

Traditions vs Commandments

Traditions and Commandments

Mark 7

**Some of the disciples ate
their bread defiled**

Matthew 15

**Disciples did not wash
their hands before
eating bread**

Luke 11

**Yeshua, when invited to
eat with a particular
group of Pharisees, were
astonished to see he did
not wash his hands
before eating**



“Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed.

Mark 7:1-2



(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash with a fist, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)

Mark 7:3
(often omitted)



And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”

And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ““These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” You leave the commandment of G_D and hold to the tradition of men.”

Mark 7:4-7



And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of G_D in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’

Mark 7:8-10



**But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother,
“Whatever you would have gained from me is Korban”’
(that is, given to G_D) — then you no longer permit him to
do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the
word of G_D by your tradition that you have handed down.
And many such things you do.’”**

Mark 7:11-13



And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable.

Mark 7:14-17



And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

Mark 7:18-19



And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, from the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Mark 7:20-23



**What are some traditional
conclusions drawn from
these passages?**

Traditional interpretations

- **Traditions of men, especially Jewish, are generally negative**
- **Yeshua canceled the laws of Kashrut, making 'all foods clean'**
- **We only need to worry about ritual purity**
- **Yeshua abandoned even simple traditions, ie: washing hands**

In summary:

Yeshua departed from Judaism, which is a man-made religion

Problems with the Traditional Interpretation

1. One major logical flaw

- Yeshua himself said not a single law would be abrogated**
- He just lectured the Pharisees on this (v7:7)**
- Are we to believe he just nullified dietary commandments?**

2. Kashrut appears to be maintained throughout the New Testament, also extended, to some degree, to the gentiles in Acts 15

3. The traditional interpretation lacks the nuance of Rabbinic debates

4. Further, this argument is not really about food

Spiritual Purity & Holiness



Ritual Purity

- 1. Purity is described at a high-level in the Torah, but worked out practically in the oral tradition**
- 2. Much of Jewish life & society revolved around people understanding the laws of purity**
- 3. Some types of impurity/Tumah were unavoidable (death, bodily fluids, etc.)**
- 4. Some types of impurity/Tumah were avoidable (Aveirot, Idolatry)**
- 5. Tumah was transmissible**



Traditions of Men

Traditions of Men

- 1. “Disagreements for the sake of Heaven”?**
- 2. The nature of Halachic disputes**
- 3. Building fences around the Torah**
- 4. When fences go too far**



**Every dispute (Makhloket) that is
for the sake of Heaven, will in the
end endure...**

Pirke Avot 5:17



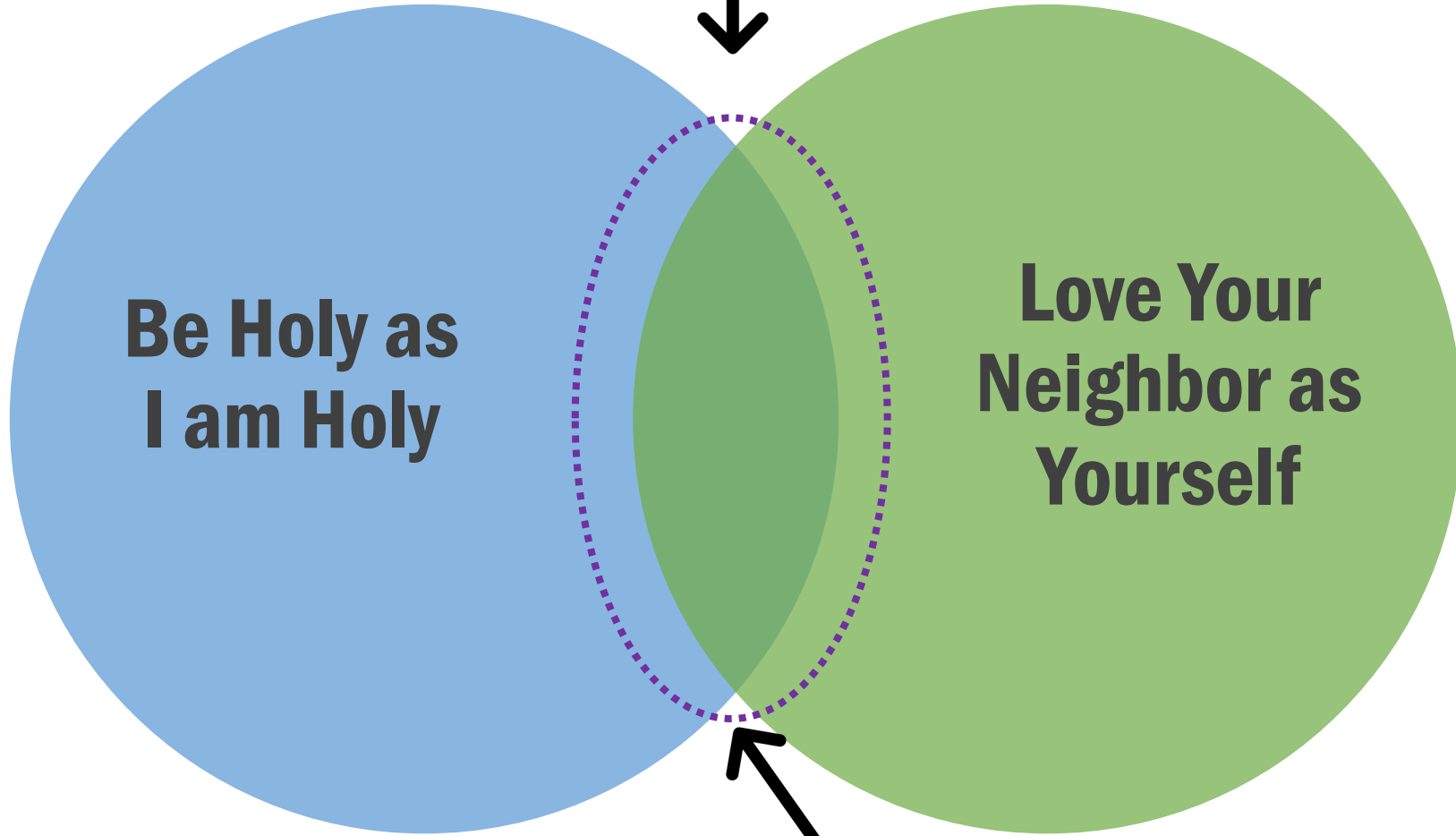
"Do not divide yourself" "Do not make yourself into groups and groups", Abaye says "Do not divide yourself, such as two courts in one city, one that teaches according to Beit Hillel and another that teaches according to Beit Shammai But two courts in two cities, there is no issue."

Yevamot 14a

The Crux of the Issue

- 1. Beit Hillel held a more inclusive view, seeking to make peace with Rome, mainly to prevent death and all-out war**
- 2. Beit Shammai sought to cut ties and separate**
- 3. Both were passionate and saw this as fundamental to serving Hashem**
- 4. Who is right?**

Balancing Conflict



**Be Holy as
I am Holy**

**Love Your
Neighbor as
Yourself**

Fences

“

**Rabbi Chiya
said “Let not
the hedge
become more
important than
the vineyard.”**

Genesis Rabbah 19:4

“

**“Do not construct
a hedge too tall
lest it collapse
and tear up the
garden.”**

Avot d'Rebbe Natan 1:1

“

**“Better a hedge a
mere 10 cubits tall
than a hedge 100
cubits high that
will fall.”**

Avot d'Rebbe Natan 1:1



“...AND RAISE MANY DISCIPLES.

Beit Shammai says: One ought to teach only him who is talented and meek and of distinguished ancestry...

Beit Hillel says: One ought to teach every man, for there were many sinners in Israel who were drawn to the study of Torah, and from them descended righteous, pious, and worthy folk.”

Avot D'Rebbe Natan 3:1

“

Hillel says, "Be of the disciples of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving the creation and bringing them closer to Torah."

Pirke Avot 1:12

Story – Talmud Shabbat 127

- **A homeowner hired a worker but was unable to pay him**
- **The worker asked for other means of payment (fruit, vegetables, land, animals, goods)**
- **The homeowner had nothing as he dedicated his property and produce to the Temple**
- **The worker went home with nothing for his labor**

“

The wages of a worker shall not remain with you until morning.

Leviticus 19:13

“

On the same day you will pay him his wage, before the sun sets, for he relies on his earnings for his livelihood; lest he complain to the Eternal against you, and you be guilty.

Deuteronomy 24:15



The homeowner said to him:... I had no money available at the time because I vowed and consecrated all my property on account of Hyrcanus, my son, who did not engage in Torah study.

The homeowner sought to avoid leaving an inheritance for his son. And when I came to my colleagues in the South, the Sages of that generation, they dissolved all my vows. At that point, the homeowner had immediately gone to pay his worker.

Shabbat 127b

“

**But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother,
“Whatever you would have gained from me is Korban”’
(that is, given to G_D)— then you no longer permit him to
do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the
word of G_D by your tradition that you have handed down.
And many such things you do.’”**

Mark 7:11-13



Bet Shammai say, “We wash hands [before the meal] first, and [only] after that we pour the cup [of wine for Kiddush, because] may be the liquid outside of the cup will become Tameh (ritually impure), because of the [Tameh] hands, and in turn it will make the cup Tameh.”

Bet Hillel say, “The outside of the cup is always Tameh, [so therefore it does not matter if the liquid on the outside of the cup will make it Tameh.] [Besides this there is] another explanation. Hands should be washed as close to the meal as possible.”

Tosefta Berakhot 5:26

The background of the image is a dark, atmospheric scene of a volcanic eruption. A massive plume of white and grey smoke or ash billows upwards from a dark, jagged mountain peak. To the left of the mountain, a bright sunburst or starburst effect emanates from behind the text, casting rays of light across the scene. The overall color palette is dominated by deep blues, blacks, and greys, with the white of the smoke and the bright light of the sunburst providing high contrast.

Ritual Purity & Holiness

Ritual Purity & Holiness

1. **Physical and Spiritual Impurity were key factors at this time**
2. **Impurity seems to be something similar to a kind of radioactive air pollution, Invisible, and contagious**
3. **The Sages teach many methods for avoidance and remediation of impurity**
4. **18 Decrees: the nations, and their produce, were subject to this Tumah**
5. **Impurity causes separation from Hashem**

11 Types of Impurity – Numbers Rabbah 7:5

- **Blaspheming**
- **Immorality**
- **Bloodshed**
- **Bearing false witness**
- **Haughtiness**
- **Entering a stranger's house**
- **Lashon Hara**
- **Lying**
- **Taking a false Oath**
- **Chillul Hashem**
- **Idolatry**

Ruach Ra - Evil Spirits

Ibur - Ruach HaKodesh

Impurity

Purity - Holiness



No man commits any transgression unless
a spirit of folly has entered into him
- Sotah 3a



And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Ephesians 2:1-3



Defiled Hands & Ritual Handwashing

Defiled Hands & Handwashing

- 1. Halachic reasons for Hand-washing**
- 2. Avoidance & Remediation of Tumah (impurity)**
- 3. From a practice of Cleanliness to one of Holiness**



The rabbis required us to wash netilat yadayim for two reasons.

- 1. To be in a good habit for terumah.** When the laws of ritual purity were relevant, kohanim had to wash their hands before they ate terumah, since we're not always aware what our hands touched, and maybe they touched something impure, and then they'll make the terumah impure...
- 2. For cleanliness and holiness.** The rabbis found a hint to this in the verse "make yourselves holy and be holy."

Mishnah Berurah 158



(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash with a fist, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)

Mark 7:3

Halachic Reasons for Handwashing

Cleanliness



Holiness

- Mostly for Priests & Levites
- Keeping Terumah pure for offerings
- After using the bathroom
- Before eating food, ie: bread
- When handling blood, cutting nails, washing feet, etc

- Avoidance/Removal of Tumah
 - After sleeping
 - Leaving a cemetery
 - Leaving the marketplace
 - To avoid the punishing Angels
 - Warding off a Ruach Ra (Evil spirit)
- Holiness
 - Cleanliness of the Soul
 - Preparation for Ruach HaKodesh



From here Rabbi Pinchas ben Ya'ir would say: Torah study leads to care in the performance of mitzvot. Care in the performance of mitzvot leads to diligence in their observance. Diligence leads to cleanliness of the soul. Cleanliness of the soul leads to abstention from all evil. Abstention from evil leads to purity and the elimination of all base desires. Purity leads to piety. Piety leads to humility. Humility leads to fear of sin. Fear of sin leads to holiness. Holiness leads to the Divine Spirit. The Divine Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead. And piety is greater than all of them, as it is stated: “Then You did speak in a vision to Your pious ones” (Psalms 89:20)

Avodah Zara 20b



With regard to the Israelites, where does Scripture command washing the hands? In the verse, "Sanctify yourselves and be holy." (Leviticus 11:44). On the basis of this verse, Rabban Gamliel [the elder] observed Levitical precautions of self-purification when he ate everyday food.

Eliyahu Rabbah 15:1



He would say obedience to the precept of hand-washing for the sake of holiness was required not only for priests, but of priests, Levites, and Israelites - required of every one of them, as Scripture tells us, "the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak unto the congregation of the children of Israel and say unto them: You shall be holy." (Leviticus 19:1-2)

Eliyahu Rabbah 15:1

“

**Women should wash
their hands before
giving bread to a child
to be careful not to
spread Shivta.
(an evil spirit)**

Yoma 77b

“

**Foods and drinks can
have an evil spirit rest
on them overnight if
left unattended**

Pesachim 112a



If one has an evil spirit on their hands they should not touch their eyes or nose.

Shabbat 108b



Are All Foods Clean?

“

And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

Mark 7:18-19

What are some of the traditional interpretations for this passage?

“

“By saying this, he showed that every kind of food is acceptable”

Mark 7:19 NLT

“

“In saying this, Jesus declared all foods ‘clean’”

Mark 7:19 NIV



“Thus He was making and declaring all foods [ceremonially] clean [that is, abolishing the ceremonial distinctions of the Levitical Law]”

Mark 7:19 AMP



This radical repurposing of the dietary laws took a long time for people to accept because they were so used to avoiding anything “unclean.” Peter himself really wrestled with this, so much so that God gave him a vision of a bed sheet coming down from heaven filled with animals who were “unclean” in it. Peter was hungry and so God told him to “kill and eat” in Acts 10:13. Peter pushes back by saying he has never eaten anything unclean. A voice from heaven then says, “What God has made clean, do not call common.”

Brian Bill

Moody Bible - Pastor, Bible Commentator



The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air.

Acts 10:9-12

“

And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” And the voice came to him again a second time, “What G_D has made clean, do not call common.” This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Acts 10:13-16

“

And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”

Acts 10:19-20

“

And he [Peter] said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but G_D has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

Acts 10:28



And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days G_D made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And G_D, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:7-9



And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, from the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Mark 7:20-23

Mark 7:19 (Thus he declared all foods clean)

- 1. The parentheses are a late edition (4-5th century)**
- 2. Most readers are simply not learned in the laws of kashrut, purity, and technical halachic frameworks**
- 3. Ironically, this makes the above addition a 'tradition of men'**

Conclusion

- 1. This story is not about dietary laws**
- 2. It assumes we understand the basics of purity laws**
- 3. Yeshua builds upon major impurities of heart**
- 4. Yeshua doesn't argue about handwashing, or traditions in general, only when they go too far and miss the point**
- 5. This frames a new perspective**