Moses rejoiced in the gift of his portion: that You called him a faithful servant. A crown of splendor You placed on his head when he stood before You on Mount Sinai. He brought down two stone tablets in his hand, on which is inscribed the observance of the Sabbath. So it is written in Your Torah:

The Children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath an eternal covenant for their generations. Between Me and the Children of Israel it is a sign forever that in six days HaShem made the heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.

You did not give it, HaShem our God, to the nations of the lands, nor did You make it the inheritance, our King, of the worshipers of graven idols. And in its contentment the uncircumcised shall not abide – for to Israel Your people, have You given it in love, to the seed of Jacob, whom You have chosen. The people that sanctifies the Seventh – they will all be satisfied and delighted from Your goodness. And the Seventh – You found favor in it and sanctified it! “Most coveted of days,” You called it, a remembrance of the act of creation.

ArtScroll Complete Siddur, p 425

Lesson Four: Kosher Certification or Leviticus 11?

And HaShem God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Genesis 2:16-17

Speak to the children of Israel, saying, “These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth: among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud—that you may eat... Nevertheless these you shall not eat among those that chew the cud or those that have cloven hooves: the camel, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you...Whatever in the water does not have fins or scales—that shall be an abomination to you.”

Leviticus 11:2-4,12

Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

Romans 14:1-3

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

1Corinthians 8:13

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake...

1Corinthians 10:25

As You Begin

Very little in Scripture is as personal as instructions about food. At the same time, Scripture makes it very clear that the food we eat has ramifications for our faith community. Sociology agrees that food is both personal and communal. These are dangerous subjects.

- Ask God that you will be able to look honestly at His instructions regarding food.
- Determine to surrender your will to the King of the Universe, but also to the least in your faith community.
- Put your personal preferences aside, and open your Bible...

Some Questions to Ask

- Does HaShem only care about what I eat privately, or are some of these instructions for community meals?
- Is Leviticus 11 the minimum requirement for eating, or is it the source for all our eating instructions?
- Can I rely on the kosher seal to know if something is OK to eat?
- Do I need to buy my meat only from a kosher butcher?

Background on Tradition

The first commandment given to mankind was what could be eaten, and what could not be eaten. This fact carries with it some deep insight into the difficulty some people have with obeying HaShem's instructions in general, but food-related instructions in particular.

Hopefully, we can all agree that Leviticus 11 is quite clear that certain animals are not food, and should not be eaten. Once we see that God does care about what we eat, and that He has given us clear instructions about meat in Leviticus, the matter should be easily set to rest. If we were to think that, however, we would be quite wrong. The issue goes far beyond what we choose to eat. It has a lot to do with community and community standards – and there are many traditions associated with food.

“Kosher” is the Ashkenazi pronunciation of the Hebrew word כָּשֵׁר [*kasher*]. It simply means “fit.” Although Judaism's kosher standards originate in Leviticus 11; Genesis 32:32; Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 7:26; and Deuteronomy 12:21-25 – that is only the starting place. These are the primary issues that concern the various kosher standards of Judaism:

- Is the meat from a clean animal?
- Was the animal disease-free?
- Was the animal slaughtered in the required way?
- Was the sciatic nerve and major veins and arteries removed?
- Are there meat products mixed with dairy products?
- Are dairy and meat ingredients kept strictly separate in food preparation (and consumption)?
- Does the food have rennet enzyme or gelatin in it?
- Was the food prepared and packaged by non-Jews?
- Did the food preparers wash their hands in the prescribed way?
- Is the food from the Land of Israel, and if so, was it harvested in accordance with the First Fruits and *Sh'mittah* restrictions?
- Have all the bugs been removed from produce?

Sounds complicated, doesn't it? How much simpler if there was simply a “Good Housekeeping” seal on everything that told us if it was OK to eat. In a way, there is: the *hechsher* seal. A

“*hechsher*” is the kosher certificate found on most consumer food products today that are considered kosher. However, there are dozens of different *hechsher* standards in the world today. The different degrees of kosher are dizzying if you are not a part of a community that abides by a historical kosher standard. Even within such communities, a *hechsher* seal often carries with it a warning that you should consult your rabbi when in doubt. So, it still isn’t that easy.

Ritual Slaughter: *Shechita*

Shechita is the slaughter of mammals and birds according to strict tradition. The *shochet* [ritual slaughterer] performs *shechita* by severing the trachea, esophagus, carotid arteries and jugular veins, and allowing the blood to drain out. Although *shechita* originates from a concept in Deuteronomy 12:21, the practice is detailed in traditional sources such as the Babylonian Talmud, and primarily the Sixteenth Century *Shulchan Aruch*. The *shochet* is a religious Jew, who is specifically licensed to perform the slaughter of clean animals. In *shechita*, there are five major prohibitions in slaughtering clean animals. Each carries a technical definition that if not followed, the meat is rendered unfit for consumption. They are: pressing, pausing, piercing, tearing, and covering.

After the animal is killed according to *shechita*, it must be butchered in the proper way, or the meat is rendered unfit for consumption. First, the animal is inspected. The animal must be *glatt* [Yiddish for “smooth”]. This means that depending upon the standard used, the lungs must be healthy. Next, the animal is porged. Porging involves the removal of certain fats, veins, arteries, and the sciatic nerve from the meat.

The removal of blood is an important part of *shechita*. The way the animal is killed is only a part of the process of removing blood. The blood must be allowed to spill on the ground and not be caught in a bowl or container. All major veins and arteries must be removed, as well as all coagulated blood. Then the meat is rinsed and soaked and covered with salt.

Shechita applies to clean mammals as well as clean fowl, but not fish.

Dairy and Meat

Kosher foods are divided into three categories: meat, dairy, and pareve. Most kosher traditions keep meat and dairy separate, whereas something that is pareve can be prepared or eaten with either meat or dairy. The separation of meat and dairy has varying levels of compliance. In some cases, foods only need to be prepared and eaten separately. In other cases, the food, utensils, and location of preparation must be separate. In the Land of Israel, the most common practice is for homes to have a single kitchen, with a single refrigerator, but with separate utensils, plates, and sinks. Accordingly, dishwashers are not common.

In the Land of Israel, most restaurants that have a valid *hechsher* are either dairy restaurants, meat restaurants, or they have separate kitchens and dining facilities for both dairy and meat.

Fish is not considered “meat” for this determination. It is always permissible with dairy, and with some restrictions fish is sometimes permissible with other meats.

After eating meat, one must wait a significant time before eating dairy. Depending upon the tradition, one must wait from three to six hours after eating meat, before eating dairy. After eating dairy, most traditions require eating something pareve, rinsing the mouth, and sometimes waiting half an hour.

The Talmud

Although most of the specifics of modern kashrut laws come from the Shulchan Aruch, the Talmud does provide the backdrop. The tractate *Chullin* [“ordinary things”] describes slaughter and meat consumption. It speaks of “ordinary things” because it relates to everyday use as opposed to uses that deal with the Tabernacle/Temple. Although we would not consider the Talmud as authoritative, it can provide some unique insights, and we consider it extremely useful. With regard to kashrut, the Talmud can give us some glimpses into the formulation of the modern definition of what is kosher. The following selected passages are from the Mishnah section (200 CE). If you were to read the Gemara (200-500 CE) for each of these, you would see that there is often disagreement among the commentators as they are formulating the specific rules. That is not unusual for the Talmud, but it should be noted that a number of these comments differentiate between Scriptural instruction and oral tradition. That is unusual in the Talmud.

Who may slaughter?

MISHNAH. ALL MAY SLAUGHTER, AND THEIR SLAUGHTERING IS VALID, EXCEPT A DEAF — MUTE, AN IMBECILE OR A MINOR, LEST THEY INVALIDATE THEIR SLAUGHTERING; AND IF ANY OF THESE SLAUGHTERED WHILE OTHERS WERE STANDING OVER THEM, THEIR SLAUGHTERING IS VALID. STANDING OVER THEM, THEIR SLAUGHTERING IS VALID.

b.Chullin 2a

With what implement may it be slaughtered?

MISHNAH. IF ONE SLAUGHTERED WITH [THE SMOOTH EDGE OF] A HAND SICKLE, WITH A FLINT OR WITH A REED, THE SLAUGHTERING IS VALID. ALL MAY SLAUGHTER; AT ALL TIMES ONE MAY SLAUGHTER; WITH ANY IMPLEMENT ONE MAY SLAUGHTER, EXCEPTING A SCYTHE, A SAW, TEETH OR A FINGER NAIL, SINCE THESE STRANGLE.

b.Chullin 15b

How must it be slaughtered?

MISHNAH. IF ONE SLAUGHTERED WITH A SCYTHE, MOVING IT FORWARD ONLY, BETH SHAMMAI DECLARE THE SLAUGHTERING INVALID, AND BETH HILLEL DECLARE IT VALID. IF THE TEETH OF THE SCYTHE WERE FILED AWAY IT IS REGARDED AS AN ORDINARY KNIFE.

b.Chullin 18a

MISHNAH. IF A MAN CUT ONE [OF THE ORGANS OF THE THROAT] IN THE CASE OF A BIRD, OR BOTH ORGANS IN THE CASE OF CATTLE, THE SLAUGHTERING IS VALID. THE GREATER PART OF AN ORGAN IS EQUIVALENT TO [THE WHOLE OF] IT. R. JUDAH SAYS, HE MUST CUT THROUGH THE JUGULAR VEINS. [IF ONE CUT] HALF OF ONE ORGAN IN THE CASE OF A BIRD, OR ONE AND A HALF ORGANS IN THE CASE OF CATTLE, THE SLAUGHTERING IS INVALID. [IF A MAN CUT] THE GREATER PART OF ONE ORGAN IN THE CASE OF A BIRD, OR THE GREATER PART OF EACH ORGAN IN THE CASE OF CATTLE, THE SLAUGHTERING IS VALID.

b.Chullin 27a

MISHNAH. IF THE KNIFE FELL AND HE PAUSED [IN THE SLAUGHTERING IN ORDER] TO LIFT IT UP, IF HIS COAT FELL DOWN AND HE PAUSED TO LIFT IT UP, IF HE SHARPENED THE KNIFE AND GREW TIRED AND ANOTHER CAME AND SLAUGHTERED — [IN EACH CASE] IF THE PAUSE WAS FOR THE LENGTH OF TIME REQUIRED FOR SLAUGHTERING, THE SLAUGHTERING IS INVALID. R. SIMEON SAID, [IT IS INVALID] IF THE PAUSE WAS FOR THE LENGTH OF TIME REQUIRED FOR EXAMINING [THE KNIFE].

b.Chullin 32a

MISHNAH. IF A MAN SLAUGHTERED [AN ANIMAL] AS A SACRIFICE TO MOUNTAINS, HILLS, SEAS, RIVERS, OR DESERTS, THE SLAUGHTERING IS INVALID.

b.Chullin 39b

How must it be inspected and found acceptable?

MISHNAH. THE FOLLOWING [DEFECTS] RENDER CATTLE TREFAH: [I] IF THE GULLET WAS PIERCED; [II] OR THE WINDPIPE SEVERED; [III] IF THE MEMBRANE OF THE BRAIN WAS PIERCED; [IV] IF THE HEART WAS PIERCED AS FAR AS THE CAVITY THEREOF; [V] IF THE SPINE WAS BROKEN AND THE CORD SEVERED; [VI] IF THE LIVER WAS GONE AND NAUGHT REMAINED; [VII] IF THE LUNG WAS PIERCED, [VIII] OR WAS DEFICIENT (R. SIMEON SAYS, PROVIDED IT WAS PIERCED AS FAR AS THE MAIN BRONCHI); [IX] IF THE ABOMASUM, [X] OR THE GALL-BLADDER, [XI] OR THE INTESTINES WERE PIERCED; [XII] IF THE INNER RUMEN WAS PIERCED, [XIII] OR THE GREATER PART OF THE OUTER COVERING TORN (R. JUDAH SAYS, IN A LARGE ANIMAL IF IT WAS TORN TO THE EXTENT OF A HANDBREADTH, AND IN A SMALL ANIMAL IF THE GREATER PART OF IT WAS

TORN); [XIX] IF THE OMASUM [XV] OR RETICULUM WAS PIERCED ON THE OUTSIDE; [XVI] IF THE ANIMAL FELL FROM THE ROOF; [XVII] IF MOST OF ITS RIBS WERE FRACTURED; [XVIII] OR IF IT WAS CLAWED BY A WOLF (R. JUDAH SAYS, SMALL CATTLE [ARE TREFAH] IF CLAWED BY A WOLF, LARGE CATTLE IF CLAWED BY A LION; SMALL FOWL IF CLAWED BY A HAWK, LARGE FOWL IF CLAWED BY A FALCON). THIS IS THE RULE: IF AN ANIMAL WITH A SIMILAR DEFECT COULD NOT CONTINUE TO LIVE, IT IS TREFAH.

b.Chullin 42a

What are the characteristics of clean birds and clean fish (and is a turkey kosher)?

MISHNAH. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CATTLE AND OF WILD ANIMALS ARE STATED IN THE TORAH. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BIRDS ARE NOT STATED, BUT THE SAGES HAVE SAID, EVERY BIRD THAT SEIZES ITS PREY IS UNCLEAN. EVERY BIRD THAT HAS AN EXTRA TOE, A CROP, AND A GIZZARD THAT CAN BE PEELED, IS CLEAN. R. ELIEZER, SON OF R. ZADOK SAYS, EVERY BIRD THAT PARTS ITS TOES IS UNCLEAN. OF LOCUSTS: ALL THAT HAVE FOUR LEGS, FOUR WINGS, LEAPING LEGS, AND WINGS COVERING THE GREATER PART OF THE BODY, [ARE CLEAN]. R. JOSE SAYS, IT MUST ALSO BEAR THE NAME 'LOCUST'. OF FISHES: ALL THAT HAVE FINS AND SCALES ARE CLEAN. R. JUDAH SAYS, THERE MUST BE [AT LEAST] TWO SCALES AND ONE FIN. THE SCALES ARE THOSE [THIN DISCS] WHICH ARE ATTACHED TO THE FISH, THE FINS ARE THOSE [WINGS] BY WHICH IT SWIMS.

b.Chullin 59a

How should an animal be butchered?

MISHNAH. [THE PROHIBITION OF] THE SCIATIC NERVE IS IN FORCE BOTH WITHIN THE HOLY LAND AND OUTSIDE IT, BOTH DURING THE EXISTENCE OF THE TEMPLE AND AFTER IT, IN RESPECT OF BOTH UNCONSECRATED AND CONSECRATED [ANIMALS]. IT APPLIES TO CATTLE AND TO WILD ANIMALS, TO THE RIGHT AND LEFT HIP, BUT IT DOES NOT APPLY TO BIRDS BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO SPOON-SHAPED HIP.

b.Chullin 89b

MISHNAH. WHEN A PERSON REMOVES THE SCIATIC NERVE HE MUST REMOVE ALL OF IT. R. JUDAH SAYS, ONLY SO MUCH AS IS NECESSARY TO FULFIL THE PRECEPT OF REMOVING IT.

b.Chullin 96a

What about meat and dairy?

MISHNAH. EVERY KIND OF FLESH IS FORBIDDEN TO BE COOKED IN MILK, EXCEPTING THE FLESH OF FISH AND OF LOCUSTS; AND IT IS ALSO FORBIDDEN TO

PLACE UPON THE TABLE [FLESH] WITH CHEESE, EXCEPTING THE FLESH OF FISH AND OF LOCUSTS.

b.Chullin 103b

IF A PERSON VOWED TO ABSTAIN FROM FLESH. HE MAY PARTAKE OF THE FLESH OF FISH AND OF LOCUSTS.

b.Chullin 104a

MISHNAH. A FOWL MAY BE PLACED UPON THE TABLE TOGETHER WITH CHEESE BUT MAY NOT BE EATEN WITH IT: SO BETH SHAMMAI. BETH HILLEL SAY: IT MAY NEITHER BE PLACED [UPON THE TABLE TOGETHER WITH CHEESE] NOR EATEN WITH IT. R. JOSE SAID: THIS IS AN INSTANCE WHERE BETH SHAMMAI ADOPT THE LENIENT RULING AND BETH HILLEL THE STRICT RULING. OF WHAT TABLE DID THEY SPEAK? OF THE TABLE UPON WHICH ONE EATS; BUT ON THE TABLE WHEREON THE FOOD IS SET OUT ONE MAY WITHOUT ANY HESITATION PLACE THE ONE [FOOD] BESIDE THE OTHER.

b.Chullin 104b

MISHNAH. A PERSON MAY WRAP UP FLESH AND CHEESE IN ONE CLOTH, PROVIDED THEY DO NOT TOUCH ONE ANOTHER. R. SIMEON B. GAMALIEL SAYS: TWO PEOPLE AT AN INN MAY EAT AT THE SAME TABLE, THE ONE FLESH AND THE OTHER CHEESE, WITHOUT HESITATION.

b.Chullin 107b

MISHNAH. IT IS FORBIDDEN TO COOK THE FLESH OF A CLEAN ANIMAL IN THE MILK OF A CLEAN ANIMAL OR TO DERIVE ANY BENEFIT THEREFROM; BUT IT IS PERMITTED TO COOK THE FLESH OF A CLEAN ANIMAL IN THE MILK OF AN UNCLEAR ANIMAL OR THE FLESH OF AN UNCLEAR ANIMAL IN THE MILK OF A CLEAN ANIMAL AND TO DERIVE BENEFIT THEREFROM. R. AKIBA SAYS, WILD ANIMALS AND FOWLS ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THE PROHIBITION OF THE TORAH, FOR IT IS WRITTEN THRICE, THOU SHALT NOT SEETHE A KID IN ITS MOTHER'S MILK, TO EXCLUDE WILD ANIMALS, FOWLS, AND UNCLEAR ANIMALS. R. JOSE THE GALILEAN SAYS, IT IS WRITTEN, YE SHALL NOT EAT OF ANYTHING THAT DIETH OF ITSELF. AND IN THE SAME VERSE IT IS WRITTEN, THOU SHALT NOT SEE THE A KID IN ITS MOTHER'S MILK; THEREFORE WHATSOEVER IS PROHIBITED. UNDER THE LAW OF NEBELAH IT IS FORBIDDEN TO COOK IN MILK. NOW IT MIGHT BE INFERRED THAT A FOWL, SINCE IT IS PROHIBITED UNDER THE LAW OF NEBELAH IS ALSO FORBIDDEN TO BE COOKED IN MILK; THE VERSE THEREFORE SAYS. IN ITS MOTHER'S MILK'; THUS A FOWL IS EXCLUDED SINCE IT HAS NO MOTHER'S MILK.

b.Chullin 113a

Although some might read all of this and immediately discount it because it seems to be based on tradition – we feel that would be very unwise. We should approach these traditions in the

same way that we have been throughout this study – in the manner we feel Messiah treated the traditions of Israel, and the community of faith. For that, we need to know what the Scriptures say.

What Scripture Says

It might be easy for some to read the stringencies of some of these kosher rules, and immediately discount them as “extra-biblical.” And yet, when you read some passages, particularly in the Apostolic Scriptures, that is not so easy a prospect. As well, if you were to ask anyone who keeps a “kosher kitchen” (where the strictness of meat and dairy separation is adhered to), they would not complain of any difficulty *at all*.

On the other hand, there are some within the Messianic movement that chastise others by telling them that there is no such thing as “Leviticus 11 kosher.” They mock Messianics who do not put bacon on their **cheese burger** as ignorant of the Scriptures. They think that living a righteous life **requires** adherence to a given tradition. This is not only arrogant, it is unloving and divisive.

We are trying to determine good from bad tradition. We are not trying to erase tradition from our lives (impossible), neither are we trying to distinguish ourselves as *distinct* from greater Israel – or from the Messianic movement.

So, try to put your biases aside and let’s dig into the Scriptures – for in them, we will discover not only truth, but truth **we can live by**.

Let’s start by reading Leviticus 11 again. Read the whole chapter and list what is permitted and what is forbidden to eat in the table that follows.

Leviticus 11		
Verse	Permitted	Forbidden

Did you notice those last two verses of Leviticus 11?

***This is the law** of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, **to distinguish between the unclean and the clean**, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.*

Leviticus 11:46-47

Is this simply about not eating what is forbidden, or are these instructions about teaching a bigger lesson – about **choosing between** the “Tree of Life” and the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”?

Comment on how hechsher seals either help, or hinder the ability to distinguish between clean and unclean. **How** are we to distinguish?

Read and comment on each of the passages, and how they relate to what God said, and the traditions that came from those literal words.

Exodus 23:19:

Leviticus 7:26

Deuteronomy 12:16:

Deuteronomy 12:21-25

The companion passage to Leviticus 11 is found in Deuteronomy 14. Fill out the table that follows in the same way that you did for Leviticus 11:

Deuteronomy 14:3-21		
Verse	Permitted	Forbidden

Lesson Four: Kosher Certification or Leviticus 11?

Now take all the permitted and forbidden in your tables for Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, and combine them in the table that follows, removing all the repeated ones. Include Deuteronomy 12:16 in your list.

What God Says About Eating Meat	
Permitted	Forbidden

Let's explore the idea of choosing between the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Read Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:1-13. This is an account of an actual occurrence. It is also representative of our problem as human beings: when left to ourselves, ***we choose poorly***. Comment on how this example teaches us the importance of knowing ***God-given*** distinctions.

Hopefully, we have begun to differentiate between tradition and God's explicit instructions regarding food. However, if we think that we can simply rest on that, we have not considered the concepts that are addressed in the Apostolic Scriptures. There may be something to those traditions after all... at least, we need to deal with them correctly.

Paul writes in 1Corinthians chapters 8 and 10 about "meat offered to idols." As we saw in the quotes from the Talmud, this was a big deal in those deals. But what does the Scripture say about meat offered to idols? Was that in the Torah?

What about meat that was slaughtered by the procedures of *shichita* [ritual slaughter] – what did Torah say specifically about that?

Now read and comment on the following passages and how they possibly relate to *shichita*:

1Corinthians 8:

1Corinthians 10:23-32:

As we have seen in other studies, Romans 14 is greatly misunderstood by traditional Christianity. In Romans 14:1, Paul is clearly speaking of issues that are in dispute. Leviticus 11 was not in dispute in the First Century community of believers. However, what was in dispute was traditions. Although the modern kashrut laws did not yet exist, some of them existed in an early form. In Romans 14:14, Paul says, “*nothing unclean of itself...*” – he is not abrogating Leviticus 11. Rather, Paul is speaking of what we have seen as extra-biblical traditions, where meat that otherwise would be clean (and hence, “food”), was considered “unclean” because of additional requirements.

Read and comment on how Romans 14 relates to the issues of kosher in Messianic communities:

Test-A-Tradition Questions

Any “yes” answer should be a red flag.

- Does this tradition, in helping keep one commandment, obscure a more important commandment?
- Does this tradition turn us away from commandments?
- Does this tradition deny Yeshua as Messiah?
- Does this tradition cause division between Jew and Gentile?
- Does this tradition (or rejecting of this tradition) make us *distinct* from greater Israel?

And lastly, if you can answer “no” to all those above,

- Does this tradition unnecessarily burden us (in other words, are there other ways to keep the commandment[s] in question)?

Conclusion

When we read Paul's instructions in 1Corinthians 8 and 10, and in Romans 14, we are impressed that Paul had great concerns for the communities to which he ministered, that they be able to enjoy table fellowship – in addition to maintaining Scriptural purity in regard to God's instructions about food. It really is more than simply a personal or family choice. We do not live in a vacuum. **We must consider each other!**

Prayer Focus

"HaMazon" is the blessing after eating, is a prayer of thanksgiving for food and provision. It is traditionally used to fulfill the command in Deuteronomy 8:10:

When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless HaShem your G-d for the good land which He has given you.

Deuteronomy 8:10

Yes, praying **before** you eat is a **tradition**. Praying **after** you eat is **commanded**.

HaMazon – the First Blessing

We bless You, HaShem our God, King of the whole world, Who feeds the entire world in His goodness - with love, kindness, and mercy. He gives food to all people, because His kindness lasts forever. Because of His great goodness, we have never lacked food; may He never let us lack food. Why do we ask for this? - so that we can praise His Great Name, because He is the merciful God, Who feeds and supports everyone, and does good to everyone, and Who prepares food for all His creatures that He has created.

We bless You, HaShem, Who feeds everyone.

ArtScroll Birchon

Lesson Five: Mezuzah or Sharpie Pen?

Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts [mezuzot, mezuzah (singular)] of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which HaShem swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.

Deuteronomy 11:18-21

Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. And there you shall build an altar to HaShem your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them. You shall build with whole stones the altar of HaShem your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to HaShem your God. You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before HaShem your God. And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this Law.

Deuteronomy 27:4-8

As You Begin

- Walk outside your apartment or house. Look at the main door to your home and consider for a moment how this doorway represents you and your life. What does it say about you, if anything at all?
- Ask HaShem to open your eyes to the doorways of your neighbors. What do those doorways represent?
- Ask HaShem to prepare your heart, to be **a doer**, and not merely **a hearer** of the Word.

Some Questions to Ask

- Is the commandment to “*write them [these words] on the doorposts of your house and on your gates*” a literal commandment?
- If literal, does the commandment tell us *how* to write them?
- Does the commandment place importance on *how* to write them?
- What is a “doorpost”? What is a “gate”?
- If not literal, how could this commandment be obeyed?

Background on Tradition

Observant Jews attach a small box containing a scroll with three Scripture passages on the right doorpost of their home. This is called a “mezuzah, ” which means “doorpost.” Technically, a mezuzah is made up of both the case (or box), and the *klaf* , which is the parchment with the Scripture written on it. If the *klaf* is not intact, or is not written correctly, the mezuzah is not considered “kosher” by Orthodox standards.

Modern critics of Judaism have used mezuzah practices to promote anti-Semitism. They have claimed that the mezuzah is evidence of Talmudic “magic” and superstition. Their claims are bolstered by Kabbalistic practices regarding certain markings and phrases in mezuzot [plural] in the Middle Ages. Investigation into the history of the mezuzah should dispel such concerns.

The practice of placing a scroll of Scripture inside a container and fastening it to the doorposts of a house is ancient. Certainly, in the days when Messiah led His first disciples, the mezuzah was used.

First Century historian, Josephus, writes:

*Let everyone commemorate before God the benefits which he bestowed upon them at their deliverance out of the land of Egypt, and this twice every day, both when the day begins and when the hour of sleep comes on, gratitude being in its own nature a just thing, and serving not only by way of return for past, but also by way of invitation of future favors. **They are also to inscribe the principal blessings they have received from God upon their doors**, and show the same remembrance of them upon their arms; as also they are to bear on their forehead and their arm those wonders which declare the power of God, and his good will towards them, that God’s readiness to bless them may appear everywhere conspicuous about them.*

Antiquities IV, viii 13

When the ancient community of Qumran was excavated after the discovery of what has become known as the “Dead Sea Scrolls” mezuzot were discovered on some of the doorposts.

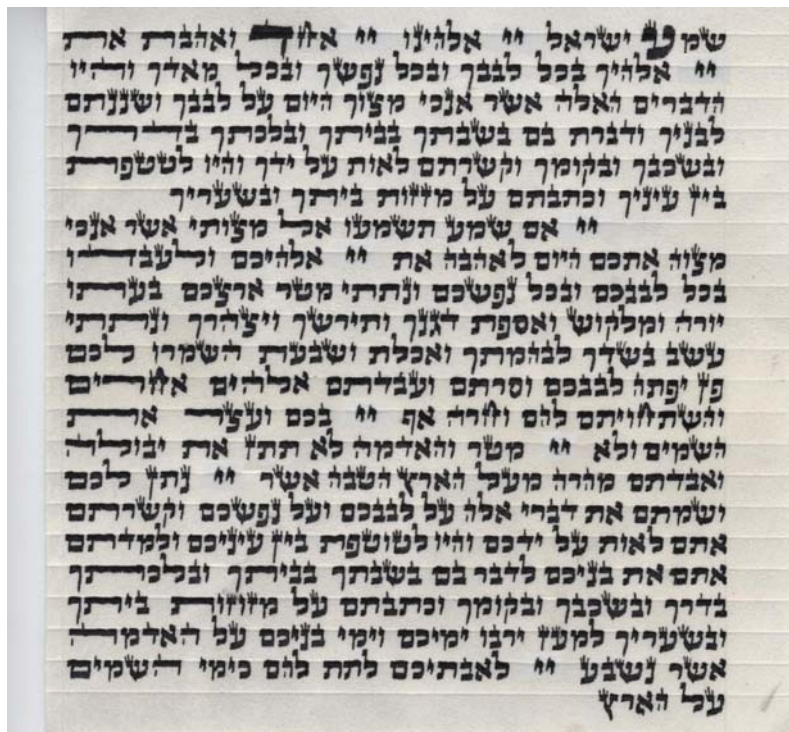
We learn from these [mezuzot] that the same passages required by later rabbinic halakhah were also required here, namely Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and 11:13–21—the first two paragraphs of the Shema. But the Qumran mezuzah texts have some additional material, for example, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–14, Deuteronomy 5:6–18).

Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*

The mezuzah is not a product of the age of the Talmud (circa 500 CE), nor of the Middle Ages. It predates those periods. Although the Scriptural passages may have varied to a minimal degree in ancient times, the modern practice appears to closely resemble the practice in ancient Israel.

Beginning in the Middle Ages, some Jewish communities started writing the nonsensical phrase “*kozu bemuchsaz kozu*” on the back of the parchment. This phrase is not a magic formula, as some have suspected, but simply a cipher shift of the phrase, “*Adonai Eloheinu Adonai.*” Some scholars did oppose this practice for fear that it would be misunderstood as a “magical” phrase, although it can still be found on some parchments today. On the other hand, other practices that appeared to be superstitious have been strongly condemned by Jewish scholars throughout history. It is clear that throughout history, Jewish leaders have sought to dictate the rules of the mezuzah so as to discourage misunderstanding its purpose. To them, it was not a matter of superstition, but rather a matter of obedience.

The rules for a *sofer* scribe to write a mezuzah *klaf* parchment are extremely detailed. It must come from the skin of a kosher animal. It is to be written with a quill from a kosher bird. The black ink must come from vegetable ingredients. The text must be Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Deuteronomy 11:13-21. It must then be written perfectly and in the correct order. An observant *sofer* scribe must carefully write the twenty-two lines shown below¹:



The Talmud and Shulchan Aruch dictate the rules for affixing a mezuzah for the Orthodox. In the Diaspora, a mezuzah must be placed on each door (except closets, bathrooms, etc.) of a

¹ The *klaf* represented does not include the most holy name of HaShem: the *Yod*, the *Hey*, the *Vav*, and the *Hey*.

home within 30 days. In the Land of Israel, this must occur immediately upon moving in. The mezuzah case should be permanently affixed with nails, screws, glue, etc. Where the doorway is wide enough, tilt the case so that the top slants in toward the room. This is a compromise between the opinions of RASHI and his grandson Rabbeinu Tam as to whether a mezuzah should be placed horizontally or vertically.

It is a common practice to “kiss” a mezuzah when passing through a doorway. This is done by touching fingers to the mezuzah case and then kissing those fingers. This practice is illustrated in the Talmud by Onkelos:

When Onkelos the son of Kalonymus became a proselyte, the Emperor sent a contingent of Roman soldiers after him, but he enticed them by citing scriptural verses and they became converted to Judaism. Thereupon, the Emperor sent another Roman cohort after him, bidding them not to say anything to him. As they were about to take him away with them, he said to them: “Let me tell you just an ordinary thing: In a procession the torchlighter carries the light in front of the torchbearer, the torchbearer in front of the leader, the leader in front of the governor, the governor in front of the chief officer; but does the chief officer carry the light in front of the people that follow?” “No!” they replied. Said he: “Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, does carry the light before Israel, for Scripture says. And HaShem went before them... in a pillar of fire to give them light.” Then they, too, became converted.

Again he sent another cohort ordering them not to enter into any conversation whatever with him. So they took hold of him; and as they were walking on he saw the mezuzah which was fixed on the door-frame and he placed his hand on it saying to them: “Now what is this?” and they replied: “You tell us then.” Said he, “According to universal custom, the mortal king dwells within, and his servants keep guard on him without; but in the case of the Holy One, blessed be He, it is His servants who dwell within whilst He keeps guard on them from without; as it is said: HaShem shall guard thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and for evermore.” Then they, too, were converted to Judaism. He sent for him no more.

b.Avodah Zarah 11a

There are numerous passages of the Talmud that detail the rules for a mezuzah, as well as the purpose for a mezuzah. Primarily, it is agreed that the purpose for the mezuzah is that it serves as a sign, both to those inside and outside. It is a sign of ownership and protection. Israel is said to be the unique possession of God, and under His direct care. It reminds those outside that the inhabitants are God’s. It reminds those inside to Whom they owe their allegiance and obedience.

R. Eliezer b. Jacob said, "Whosoever has the tefillin on his head, the tefillin on his arm, the tzitzit on his garment, and the mezuzah on his doorpost, is in absolute security against sinning, for it is written, 'And a threefold cord is not quickly broken;' and it is also written, 'The angel of HaShem encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.'"

b.Menachot 43b

What Scripture Says

Judaism has considered the commandment of the mezuzah to be literal since ancient times. That the commandments listed in the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-31) are meant as a sign or a witness, is evidenced in the Torah scroll² of the first line where the ׀ [ayin] of the word "Shema" and the ך [dalet] of the word "echad" are enlarged as shown here:



Here, the ׀ and the ך spell the word ׀ך which means "witness." Read and comment on the following passages that also use the word ׀ך [witness]:

Genesis 31:43-52:

Joshua 22:25-29:

Psalms 89: 34-37:

Isaiah 43:10:

Jeremiah 42:5:

² The text represented does not include the most holy name of HaShem: the *Yod*, the *Hey*, the *Vav*, and the *Hey*.

In the example of Jacob and Joshua, we see the “pile of rocks” type of witness other places in Scripture. None present so dramatic a scene as the one where the Children of Israel gather on two mountains in the heart of the Land of Israel and declare blessings and curses – blessings for fealty to HaShem, and curses for disobedience. Read and comment on the following passages that detail this account:

Deuteronomy 11:13-32 (note: verses 13-21 are the second paragraph of the Shema, which is written on a *klaf* parchment in a mezuzah):

Deuteronomy 27:1-13:

Joshua 8:30-35:

Now let’s take a closer look at the two places where the actual command to “*write them on your doorposts and on your gates*” are found.

Read the following passages and answer the questions that follow:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Deuteronomy 11:13-21:

What are “these words” (6:6, 11:18)?

Are “these words” of theology, ideas, concepts, or specific imperative words? Is He speaking of His commandments, statutes, judgments etc. (6:1)?

Where specifically were we commanded to write “these words”?

Does He say why we are to write them?

Does He say how we are to write them?

Test-A-Tradition Questions

Any “yes” answer should be a red flag.

- Does this tradition, in helping keep one commandment, obscure a more important commandment?
- Does this tradition turn us away from commandments?
- Does this tradition deny Yeshua as Messiah?
- Does this tradition cause division between Jew and Gentile?
- Does this tradition (or rejecting of this tradition) make us *distinct* from greater Israel?

And lastly, if you can answer “no” to all those above,

- Does this tradition unnecessarily burden us (in other words, are there other ways to keep the commandment[s] in question)?

Conclusion

Throughout history, the dwelling and worship places of Jews have been easily identified. How easy it would have been to “blend in” to the civilizations around them, and yet Jews rarely have. Certainly the small box attached to the doorposts of their homes have made them a target for suspicion, ridicule, theft, and murder. Why do it? Why have a tradition that seems like it can be such a liability? Could it be that this “liability” is a source of tremendous blessing?

In the modern Messianic movement, many who have returned to the roots of Messianic faith have begun to put mezuzot on their doorposts. For the most part, they have followed the traditional practices of attaching mezuzot. By doing this, even Gentile believers are identifying with greater Israel. In so doing, they are taking on an obligation to live righteous lives according to the commandments of God – where the mezuzah acts as a witness to their comings and goings. We feel this is very good, if done for the correct reasons. However, are you willing to take the suffering that such a **witness** may bring? The Talmud has a warning about fair-day friends, who pretend to be attached to Israel, only to cast off that affinity in the Last Days.

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 of 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 God 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...

b. Avodah Zara 3b

May this not be said of any of Messiah’s disciples. May it not be said of us.

Prayer Focus

The blessing for affixing a mezuzah is normally said only for the first one attached in a home.

*Blessed are You, HaShem, our God, King of the Universe,
Who has sanctified us with His commandments,
and has commanded us to affix a mezuzah.*

ArtScroll Complete Siddur, p 227

Lesson Six: To Wrap or Not to Wrap?

“I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know HaShem.”

Hosea 2:19-20

You shall bind them [these words] as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

Deuteronomy 6:8

As You Begin

- Ask God to give you insight as to how intentional ritual can strengthen faith.
- Ask Him to give you insight as to how faith can be weakened by unintentional ritual.
- If you are married, examine your wedding ring and ponder what it means, and why you wear it.

Some Questions to Ask

- Is the commandment to “*bind them* [these words]” literal, figurative, or both?
- If literal, which hand, and how should these words be bound?
- If literal, is this an article of clothing to be worn all day, or is it something else?
- What are the “frontlets” mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:8?
- What purpose would this commandment serve if it is to be taken literally?
- When Yeshua criticized some for making their “*phylacteries broad*” in Matthew 23:5, was He condemning the tradition of tefillin (what are called “phylacteries” in the English translation of the Apostolic Scriptures)?

Background on Tradition

For millennia, observant Jewish men have tied a small leather box on one of their arms, and another on their foreheads during morning prayers. These boxes, and the leather straps used to hold them in place, are called “tefillin” [תפילין]. The plural word is likely Aramaic in origin, and relates to the Hebrew word, [prayer]. Inside both of the leather boxes are four Scripture passages written on pieces of parchment.

Almost anyone who has studied the Apostolic Scriptures knows what “phylacteries” are, at least in a general sense. The Greek word used in the Apostolic Scriptures is “φυλακτήριον” [phylakterion], which comes from a word that means “guard,” or “protect.” Although the etymology of the Greek word does not have any negative meaning, it eventually came to mean “amulet,” or magic charm. For that reason, the tradition of tefillin has no real correlation to

phylacteries. The Greek “*phulakterion*” is not found in the Septuagint [the ancient Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures].

Evidence in the Apostolic Scriptures points to early adherence to the tradition of tefillin. First Century historian Josephus wrote:

Let everyone commemorate before God the benefits which he bestowed upon them at their deliverance out of the land of Egypt, and this twice every day, both when the day begins and when the hour of sleep comes on, gratitude being in its own nature a just thing, and serving not only by way of return for past, but also by way of invitation of future favors. They are also to inscribe the principal blessings they have received from God upon their doors, and show the same remembrance of them upon their arms; as also they are to bear on their forehead and their arm those wonders which declare the power of God, and his good will towards them, that God’s readiness to bless them may appear everywhere conspicuous about them.

Antiquities IV, viii 13

Josephus was a Pharisee. The Apostolic Scriptures clearly speak of Pharisees wearing tefillin. However, in the pseudepigraphical *Letter of Aristeas*, the practice is also described as more widespread than simply among Pharisees.

Moreover, upon our garments he has given us a symbol of remembrance, and in like manner he has ordered us to put the divine oracles upon our gates and doors as a remembrance of God. And upon our hands, too, he expressly orders the symbol to be fastened, clearly showing that we ought to perform every act in righteousness, remembering (our own creation), and above all the fear of God.

Letter of Aristeas, R.H. Charles translation, section 159-160

The *Letter to Aristeas* is a Second Century BCE Hellenistic work that was written to promote the superiority of the Septuagint, so the unknown author most certainly did not come from the Pharisaic sect. The Dead Sea community at Qumran were not Pharisees either, and they wore tefillin prior to the First Century. Even though the practice does not appear to have been universal in the First Century, history shows that the literal interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:8 was a well-accepted view among various sects of Judaism for at least several hundred years prior to the writing of the Apostolic Scriptures. While Karaite Jews do not recognize the literal interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:8, their claim that the practice of wearing tefillin is an invention of later Rabbis unfounded.

Since ancient times, the tradition of tefillin has been related to the deliverance from Egypt. The four passages that are found in the leather boxes are:

- Exodus 13:1-10
- Exodus 13:11-16

- Deuteronomy 6:4-9
- Deuteronomy 11:13-21

The two passages from Exodus reveal the correlation to the freedom from Egyptian bondage.

It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that HaShem's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand HaShem has brought you out of Egypt... It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand HaShem brought us out of Egypt.

Exodus 13:9, 16

Traditionally, men wear tefillin each morning for Shacharit [morning prayers] on weekdays. They are not worn on Shabbat or major festival days. The Talmud exempts women from the tradition of tefillin.

WOMEN, SLAVES AND MINORS ARE EXEMPT FROM RECITING THE SHEMA AND PUTTING ON TEFILLIN, BUT ARE SUBJECT TO THE OBLIGATIONS OF TEFILLAH [prayer], MEZUZA, AND GRACE AFTER MEALS.

b.Berachot 17b

The tefillin *shel yad* [arm tefillin] is wrapped on the weak arm (left arm for right-handed, and right arm for left-handed), although it is understood that the box on the *shel yad* is “near the heart.” The tefillin *shel rosh* [head tefillin] is placed at hairline above the forehead, where it is “near the soul.” This understanding comes from Deuteronomy 6:18 which says,

Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

Deuteronomy 6:18

There are three special knots in the leather straps that are placed in strategic places while putting on tefillin.

A knot in the shape of a י [yod] is placed on the bicep. A knot in the shape of a ד [dalet] is placed at the nape of the neck. The way the arm strap is tied around the hand forms a knot in the shape of a ש [shin]. These knots are meant to spell HaShem's Name שדי [Shaddai]

There are numerous varying traditions on making and “laying” [putting on] tefillin. However all of the varying traditions include some of these common elements:

- Seven wraps around the lower arm
- Wraps around the longest finger
- Quotes from Hosea 2:19-20 while wrapping the strap around the fingers

The marriage symbolism is easily seen in tefillin. This is an intentional act that is designed to remind the worshiper that God has betrothed Himself to Israel. As the bride walks seven times around the bridegroom in the traditional Jewish wedding, so too the arm strap is wrapped seven times around the lower arm. As the wedding ring is put on during the wedding, so too the strap is wrapped around the longest finger, while reciting:

I will betroth you to Me forever. I will betroth you to Me with righteousness, justice, kindness and mercy. I will betroth you to me with faithfulness; and you shall know HaShem.

Hosea 2:19-20

What Scripture Says

Read and comment the following passages, which are found in the parchments in the tefillin boxes. Clearly, these passages contain commandments – but are they literal? Make special note of any purpose clauses found in the commandments regarding what is bound on the hand, and between the eyes.

- Exodus 13:1-10:
- Exodus 13:11-16:
- Deuteronomy 6:4-9:
- Deuteronomy 11:13-21:

In the two passages from Exodus, there are parallel clauses in verses 9 and 16. Here they are with the words and purposes clauses placed in parallel.

Exodus 13:9: *It shall be as a **sign to you on your hand** and as a **memorial between your eyes**, that HaShem's Law may be in your mouth; for with a **strong hand HaShem has brought you out of Egypt**.*

Exodus 13:16: *It shall be as **a sign on your hand** and as **frontlets between your eyes**, for by **strength of hand HaShem brought us out of Egypt**.*

The word “frontlets” is the word טוֹטַפֹּת [totafot], which comes from a root which means to bind, or make immovable.

Comment on the following correlations:

Sign on your hand (both verse 9 and 16):

“Frontlets” compared to “memorial” “between your eyes”:

Now let’s look at the two passages from Deuteronomy. Here they are color-coded again for the parallels:

Deuteronomy 6:5-6, 8: You shall love HaShem your God with **all your heart, with all your soul,** and with **all your strength**. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart... You shall **bind them as a sign on your hand**, and they shall be as **frontlets between your eyes**.

Deuteronomy 11:18-21: Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine **in your heart and in your soul**, and **bind them as a sign on your hand**, and they shall be as **frontlets between your eyes**. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which HaShem swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.

Notice that two Exodus passages “it shall be a sign on your hand” are now represented as “bind them as a sign on your hand” in both Deuteronomy passages. All four passages relate what is on the hand as a “sign” – which in all four verses is the word אוֹת [ot = sign, mark, proof]. The word for “bind” comes from the word קָשַׁר [kashar = bind together, confine]. Three of the four passages use “frontlets” [totafot] as what is “between the eyes” – and the fourth uses the word “memorial” or זִכְרוֹן [zikron = memorial, to make a remembrance]. From this we may conclude that “frontlets” [totafot] and “memorial” [zikron] are somehow related. Our problem comes in the fact that totafot is only used in these three places in Scripture. In western thinking, a “memorial” has no practical meaning. It has presence, but is not active. On the other hand, a “sign” is active. It directs action, such as a road sign, etc. This is not the case in Hebrew. In Hebrew, both memorials and signs are active. That does not necessarily make these into literal commands however. We must dig deeper.

Deuteronomy 6:6 and 11:18 use “heart and soul” imagery. Let’s look at the idea of “in your heart” and “in your soul.”

Lesson Six: To Wrap or Not to Wrap?

Deuteronomy 11:18 says: *Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your **heart** [lev] and in your **soul** [nefesh], and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.*

Read the following passages that use the words “lev” or “nefesh” and comment how they relate to placing “*these words of mine in your heart and in your soul*”:

Deuteronomy 4:9-10:

Deuteronomy 8:2:

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (this is quoted in Romans 10:8):

Psalms 73:26:

Genesis 32:30 (life = *nefesh*, soul):

Leviticus 7:21 (person = *nefesh*, soul):

Leviticus 17:14 (life = *nefesh*, soul):

Deuteronomy 30:6:

Can you see from these passages, that the “heart” and the “soul” are not passive, nor merely spiritual in nature?

The only passage in which Scripture clearly speaks of the tradition of tefillin is found in the Apostolic Scriptures. Read Matthew 23:1-5 and then answer the questions that follow.

Matthew 23:1-5

Why did “the scribes and Pharisees” make their phylacteries broad?

What did they “bind” on others?

Do you think there is a comparison or a contrast being given to the “binding” of tefillin, and the binding of burdens on others?

What specific commandments did Yeshua give to His disciples in this passage?

Test-A-Tradition Questions

Any “yes” answer should be a red flag.

- Does this tradition, in helping keep one commandment, obscure a more important commandment?
- Does this tradition turn us away from commandments?
- Does this tradition deny Yeshua as Messiah?
- Does this tradition cause division between Jew and Gentile?
- Does this tradition (or rejecting of this tradition) make us *distinct* from greater Israel?

And lastly, if you can answer “no” to all those above,

- Does this tradition unnecessarily burden us (in other words, are there other ways to keep the commandment[s] in question)?

Conclusion

It may be easy for some to discount the tradition of tefillin. It is foreign to their cultural experiences and they assume that some in the First Century kept the tradition for show. However, we must ask ourselves if it is always inappropriate to participate in something that can be misused – no matter how beneficial. Surely, many give charity for show. Many meet in churches and synagogues for show. Many delight in the attention given when called to lead in prayer, or public Scripture reading. Are *those* activities also to be avoided?

On the other hand, we have already seen that without ritual, and without tradition, new traditions fill the void. Some have a tradition of *not* wearing tefillin for precisely the same reason those Yeshua criticized made theirs “broad.” This could be true of some in the Karaite movement, which *prides* itself in being tradition-free when in fact they have simply replaced some man-made traditions with their own man-made traditions.

Prayer Focus

The blessings when wrapping tefillin before prayer:

Shel Yad [arm tefillin]

Blessed are You, HaShem, our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to put on tefillin.

Shel Rosh [head tefillin]

Blessed are You, HaShem, our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments regarding the commandment of tefillin.

Blessed be His glorious Kingdom for all eternity.

[While wrapping around the ring finger]

I will betroth you to Me forever, and I will betroth you to Me with righteousness, justice, kindness, and mercy. I will betroth you to Me with fidelity, and you shall know HaShem.

ArtScroll Complete Siddur, p 7-8

Lesson Seven: Knots, Tucked, or the Colors of the Rainbow?

Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels [tzitziyot] on the corners [kanafi] of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread [p'tiyel t'chelet] in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel [tzitzit], that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of HaShem and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. I am HaShem your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am HaShem your God.

Numbers 15:38-41

You shall make tassels on the four corners [arba kanafot] of the clothing with which you cover yourself.

Deuteronomy 22:12

Thus says HaShem of hosts: "In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve [kanaf] of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

Zechariah 8:23

But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders [kraspedon = kanaf] of their garments.

Matthew 23:5

As You Begin

- In this lesson, we will be examining the biblical command of attaching *tzitziyot* [fringes, tassels] to our clothing – and the traditions that have developed in order to keep that commandment.
- Ask God to give you insight not only into the traditions, but into the commandment itself, so that you can determine the correct response to His command.
- Try and set aside all preconceived ideas about *tzitzit*. We want to compare the traditions to what Scripture actually says. Remember, we all have traditions – even if the tradition is to not have a tradition...

Some Questions to Ask

- What are *tzitziyot*, *kanaf*, *p'niyel t'chelet*? Do these obscure Hebrew words give insight into the commandment of *tzitzit*?
- Is *tzitzit* knotted strings? Is *t'chelet* blue?
- Where is the *kanaf* of a garment?

- Are *tzitzit* my personal “signature” – a way to show my individuality?
- Should I wear *tzitzit* all the time, or only for prayer?

Background on Tradition

Tzitzyot are one of the most recognizable things on observant Jewish men. When worn along with a *kippa* (*yarmulke*, skull cap), they represent the “uniform” that identifies a man as one who keeps the commandments of HaShem. *Tzitzyot* is the plural, but normally they are simply referred to in the singular: “*tzitzit*.” *Tzitzit* are strings that are tied in specific ways. They are normally tied with white strings, and occasionally they have a blue [understood as “*t’chelet*”] thread also. The traditional way of fulfilling the commandment dates to the earliest days of Israel. Prior to the commandment of *tzitzit*, the practice of attaching knotted strings to clothing as “personal signatures” dates back to the times of the Patriarchs. The account of Judah and Tamar mentions this practice:

*When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, because she had covered her face. Then he turned to her by the way, and said, “Please let me come in to you”; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. So she said, “What will you give me, that you may come in to me?” And he said, “I will send a young goat from the flock.” So she said, “Will you give me a pledge till you send it?” Then he said, “What pledge shall I give you?” So she said, “Your signet and **cord** [p’tiylecha], and your staff that is in your hand.” Then he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him... And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, “Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she is with child by harlotry.” So Judah said, “Bring her out and let her be burned!” When she was brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, “By the man to whom these belong, I am with child.” And she said, “Please determine whose these are—the signet and **cord** [p’tiyilim], and staff.” So Judah acknowledged them and said, “She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son.” And he never knew her again.*

Genesis 38:15-18, 24-26

The illicit union between Judah and Tamar resulted in the birth of the twins Peretz and Zerah. Messiah Yeshua is a descendant of Peretz.

In the time of the First Century, the tradition of *tzitzit* was well-established. They were attached to the four corners of the outermost garment worn by men. There were knots and the thread of *t’chelet* – although it appears that there were some variants in the way that they were tied. By the time of the Talmud the rules for tying *tzitzit* were more uniform. The earliest extra-biblical writings place high value on the commandment of *tzitzit*.

“That ye may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord”: this precept is equal to all the precepts together. And another [Baraita] taught: “That ye may look upon it and remember . . . and do them”: looking [upon it] leads to remembering [the commandments], and remembering leads to doing them. R. Simeon b. Yohai says, “Whosoever is scrupulous in the observance of this precept is worthy to receive the Divine presence, for it is written here, ‘That ye may look upon it’, and there it is written, ‘Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and Him shalt thou serve.’”

b.Menachot 43b

The means of making the dye of *t’chelet* was lost in the Diaspora after 135 CE. However, the Talmud defines *t’chelet* as a type of “blue.”

It was taught: R. Meir used to say, “Why is blue specified from all the other colours [for this precept]? Because blue resembles the colour of the sea, and the sea resembles the colour of the sky, and the sky resembles the colour of [a sapphire, and a sapphire resembles the colour of] the Throne of Glory, as it is said, ‘And there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone,’ and it is also written, ‘The likeness of a throne as the appearance of a sapphire stone.’”

b.Menachot 43b

Our Rabbis taught: The hillazon resembles the sea in its colour, and in shape it resembles a fish; it appears once in seventy years, and with its blood one dyes the blue thread; and therefore it is so expensive.

b.Menachot 44a

The material of the strings was usually plant-based (cotton, flax) for the white threads and wool for the thread of *t’chelet*. This was first a matter of practicality, because dyes known in the ancient world did not bind well with plant-based materials – whereas they bound well with materials made from wool. Here the *t’chelet* is equated with purple:

As to the Tanna of the School of R. Ishmael, is the reason [why “mingled stuff” is permitted in zizith] because the All Merciful has written “wool and linen,” but if He had not done so, would it have been assumed that the All Merciful had forbidden two kinds of stuff in the zizith? But, surely, it is written, “And they shall make them fringes in the corners of their garments” and a Tanna of the School of R. Ishmael [taught]: Wherever “garment” [is written] such as is made of wool or flax [is meant], and yet the All Merciful said that in them “purple” shall be inserted, and purple, surely, is wool. And whence is it deduced that purple is wool? Since linen is flax, purple must be wool.

b.Yevamot 4b

Women Wearing *Tzitzit*

The Talmud exempts women from “time-based” commandments. Because Numbers 15:39 says that the purpose for the *tzitzit* is to “look at them” and thereby remember all the commandments, *tzitzit* are considered a “time-based” commandment. However, this discussion in the Talmud offers inconclusive opinions regarding women wearing *tzitzit*.

Rab Judah attached fringes to the aprons of [the women of] his household; moreover, he used to say every morning the blessing [“. . . and hast commanded us] to enwrap ourselves with the fringes.” But since he attached [the fringes to the womens’ garments], obviously he is of the opinion that it is a precept not dependent on a fixed time; why then did he say the blessing every morning? — He follows Rabbi’s view; for it was taught: “Whenever a man puts on the tefillin he should make a blessing over them,” says Rabbi. But if so, at any time [of the day whenever he puts on the garment he should say the blessing]? — Rab Judah was a most decorous person and would not take off his cloak the whole day long. Then why [did he say the blessing] in the morning? — That was when he changed from night clothes into day clothes.

*Our Rabbis taught: All must observe the law of *tzitzit*, priests, Levites, and Israelites, proselytes, women and slaves. R. Simeon declares women exempt, since it is a positive precept dependent on a fixed time, and women are exempt from all positive precepts that are dependent on a fixed time.*

... R. Simeon declares women exempt. What is R. Simeon’s reason? — It was taught: “That ye may look upon it”: this excludes a night garment. You say it excludes a night garment, but perhaps it is not so, but it excludes rather a blind man’s garment? The verse, when it says, “Wherewith thou coverest thyself,” clearly includes a blind man’s garment; how then must I explain the verse, That ye may look upon it? As excluding a night garment. And why do you choose to include a blind man’s garment and to exclude a night garment? Include a blind man’s garment since it is looked upon by others, whilst I exclude a night garment since it cannot be looked upon by others.

b.Menachot 43a

Knots and Windings

While the Talmud makes extensive reference to *tzitzit*, it does not indicate the precise method for tying the knots for *tzitzit* – only the number threads and of windings. The Talmud does hint at a form of gematria for *tzitzit* in *Shavuot* 29a. Regardless, the method for tying the knots was well-established by the time of RASHI. It is RASHI that first gives us the gematria of the word *tzitzit* and the knots and strands as equaling 613 to coincide with the traditional enumeration of the commandments of the Torah. Although RASHI’s method to account for the knots is not

universally accepted, various accountings do render significance to the number of knots and strands.

Our Rabbis taught: How many threads must one insert? Beth Shammai say, "Four;" but Beth Hillel say, "Three." And how far must they hang down? Beth Shammai say, "Four" [fingerbreadths]; but Beth Hillel say, "Three." And as for the three [fingerbreadths] stated by Beth Hillel each must measure one fourth part of the handbreadth of an ordinary person. R. Papa said, "The handbreadth of the Torah is equal to four times the width of the thumb, or six times the width of the little finger, or five times the width of the middle finger."

b.Menachot 41b

In the Ashkenazi tradition, two sets of strands are knotted together twice, and then a longer strand is wound around the other seven strands a set number of times. The two sets are then knotted again twice. This is repeated three times (as the Talmud dictates), until there are five knots. Between the knots, the windings number 7-8-11-13 for a total of thirty-nine. Thirty-nine is the gematria for the phrase from Deuteronomy 6:4: *HaShem Echad* [HaShem is One].

The Sefardi tradition uses windings of 10-5-6-5 which totals twenty-six, or the gematria for HaShem's most holy Name, the *Yod*, the *Hey*, the *Vav*, and the *Hey*.

Talit and Talit-Katan

After the Diaspora, clothing styles changed for Jews as they adapted the clothing of the countries in which they lived. The four-cornered outer garment was no longer worn. By the time of the Middle Ages, *tzitzit* were no longer worn all during the day, but only when attached to a special prayer garment called a *talit*. The *talit*, with its four-corners, closely resembles the large outer garment of ancient Israel. It serves one primary purpose: to affix *tzitzit*.

The *talit-katan* [small *talit*] later became a method for wearing *tzitzit* all day because it is designed with four corners. Unlike the original outer garment, the *talit-katan* is worn underneath an outer layer of clothing. The only purpose for wearing a *talit-katan* is in order to affix *tzitzit*. With a *talit-katan*, the *tzitzit* can be seen extending below an outer garment, or can be tucked inside an outer garment so as not to be seen.

To Remember the Commandments

Since ancient times, the purpose for the commandment of *tzitzit* has dictated the associated traditions. The primary purpose of "see and remember" is expressed in various accounts in the Talmud. The following account relates the "see and remember" aspect to guard against immorality.

It was taught: R. Nathan said, There is not a single precept in the Torah, even the lightest, whose reward is not enjoyed in this world; and as to its reward in the future world I know not how great it is. Go and learn this from the precept of zizith. Once a man, who was very scrupulous about the precept of zizith, heard of a certain harlot in one of the towns by the sea who accepted four hundred gold [denars] for her hire. He sent her four hundred gold [denars] and appointed a day with her.

When the day arrived he came and waited at her door, and her maid came and told her, "That man who sent you four hundred gold [denars] is here and waiting at the door;" to which she replied "Let him come in." When he came in she prepared for him seven beds, six of silver and one of gold; and between one bed and the other there were steps of silver, but the last were of gold. She then went up to the top bed and lay down upon it naked. He too went up after her in his desire to sit naked with her, when all of a sudden the four fringes [of his garment] struck him across the face; whereupon he slipped off and sat upon the ground. She also slipped off and sat upon the ground and said, "By the Roman Capitol, I will not leave you alone until you tell me what blemish you saw in me." "By the Temple," he replied, "never have I seen a woman as beautiful as you are; but there is one precept which the Lord our God has commanded us, it is called zizith, and with regard to it the expression 'I am the Lord your God' is twice written, signifying, I am He who will exact punishment in the future, and I am He who will give reward in the future. Now [the zizith] appeared to me as four witnesses [testifying against me]." She said, "I will not leave you until you tell me your name, the name of your town, the name of your teacher, the name of your school in which you study the Torah." He wrote all this down and handed it to her. Thereupon she arose and divided her estate into three parts; one third for the government, one third to be distributed among the poor, and one third she took with her in her hand; the bed clothes, however, she retained. She then came to the Beth Hamidrash of R. Hiyya, and said to him, "Master, give instructions about me that they make me a proselyte." "My daughter," he replied; "perhaps you have set your eyes on one of the disciples?" She thereupon took out the script and handed it to him. "Go," said he 'and enjoy your acquisition.'" Those very bed-clothes which she had spread for him for an illicit purpose she now spread out for him lawfully. This is the reward [of the precept] in this world; and as for its reward in the future world I know not how great it is.

b.Menachot 44a

What Scripture Says

Because the commandments regarding *tzitzit* are quite clearly literal, it might be tempting just to adopt the traditions of *tzitzit* without further investigation. That approach might rob us of a better understanding not only of the purpose for the commandment, but how it can be an effective act of worship.

In the chart that follows, read each instance where the commandment of *tzitzit* is found. Then detail what the particulars of the commandment are. Be sure to make “action words” your focus.

Scripture	Details of the Commandment
Numbers 15:38-39	
Deuteronomy 22:12	

Based upon the details of the Commandment, what is the primary purpose for the commandment of *tzitzit*?

In Deuteronomy 22:12, the word for “tassels/fringes” is the word **גְּדִלִים** [*gadil*], which is a word that comes from the root verb, “to grow, to magnify.” It carries the concept of adorning, or winding (twisting). The word for is “corners” **כַּנָּפוֹת** [*kanafot*, pl. for *kanaf*]. “*Kanaf*” is usually translated as “wing.” By looking at the word *kanaf*, maybe we can discover some more instances of the application of the commandment of *tzitzit*. Read the following passages and comment on the use of *kanaf* and how it might relate to the commandment of *tzitzit*.

Numbers 15:38 (borders = *kanaf*):

Deuteronomy 22:30 ([his father's] bed, skirt = *kanaf*):

Ruth 3:9 (skirt, cloak = *kanaf* - compare to Ruth 2:12:

1Samuel 15:25-28:

1Samuel 24:4-11:

Psalms 91:3-5:

Ezekiel 16:8:

Zechariah 8:23:

Malachi 4:2:

The Greek word used for *kanaf* in the Numbers 15:38-39, Deuteronomy 22:12, and Zechariah 8:23 in the Septuagint is the word **κρασπέδου** [*kraspedon* = border]. Read the following passages that use the word *kraspedon* and comment how they might relate to the commandment of *tzitzit*.

Matthew 9:20-22 (hem, border):

Matthew 14:35-36 (hem, border):

Mark 6:56:

Luke 8:43-48:

Lastly, possibly the best known reference to the *tzitzit*, is from the negative account that we looked at in the previous lesson. Read and comment on Matthew 23:5:

Test-A-Tradition Questions

Any “yes” answer should be a red flag.

- Does this tradition, in helping keep one commandment, obscure a more important commandment?
- Does this tradition turn us away from commandments?
- Does this tradition deny Yeshua as Messiah?
- Does this tradition cause division between Jew and Gentile?
- Does this tradition (or rejecting of this tradition) make us *distinct* from greater Israel?

And lastly, if you can answer “no” to all those above,

- Does this tradition unnecessarily burden us (in other words, are there other ways to keep the commandment[s] in question)?

Conclusion

We have not have been able to see in Scripture every aspect of the traditions related to the commandment of *tzitzit*. That is because like many of the commandments, there is very little “how to” given in the commandment. Does that mean we are free to make it up as we go? As we have seen in the “Test-A-Tradition” questions, things are simply not that easy. The commandments were meant to be lived out in a *community* of believers. Especially the commandment of *tzitzit*. In Numbers 15:38-39, the “you” that is commanded is plural. Likewise

the “you” in “*that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments*” is not singular, it is plural. That means that the *tzitzit* are primarily *not for the wearer*, but others who will see them. Are *tzitzit* our personal statement to the world – our signature? Should we attach them to belt loops instead of attaching them to “corners”? Should we make them the colors of the rainbow, or knotting them in our own unique way? The plural “you” seems to indicate that this is a corporate commandment.

In the space below, write your conclusions about the commandment of *tzitzit*, and how the traditions affect your application of the commandment in your life:

Prayer Focus

In the Daily Prayers from the Siddur, the prayers use the imagery of HaShem Himself donning *talit* with *tzitzit*. Those prayers bless Him, as we imitate...

Donning the *Tzitzit* [Talit Katan]

Blessed are You, HaShem, our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us regarding the commandment of tzitzit.

ArtScroll Complete Siddur, p.3

Donning the *Talit*

Bless HaShem, O my soul; HaShem my God, You are very great; You have donned majesty and splendor, cloaked in light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a curtain.

Blessed are You, HaShem, our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to wrap ourselves in tzitzit.

How precious is Your kindness, O God! The sons of man take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. May they be sated from the abundance of Your house; and may You give them to drink from the stream of Your delights. For with You is the source of life – by Your light we shall see light. Extend Your kindness to those who know You, and Your charity to the upright of heart.

ArtScroll Complete Siddur, p.3, 4

Lesson Eight: On What Date Does Passover Begin?

Now HaShem spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, “This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man’s need you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight...

So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to HaShem throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.

Exodus 12:1-6; 14-18

In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

Esther 3:7

And David said to Jonathan, “Indeed tomorrow is the New Moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go, that I may hide in the field until the third day at evening.”

1Samuel 20:5

Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.

Psalms 81:3-4 (KJV)

As You Begin

- Ask God to help you to put aside all preconceived ideas about dates and calendars. Commit to live by only *His* appointment book.
- Read the “Hebrew Calendar” article located in the Appendix

Some Questions to Ask

- Is there something “magical” about memorializing any given feast day – or is it that HaShem wants simple obedience in keeping His instructions?
- Do we celebrate a “Messianic” Passover on the evening before the first day of Unleavened Bread (the evening of Nisan 14), or should it be the evening before (Nisan 13) like John 13:1 and John 19:14 seem to indicate?
- What about Resurrection Day? Shouldn’t we always celebrate it on a Sunday?
- Shouldn’t we be doing “observations” for each new moon, looking for a crescent – instead of simply looking at a calendar?

Background on Tradition

At first glance, any calendar controversies seem trivial. It seems quite straight forward: if we are going to celebrate Passover, shouldn’t we just look at a calendar to see what day to celebrate it? Even Microsoft Outlook can tell you when to celebrate Passover. However, it isn’t that easy. While the commandment about when and how to celebrate Passover seems quite clear, there is a problem: We are not told how to determine which day is the first day of the first month.

It seems that the first month was changed in Exodus 12. The entire dating system appears to have been altered to align with the exodus from Egypt. The rules for this “new” dating scheme are extremely rudimentary. If this affected only the date for celebrating Passover that would be difficult enough, but because of Exodus 12, all subsequent biblical months and days are dependent upon establishing the singular date simply identified as “...*the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight...*” (Lev 23:5). What is the “*fourteenth day*” – counting from where? What is the “*first month*” – how is it determined? What is “*twilight*”? The answer to each of these questions invites a tradition. Even the rejection of any given tradition is a tradition itself. Can we really determine what the Scriptures say without the bias of any given tradition? It may be more difficult that you imagine.

The history of the Hebrew calendar can be divided into three distinct periods: Before the Second Temple, During the Second Temple, and Post-Talmudic.

Prior to the Second Temple period

There is no mention of an intercalary month in the Bible, nor is there any mention of a method for intercalation. We only know that intercalation of some sort is required to align the lunar

cycle with the agricultural seasons. It is not known whether intercalation in the pre-Babylonian exile era was accomplished by the addition of one month every three years or by adding ten or eleven days at the end of each year.

Ancient sources are silent on the issue, however we do have a few clues from history and from the Scriptures. The lunisolar calendar was calculated long before the Babylonian exile. 1Samuel indicates that some computational method was in use as early as 1000 BCE.

And David said to Jonathan, "Indeed tomorrow is the New Moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go, that I may hide in the field until the third day at evening."

1Samuel 20:5

During the Second Temple Period

Because Deuteronomy 16:1 literally says, "*Keep the renewed moon of the aviv and make the Pesach of HaShem...*" a need for astronomy was necessary according to the Pharisees and their descendants. The science of the astronomy of the calendar was considered a secret science, and although much is written about the necessary observations, we are not given all of the details regarding how they used astronomy. We simply know that some of the Sages were well-schooled astronomers.

During the Second Temple period until about the Fourth Century CE the majority of Judaism adhered to a observational calendar, which required a number of observations. To determine the date of Passover, the Sages of the Second Temple period would:

- Observe the new moon that identified the first month (*Aviv, Nisan*)
- Observe if the barley crop was ripe
- Observe if fruit trees were ripe
- Observe if the vernal equinox had occurred

Based on these observations, judges would decide if an intercalation was needed in order to keep Passover aligned with the Spring harvests as Scripture requires. The *bet din*, or Sanhedrin, would take into account many other practical considerations that might affect pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for Passover. If the Sanhedrin determined that an intercalation was required, they would delay Passover by thirty days, by adding a leap month to the year. During the Second Temple period, the leap month was named "Adar II." Once a intercalation was decided, the entire year's festival dates were fixed. Additional observations of the moon were used to confirm minor dates, but most importantly to confirm the dates of the Fall festivals, specifically *Yom T'ruah (Rosh Hashanah)*. This observation was solely to confirm the day of the New Moon of the seventh month.

Because the Temple system did not support different sects' traditions for determining dates, some minor sects did not participate in the Temple service in the Second Temple period.

Alternate traditional calendars are known to have existed for the Samaritans, Essenes, Boethusians, and the Qumran communities.

The Mishnah contains detailed information on the methods for observations during the Second Temple period. These details were passed on to the generations that followed the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. From there, the debates continued in the Gemara, which in turn gives us a rich background on the traditions of the Second Temple period.

If the court and all the Israelites saw the new moon, the witnesses having been examined, but they had no chance to say, "It is sanctified," before it actually got dark, lo, this month coming to an end is an intercalated month. If the court alone saw it, let two of them get up and give testimony before the rest of them, and then they should say, "It is sanctified, it is sanctified." If three of them saw it, and they already are a court, let two of them arise, and let them seat some of their colleagues with the remaining judge, and give testimony before them, so they may say, "It is sanctified, it is sanctified." For an individual is not regarded trustworthy by himself to pronounce the sanctification of the month.

m.Rosh Hashanah 3:1 – Jacob Neusner Translation

As the Mishnah records, the Pharisees of the Second Temple period had an elaborate method of observation for determining intercalation (thereby delaying Passover 30 days) and for observing the conjunction of the moon itself. The Mishnah devotes considerable time to the subject. However, the methods are not without debate. The Mishnah leaves much unresolved as does the *Gemara* of the Talmud. One thing the Mishnah makes clear: although individuals sighted the conjunction of the moon (or rather, the crescent before or after), individuals could not determine either the beginning of a month, or the need for intercalation. We know that the observational method resulted in an average 19-year cycle.

Our Rabbis taught: A year may be intercalated on three grounds: on account of the premature state of the corn-crops; or that of the fruit-trees; or on account of the lateness of the Tekufah [spring equinox] Any two of these reasons can justify intercalation, but not one alone. All, however, are glad when the state of the spring-crop is one of them. Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel says: On account of [the lateness of] the Tekufah. The Schoolmen inquired: Did he mean to say that "on account of the [lateness of the] Tekufah" [being one of the two reasons], they rejoiced, or that the lateness of the Tekufah alone was adequate reason for intercalating the year? — The question remains undecided.

Our Rabbis taught: [The grain and fruit of the following] three regions [are taken as the standard] for deciding upon the declaration of a leap-year: Judea, Trans-Jordania, and Galilee. The requirements of two of these regions might determine the intercalation, but not those of a single one. All, however, were glad when one of the two was Judea, because the barley for the Omer was obtained [by preference] in Judea.

Our Rabbis taught: The intercalation of a year can be effected [by the Beth din] only in Judea; but if for some reason [it had been decided upon by the Beth din] in Galilee, the decision holds good. Hanania of Oni, however, testified: "If the intercalation was decided upon in Galilee, it is not valid." R. Judah the son of R. Simeon b. Pazi asked: What is the reason for the view of Hanania of Oni? — Scripture states, Unto His habitation shall ye seek and thither thou shalt come: whatever search you have to make shall be only in the habitation of the Lord.

Our Rabbis taught: A leap-year is to be declared only by day, and if it has been declared by night, the declaration is invalid. The sanctification of a month is to be performed by day, and if it has been performed by night it is not valid. R. Abba says: What passage [proves this]? — Blow the horn at the new moon, at the covering of the moon our feast-day. Now on which feast is the moon covered? — We must say on the New Year. And it is thereupon written, For this is a statute for Israel, a judgment of the God of Jacob: Just as judgment is executed by day, so also must the sanctification of the month take place by day.

b.Sanhedrin 11b

The discussion of the Sages in this section of the Talmud shows that there was not universal acceptance of the observational method during the Second Temple period. Rabban Simeon ben Gamliel (First Century Sage) considered the lateness of the vernal equinox as sufficient to intercalate and delay Passover. It also reveals how they read Scripture on the subject. The Sages read Psalms 81 as referring to the New Moon of *Yom T'ruah*, as opposed to a "full moon" as some modern translations read. The actual day of *Yom T'ruah* is not defined by the Sages as a crescent moon, but a "covered moon." They read the word כֶּסֶה [keseh] as "covered" – from the root verb *kasah*, or "covered." They read Psalms 81:3 as the mechanical translation below.

תִּקְעוּ בַחֲדָשׁ שׁוֹפָר בַּכֶּסֶה לְיוֹם חַגֵּנוּ

tiku va-chodesh shofar ba-kese l'yom chagenu

Blow at moon shofar at covering for day our feast

This is further illustrated in the following account from the Talmud (remember, that the observation of the new moon was only valid if done by day, and only by whole days):

R. Hiyya once saw the old moon in the heavens on the morning of the twenty-ninth day. He took a clod of earth and threw it at it, saying, "Tonight we want to sanctify you, and are you still here! Go and hide yourself."

b.Rosh Hashanah 25a

It is clear that the Sages of the Second Temple period and after considered the delimiters of a month to be from one conjunction of the moon to the next. The conjunction was called הוֹלֵד

Post-Talmud

With the exception of some minor sects, Judaism has adhered to a computed lunisolar calendar for determining the festival dates since at least the Fourth Century CE. Often called the “Hillel II Calendar” it is based on ancient lunisolar tables, and at least one computational calendar used in exile communities in the early Second Century CE.

What Scripture Says

Every so often, I am asked how I can remind people of an upcoming New Moon in Bereans Online *eNews*, since that particular New Moon has “*not yet been observed.*” When I ask what the Scriptures say, I usually get a variety of responses – but none include Scripture. So I am curious, are the Scriptures silent on the issue, or are we simply not digging deep enough?

As we have noted, Deuteronomy 16:1 provides a basis for the position that we must “observe” the New Moon. In the space below, write out Deuteronomy 16:1:

Here it in Hebrew, with a mechanical translation:

שָׁמֹר אֶת־חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב וְעָשִׂיתָ פֶּסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בַחֹדֶשׁ
הָאָבִיב הוֹצִיאָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

*Shamor et-chodesh ha-aviv v'asita pesach la-HaShem Eloheicha ki b'chodesh ha-aviv hotsiacha
HaShem Eloheicha mi-Mitzrayim laila.*

Keep renewed the aviv and make Pesach to HaShem your God, for in renewed the aviv took you
HaShem from Egypt night.

What do the words “*aviv*” and “*chodesh*” mean? Most translations translate “*aviv*” as the month called “Aviv.” The word אָבִיב [*aviv*] comes from a root that means “tender.” It refers to the tender young ears of grain such as barley. Although it appears to be used in a general sense, the definite article “*ha*” (eg. “the *aviv*”) indicates that it is not just a general period of Springtime. This is confirmed by the second usage where “the *aviv*” is used to the particular night that the Children of Israel were rescued out of Egypt.

Lesson Eight: On What Date Does Passover Begin?

Most translations translate “*chodesh*” as “month.” The word חֹדֶשׁ [*chodesh*] comes from the root חָדַשׁ [*chadash*] which means to “make new” or “renew.” It is distinct from the Hebrew word יָרַח [*yareach* = moon].

The first usage for “*chodesh*” is found in Genesis 7:11. Read the following passages that contain the word “*chodesh*” and answer the questions that follow.

Genesis 7:11; Genesis 8: 4

Moses is writing this account of the flood. When did the flood begin, and when did the Ark rest on the mountains of Ararat?

How do you think “day” “month” and “year” were defined?

What method do you think was used to determine the “month” [*chodesh*]?

1Samuel 20:5

How did David know that the **next** day would be the “new moon” [*chodesh*]?

1Samuel 20:24

What did King Saul do on the “new moon” [*chodesh*]?

How do you think they knew it was the “new moon”?

To better understand the *chodesh* let’s look at how it is used in Scripture. In the chart that follows, read each usage of *chodesh*, and note the specific commandment associated with it.

Passages with <i>Chodesh</i> [Month, New Moon] That Contain Commands	
Passage	Specific Commands
Exodus 12:3	
Exodus 13:5	
Numbers 28:11-14	
Deuteronomy 16:1	
Psalms 81:3	

As you can see, the direct commandments associated with the actual “New Moon” [*chodesh*] are few. We have seen the importance of establishing the “New Moon” of Aviv/Nisan because it establishes the dates of all the feasts and fasts for the rest of the year. So, although the actual day of the “New Moon” seems somewhat minor, it has supreme importance for all the remaining days.

Let’s look at something else in Scripture. As we have learned, there were several calendars in use during the First Century. However, the Temple system seemed to follow only one of those calendars. History shows that the calendar in use was the Pharisee observational calendar.

Read the following passages and comment on what Yeshua and His first disciples did regarding the feast days.

Lesson Eight: On What Date Does Passover Begin?

Matthew 26:17-19:

Luke 2:41-42 (note: “custom” is the word “*ethos*”):

John 5:1 (note: this refers to Passover or Sukkot):

John 7:10 (note: this refers to Sukkot):

John 10:22-23 (note: the feast of Chanukah is not commanded in Scripture):

Acts 18:18-21:

Do you think that Yeshua and His disciples kept a different calendar system than the Pharisees? If so, give the Scriptural reasons why you believe this to be the case.

Considering that there were other calendars in use in the First Century; if you answered “no” to the previous question, why do you think that Yeshua and His disciples kept the Pharisee’s calendar? Do you think it had to do with the Temple? If so, why would that make a difference? Explain.

Test-A-Tradition Questions

Any “yes” answer should be a red flag.

- Does this tradition, in helping keep one commandment, obscure a more important commandment?
- Does this tradition turn us away from commandments?
- Does this tradition deny Yeshua as Messiah?
- Does this tradition cause division between Jew and Gentile?
- Does this tradition (or rejecting of this tradition) make us *distinct* from greater Israel?

And lastly, if you can answer “no” to all those above,

- Does this tradition unnecessarily burden us (in other words, are there other ways to keep the commandment[s] in question)?

Conclusion

Because the very nature of community is directly connected with the feast days, you can see how vital a common calendar is. Sadly, in many Messianic communities, we see fragmentation, with individuals each determining for themselves what dates to celebrate the biblical feasts. There must be a better way. I believe that there is. Unity with Israel.

Prayer Focus

The holiness of the New Moon is evident in that it sets the pattern for all the feasts. Although “Sanctifying the New Moon” is a phrase not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, we recognize the need to sanctify the New Moon.

Kiddush Lavanah

Blessed are You, HaShem, our God, King of the universe, Who with His utterance created the heavens, and with the breath of His mouth all their legion. A decree and a schedule did He give them that they not alter their assigned task. They are joyous and glad to perform the will of their Owner – the Worker of truth Whose work is truth. To the moon He said that it should renew itself as a crown of splendor for those born by Him from the womb, those who are destined to renew themselves like it, and to glorify their Molder for the name of His glorious Kingdom. Blessed are You, HaShem, Who renews the months.

ArtScroll Complete Siddur, p.613

Other Questions

We have not studied all traditions exhaustively. We have only scratched the surface. Our purpose was not to ultimately decide the authority of various traditions, but rather to learn how we can systematically approach any tradition – especially in a community context. Remember, the Torah lifestyle was meant to be lived in a community.

Here are some other questions that you may want to explore. Always keep in mind, the “Test-A-Tradition” Questions.

- How should we appoint/elect community leaders?
- How should a *bet din* [leadership council] be formed?
- How should we use the most Holy Name of HaShem? Should we use circumlocutions?
- Should our community build a *mikveh*? If so, how should it be used?
- Should we use a Siddur for prayer and services – and if so, which one?
- Should we have formal membership like a church or synagogue?
- Should men wear a head covering at all times, during prayer, or not at all?
- Should women cover their hair all the time, during prayer, or not at all?
- Should young children be present in all services?
- Should young men and women prepare for a traditional *bar/bat mitzvah*?
- Should women wear a *talit* during prayer? What about *tzitzit*?
- Should our services include contemporary music and other elements, or should it be centered around the traditional Torah service?
- Should we read the Torah portion in Hebrew or in English each Shabbat?

Some questions may seem trivial, while others may seem too invasive. As Romans 14 teaches, we are to consider what other community members consider important in our deliberations. It is always about love. It is always about unity...

It is always about our unity with Israel.

Appendix: What are “Binding” and “Loosing”?

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 16:18-19

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the assembly. But if he refuses even to hear the assembly, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

Matthew 18:15-20

Roman Catholic dogma treats Matthew 16:19 as carte blanche authority for Peter and the Apostles (and their successors) to issue Divine decree. And yet Moses, the archetypal prophet, did not have this authority. We read in Numbers 12:6-9 that he spoke with the Almighty “face to face.” The words he wrote down are authoritative, but the inherent authority comes not from some mantle of Divine wisdom – but rather from the often repeated phrase, “And HaShem spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the Children of Israel, saying...’” Yeshua, the anointed One patterned after Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22-16) likewise does not merely employ Divine authority, but derives His authority from the words already recorded in Scripture rather than from His own words.

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.”

John 14:10

What then does Yeshua mean when He speaks of “binding” and “loosing”? The verbs are “*deo*” and “*luo*” respectively. These correspond to the Hebrew words אָסַר [*asar* = bind] and נָתַר [*natar* = loose]. These words are technical words in Mishnaic Hebrew, used to describe a particular role of leadership. They are used extensively throughout the Mishnah and the Talmud (in the Gemara they are in Aramaic) and are often rendered into English as “forbidding” and “permitting.”

IF ONE SELLS A FIELD THE VENDOR IS PERMITTED [*mutar*, from the root *natir*] TO GATHER THE DUES OF THE POOR. BUT NOT [*asur*, from the root *asar*] THE PURCHASER.

m. *Peah* 5:6

IF A SE'AH OF UNCLEAN TERUMAH FELL INTO ONE HUNDRED SE'AHS OF CLEAN TERUMAH, BETH SHAMMAI PROHIBIT [*asur*, from the root *asar*] THE WHOLE, BUT BETH HILLEL PERMIT [*natir*] IT.

m. *Terumot* 5:4

Throughout the Mishnah and the Talmud, the words “loose” and “bind” are used not to establish new commandments, but as a means to articulate a difference in opinion between Judaism’s main groups in the First Century. In other words, “binding” and “loosing” is for the purpose of deciding disputes of how to *apply* any given commandment. It is very important to note that extant Jewish texts do not use these words to reference Divine authority to establish *new* commandments or *negate* ones given in the Torah. On the other hand, traditional Christianity has a long history of using these words for just those purposes – purposes which are outside of the historical usage.

Just as common (or more so) in the modern church (and increasingly in the Messianic movement) is the interpretation that He was referring to spiritual warfare and binding of demons and loosing of those bound, although this interpretation is clearly not implied in the context at all. Frequently, this is an expansion of the “divine authority” idea referenced here. This removes the issue from simply a biblical interpretation view and instead creates the potential for cult-like control of leaders over community members. Taken together, these two ideas give excessive authority to certain supposedly “spiritually gifted” leaders (ie. “prophets” or “apostles”), leading to abuse of authority and a lack of leadership accountability. Instead of biblical judges (as in a properly appointed *bet din*), leaders essentially become the figurehead for God for the community, having not only authority in the interpretation of Biblical law, but spiritual authority to bless, curse and control.

In the Matthew 16 and 18 passages Yeshua simply gave His disciples authority to establish a *bet din* [house of judgment], for the express purpose of deciding disputes within their communities. A *bet din* decides matters of legal dispute for the benefit of the local community. It does so within the constraints of Scripture, not in the absence of Scripture.

Appendix: The Hebrew Calendar

“This [Aviv, Nisan] month [חֹדֶשׁ = ha-chodesh] shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.”

Exodus 12:10

On this day you are going out, in the month Abib.

Exodus 13:4

On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is HaShem’s Passover.

Leviticus 23:5

The measurement of days in Scripture is from sunset to sunrise. We are taught this in the creation account where “evening and morning” are defined as the delimiters of a day. The measurement of weeks is from Sabbath to Sabbath. We are taught this in various places; but the term “*sh’vah shavuah*,” in Deuteronomy 16:9 points back to Leviticus 23:15 and the counting of the Omer. This shows us that “Sabbaths” and “weeks” are directly related.

But how are we to measure months?

The biblical calendar is not solar like the Gregorian or the earlier Julian calendar. It is a lunar calendar. Unlike the Islamic calendar, the biblical calendar is adjusted to the agricultural seasons in the northern hemisphere. The Hebrew calendar is based upon the biblical calendar, which itself is only defined by a few rudimentary rules: namely, it is lunar, and it follows the agricultural seasons. The biblical calendar is “lunisolar.”

The biblical year is measured by the movement of the sun. A biblical month is measured by the conjunction of the moon (i.e. the crescent or the dark moon). The problem of aligning the biblical feast days as outlined in Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16 is quickly seen when you consider that the average solar year is 365.242 days long – and the average length of time between one conjunction of the moon to the next is approximately 29.53 days. If there are to be 12 lunar conjunctions in a solar year, there is an shortfall of almost 11 days every solar year. Because the biblical festivals are to be tied to the seasons, marked by the “first” month of Aviv [Nisan], and measured by the conjunctions of the first and subsequent moons, it is imperative that there be some method for intercalating (adjusting) between lunar and solar calendars. The method used in the Second Temple period ancient times consisted of adding a “leap month” if needed. The determination of whether a “leap month” was needed was done by observation.

During the Second Temple period, observation was made once a year in advance of the first month (Aviv, or Nisan) to determine if intercalation was needed. Observation of the moon was done again in advance of the seventh month (Tishrei), in order to mark the new year for first fruits as required by the Torah, and several other times to determine minor dates. *Yom T’ruah*

(*Rosh HaShanah*) is the only festival that occurs on the first day of a biblical month – thus the conjunction of the moon must be anticipated for the seventh month.

The observations for intercalation required by the Sages of the Second Temple period were:

- The barley grain was not ripe
- The fruit from trees was not ripe
- The vernal equinox had not yet occurred³

Any two⁴ of these three observations would require that the Sanhedrin intercalate and add a month to the calendar, thus delaying the date of all the festivals for the year by at least 29 days. Additional considerations were made for the condition of roads, ovens, pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem, famine, and *Sh'mittah* year. This method was used in some form up until the disbanding of the Sanhedrin in the Fourth Century CE. The last decision of the Sanhedrin was to adopt the current computed Hebrew calendar, also known by some as the “Hillel II Calendar.” The observational calendar of the Second Temple period resulted in roughly a nineteen-year cycle. The rabbinical astronomical observations for intercalating were the vernal equinox of the sun and the visible crescent of the moon.

The Essene and the Qumran sects of Judaism in the Second Temple period used solar calendars. A solar calendar is also present in the books of 1 Enoch and Jubilees. These minor sects were able to keep a different calendar because they did not participate in the Jerusalem Temple service and its requisite festivals. Even with a 364-day solar calendar, intercalating was still needed. As well, their solar calendars were aligned so that *Yom T'ruah* always occurred on a Wednesday. These calendars died with the sects that used them. Because they were essentially unworkable they would have likely ceased anyway in the same way as the miscalculated Julian calendar.

The current Hebrew calendar is computational. It achieves the equivalent to the astronomical observations required – while ignoring the agricultural requirements by the Sanhedrin in the Second Temple period. The effect is the same, albeit more precise: a nineteen-year cycle. The nineteen-year lunar/solar cycle was well-known in the ancient world. This cycle is called the “Metonic Cycle” and is named for the Greek astronomer Meton of Athens (circa 432 BCE). Calendars based upon the Metonic Cycle are extremely accurate in predicting the astronomical new moon.

The shift between the observational and computational Hebrew calendar occurred gradually between 70 CE and 358 CE. Tradition holds that Hillel II approved the current computational calendar and the Sanhedrin enacted it in 358 CE. This tradition is first mentioned by Chai Gaon (939-1038 CE). Chai Gaon said that that Rabbi Hillel ben Yehuda (aka Hillel II) was responsible

³ b. *Sanhedrin* 11b

⁴ Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel only required the lateness of the vernal equinox – and thus the matter was not completely resolved

for the computed calendar that used a fixed intercalation cycle in 358 CE. In the Twelfth Century CE, Maimonides said that the observational calendar was used until the days of Abaye and Rava (320–350 CE) and ceased when the Land of Israel was destroyed and the Sanhedrin no longer assembled. The calculated Hebrew Calendar is challenged today most notably by Karaite Jews.

The Karaite sect began with Anan ben David (715-795 CE). The exiled Jewish community in Babylon had a titular head called an “Exilarch.” The Exilarch was selected from the direct descendants of King David. In 760 CE, upon the death of the Exilarch, Josiah ben David was selected as Exilarch. His brother, Anan ben David then declared himself Exilarch. The ruling Muslim authorities considered this a usurpation and jailed Anan, and sentenced him to death. Some accounts relate that while in prison, Anan received advice on how he could be freed. Anan was told that he should declare his religion was different from that of his brother Josiah. Thus Anan defined his sect of Judaism as antithetical to Rabbinic Judaism.

Anan ben David and his followers defined their brand of Judaism as “pure” and not subject to the “Oral Torah.” They adopted many of the positions of other anti-rabbinic forms of Judaism that had existed before. In Anan ben David’s *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* (“Book of the Commandants”) he adopted many of the positions of the old Sadducees and Essenes. He prohibited the burning of any lights and leaving of one’s dwelling on the Sabbath. He rejected the calculated Hebrew calendar and required actual observation of the crescent moon for determining festivals. He aligned his method for counting the Omer to that of the Boethusians, who specified that Shavuot always fell on a Sunday.

A basic tenet of Karaite Judaism is that the “Oral Torah” has no authority, and yet ironically, the Karaite calendar is defended by means of “Oral Torah.” The only record for lunar observation as done by the Karaite sect is from the Mishnah, a document that Karaite Judaism rejects for any other purpose.

Other than the small sects such as the Karaites, Judaism has universally used the computational Hebrew calendar since at least the Fourth Century CE.

Our *Mo’adim* Hebrew calendar software knows Julian, Gregorian, and Hebrew dates and does computations that can identify the conjunction of the moon. *Mo’adim* displays Shabbat times and festival days as well as the weekly parasha. *Mo’adim* is available for free at www.bereansonline.org/calendar.

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