



Parashat Kedoshim

What the Blind Man Saw

ספר ויקרא
לא-תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן
מכשל וְיִרְאַתָּה מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ אָנֹכִי ”

“You shall not curse a deaf man, and you shall not place a stumbling block before the blind; and you shall fear your God—I am Hashem.”
Leviticus 19:14

Sometimes the Torah speaks to us on different levels at the same time. This week's verse is an example of this phenomenon.

The *p'shat* of the above verse (the simple translation) appears to be prohibiting the literal act of setting a stumbling block in front of a blind person. In my congregation, one of our members is blind. It is a responsibility on our entire community to assist her in any way but to be especially sure that we don't block the paths with clutter when she is moving about and to give her priority of movement wherever she would like to go.

However, many Torah sages, including *Rashi* and *Rambam* explain that our verse is also referring to a person who is blind in a non-literal sense. In other words, this is a person without knowledge and is coming to you to seek advice.

In this case, the Torah forbids us to offer advice that would in some way serve our own interests rather than counsel what is best for the person seeking advice. For example, it is forbidden to counsel a person to sell his property if you have an ulterior motive to buy it for yourself. To go further, *Rambam* adds another dimension; here the Torah forbids a person from causing someone to sin by assisting him in obtaining what he needs in order to transgress, or by telling him that a forbidden behavior is actually permitted.

Without realizing it, sadly this is exactly what many Christians are accusing the Jerusalem

Council of doing in Acts 15:19-21, where the elders, through the Holy Spirit ruled that newly-saved Gentiles who are turning to God abstain from: “things contaminated by idols and fornication and from what is strangled and from blood” (v. 20). It is here at this crucial place in the verse that many Christian teachers make a grave mistake. They claim that these are the *only* commandments expected from the Gentiles, ever. That the rest of the Torah does not apply to them, only to Jewish people. Therefore, as their interpretation goes, they are casting James, the brother of Yeshua, Peter, and the other leaders of the Jerusalem Messianic community as violating the Torah commandment to “not place a stumbling block before the blind.”

How so? If this interpretation was correct (and it is not), James and the others would be permitting the Gentiles to engage in behaviors that are actually forbidden—like eating pork or doing work on the Sabbath—thereby placing a stumbling block before the blind.

How can we say the Gentiles are like the blind in our verse from Leviticus? Paul describes them in Ephesians 2:12, “...remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” Due to this separation, the Gentiles had no access to God or His ways. And now, through the blood of Messiah Yeshua, they have been brought near to God (Eph. 2:13); are united with the Jewish people (v. 14-16); share one Spirit (v. 18); and are fellow citizens (v. 19).

Now one could argue that while Jews and Gentiles are one body and share one Spirit, they have separate rules. God has given the Jews one set of rules to live by and the Gentiles get a very different set. The Jews get to keep the Biblical holidays, eat what God declares is food, and dress according to God's commandments;

The Messianic Vort

A 5 Minute Message on the Parashah

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but the Gentiles can eat what God calls “abominations,” observe pagan holidays like Christmas and Easter, and dress according to the norms of the secular culture (this means at best, dressing without any religious identification). Even a child can tell this is erroneous. When this teaching was presented to a 15 year old on a popular Messianic Forum, he replied with the following word-picture: “It’s like one group is playing baseball, and one group is playing soccer, and both groups are trying to share the same field. It won’t work!”

Thankfully, the Bible testifies that there are not two sets of rules for God’s family. In Numbers 15:16 the Torah says, “There is to be one Torah and one ordinance for you and for the righteous-Gentile¹ who sojourns with you.” The Christian teaching of “two laws” actually works to rebuild the dividing wall that Messiah tore down in His flesh!

The truth is, the yoke that the Jerusalem Council placed on the Gentiles consisted of the basic requirements anyone had to keep in order to gain access and acceptance into the Jewish community. It was not James’ intention that the Gentiles stop developing at this point and maintain a separate way of life from the Jews. In fact he goes on to say in Acts 15:21, “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” With that simple statement, the Jerusalem Council’s ruling was that born again Gentiles should abstain from the forbidden things *so that* they might have access to the synagogue where they can hear the Torah preached on the Sabbath. Why would James want this for the Gentiles? Because James was a righteous Jew who loved God’s Torah. Rather than placing a stumbling block in front of the Gentiles, he made unity possible such that through their association

¹ (Hebrew *ger*)

with the Jewish people, as one body, the stumbling blocks would be **removed** from the path of the Gentiles. Thus, James fulfills the Torah commandment of Leviticus 19:14.

Messiah Yeshua says in Matthew 18:7, “Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!” This verse pierces my heart, and I hope it does yours as well. What kind of stumbling blocks was the Master referring to? I believe that he had in mind any of our teachings, our attitudes, or behaviors that would influence others to sin.

We are living in the time of lawlessness (in the Greek it is written “Torahlessness”²) that Yeshua predicted would come and of which Paul wrote about in his epistles. For those of us who are experiencing a return to a Spirit-led life, centered in Yeshua and based on Torah, we must be extra careful as we integrate into our lives the outward parts of Messianic Judaism such as *kippahs* (yarmulkes), *tzit tzit*³, worshiping on the Sabbath, and keeping kosher diets because those behaviors are seen, especially by Jews, as acts of holiness. At the same time, even a Gentile can recognize that when you put on religious clothing or eat in a Biblical way, you are proclaiming loyalty to the One, True God of Israel. And yet if you behave in ways inconsistent with the Torah, such as spending money or working on the Sabbath, it is confusing to unbelieving, observant Jews and will convince them that Messianic Judaism is just another pagan religion with no substance (thereby profaning the Name of God), and Gentiles will recognize you as a hypocrite and consider the Gospel worthless and ineffectual.

Let the only stumbling block that we place in front of others be Yeshua Himself: “We preach Messiah crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.” 1 Corinthians 1:23

² ἀνομία

³ *Tzit tzit* are the fringes of a four-cornered garment