



ONE TORAH FOR ALL

One Torah shall be to him that is home-born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.
Exodus 12:49

Zerubbabel ben Emunah
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Adding and Subtracting from Torah

How to Guard this Commandment Properly

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 4:2

“You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of YHWH your Elohim which I command you.”

There is a lot of finger pointing today regarding this commandment. If one person takes a position which another person does not like, it is often seen where one party will accuse the other party of breaking this commandment by either adding to or taking away from Torah. But what does that mean exactly, to add to Torah or to take away from Torah?

Before one can understand the true meaning of this commandment, he must understand what Torah truly is. Torah has two aspects to it, both vital to having a proper understanding. The most common meaning associated with Torah is the Torah Moshe, the Law of Moses. This consists of the first five books of Scripture: B’reshit (Genesis), Shemot (Exodus), Vayyiqra (Leviticus), B’midbar (Numbers), and Devarim (Deuteronomy). Within these five books we are told by YHWH what He considers to be Torah. One of the foremost and important aspects of Torah is the hearing and obeying of His Voice, that is, to shema. We are to hear and obey His Voice. This is Torah.¹ The written aspect of Torah is that it is given to be our tutor to teach us how to recognize, to hear, and to obey His Voice.

His Voice is the second aspect of having a proper understanding of Torah, that is, the Torah made flesh or the living Torah. We also recognize this aspect of Torah as the Son of Elohim, Yeshua our Mashiach. Those who listen to and obey His Voice have eternal life. If one does not shema His Voice, then such a person cannot have eternal life.

¹ For more information please see the study “What is Torah part 1”
<http://www.onetorahforall.com/Studies2010/What%20is%20Torah%20part%201.html>

This commandment, then, is dealing with the prohibition of adding to or taking away from either the written Torah or the living Torah. Doing either one of these things constitutes the breaking of this commandment.

Traditions are a favorite target of those who are screaming foul concerning this commandment. To that person who takes a very literal view of this commandment, anything at all which does not include each and every commandment as written without diminishing it in any way, or adds to the written commandments in any way, is in violation of this commandment. What we will show in this study is that such a position is untenable and illogical. We will do this by discovering exactly what it means to break this commandment, thus also discovering what it means to keep this commandment. The truth is that simply doing or saying something which is not in Torah is not necessarily adding to (or taking away from) Torah. In order for one to be guilty of actually breaking this commandment, he would have to make what he is doing or saying binding or obligatory upon himself as well as upon others.

Traditionally, the Shema² is sung as a blessing, and when doing so, the second line of this small song consists of words not found in Scripture. It has been suggested that the inclusion of these few words in this song is an addition to Torah and thus is breaking the aforementioned commandment. Is this true? We will discover that it may not be true, but is dependent upon an individual's mindset.

Condemning the second line in this song and those who sing it is done so out of ignorance on several points. One is certainly within his own rights to choose not to sing it; however, he is not within his rights or authority to press those opinions upon another. In doing so, what he is accusing another of being guilty of, he actually becomes guilty of himself; that is, he becomes guilty of breaking the very commandment he wishes to guard. We shall demonstrate this below.

Yehoshua (Joshua) 1:7

“Only be strong and very courageous, to observe to do according to all the Torah, which Moshe My servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.”

After the death of Moshe, YHWH spoke to Yehoshua³ and, in part, said the above words to him. YHWH was telling Yehoshua that he was to do all that Moshe recorded in the Torah. Furthermore, Yehoshua was not to turn to the right (be more conservative) or to the left (be more liberal) in his obedience to the Torah Moshe.

² Devarim 6:4 The whole Shema consists of verses 4-9; however, at present we are only interested in verse 4, which reads, שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד (Shema Yisrael, YHWH Elohenu YHWH Echad). In singing the Shema as a blessing, the second line is sung in an undertone and reads, ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד (Baruch shem kivod malkuto l'olam va'ed – Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever). The second line is sung in an undertone to remind one that it is not Scripture; rather, it is a truth gleaned from Scripture as well as a declaration from the one singing that he desires to be included in His eternal kingdom.

³ Joshua

This passage is one of the keys to gaining a proper understanding of what it means to shema His Torah (His Voice). The way a person walks, he is being obedient to someone or something.⁴ We are admonished to be obedient to His Voice rather than walking in obedience to some other voice. It is the aspect of obedience which begins to give one a proper understanding of this commandment. If one obeys something or someone, then he is acting upon those words as being authoritative. That is, when one chooses to follow a certain edict and sees it as binding or mandatory to do so, and furthermore, thinks that such an edict is also binding upon others, then such an edict has risen to the place of being equivalent to or exceeding Torah. It is this action which causes one to break this commandment.

Mishle (Proverbs) 30:6

***Do not add unto His words,
Lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar.***

It is the adding to the words of YHWH our Elohim, which is commanded against. One cannot say, "YHWH said," unless YHWH actually said it. To do so is adding to Torah. When one adds to Torah, what immediately follows is making that addition to Torah obligatory upon others, that is, to make the addition just as important and binding as the Torah itself. Yeshua chastised the Pharisees for this very infraction.

Matithyah (Matthew) 15:1-9

1 Then there came to Yeshua from Jerusalem Pharisees and scribes, saying,

2 "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

3 And He answered and said unto them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of Elohim because of your tradition?"

4 For Elohim said,

'Honor your father and your mother;'

and,

'He that speaks evil of father or mother, let him die the death.'

5 But you say, 'whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, "That wherewith you might have been helped by me is given to Elohim" ';

6 he shall not honor his father. And you have made void the word of Elohim because of your tradition.

7 You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying,

8 'This people honors Me with their lips;

But their heart is far from Me.

9 But in vain do they worship Me,

Teaching the precepts of men as their doctrines.' "

⁴ Romans 6:16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants you are whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

These men were guilty of both adding to as well as taking away from Torah. They did this by making the words of a man as being weightier than the words of YHWH our Elohim. It is this act and this mindset which breaks the commandment. Simply singing words, which in the case of the Shema actually give additional glory and honor to YHWH, does not in any way break Torah. However, one must also understand, that if one were to make the singing of these words, that is, the words of the second line of the Shema blessing, obligatory, that is, one must sing them, then the binding of these words upon others is breaking the Torah commandment not to add to the Torah. However, if one does not attempt to bind these words upon another, or even upon himself, then the commandment is not broken. A person may sing these words without fear of breaking the commandment as long as he does so and is not under compulsion or attempts to place another person under compulsion. It is imperative to make this distinction when having a proper understanding of this commandment.

Colossians 2:8

Take heed that no one takes you captive through his philosophy and empty deception, after the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Mashiach.

Colossians 2:20-22

20 If you died with Mashiach from the elementary principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances such as,

21 "Do not handle," "Do not taste," or "Do not touch"

22 (of which are things that perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men?

When a person attempts to take a literal approach to this particular commandment, he cannot help but be hypocritical in some fashion. He will be guilty of doing that which he accuses others of doing. For example, if a literal view is taken, then one could not rightly make any comments or explanations about what any particular portion of Torah or other Scripture states. To do so would mean one is adding to Torah. Such is a literal position. Such a position would also mean that a person's life would be incomplete, that is, Torah does not specify every single aspect of a person's life. Furthermore, let us carefully and prayerfully consider this next passage as an example of what can happen if one takes a position of being too literal in his interpretation of Torah.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:12-14

12 "You shalt have a place also without the camp, where you shall go out there;

13 and you shall have a spade among your weapons; and it shall be, when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it, and shall turn back and cover that which comes from you;

14 for YHWH your Elohim walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you, and to give up your enemies before you; therefore shall your camp be holy, that He may not see an unclean thing in you, and turn away from you."

The commandment as recorded in Torah is that a person is to go outside the camp, dig a hole in the ground, relieve himself in that hole, and then cover it up again. If a person takes a literal

view of the commandment not to add to or to take away from Scripture, then he had better not be using an indoor toilet to relieve himself, for no such commandment exists in Torah, or anywhere else in Scripture, for that matter. To relieve oneself inside a dwelling, one would be guilty of breaking this commandment. Of course, this is ridiculous. One must not only look at the commandment, but its intent as well. In this case, the intent is clearly recorded. The purpose of this commandment is to keep the camp clean. As it states in verse fourteen, YHWH walks in the camp of Israel and He does not want to step in it! Frankly, neither do I. I suspect that you don't either. If this were to happen, that a person stepped in someone else's pile, then the person stepping in it would most likely curse the person who left it there, even if he never knew who actually did it. YHWH does not want us cursing each other. YHWH does not want to curse us either, so we need to be clean in this regard.

One can keep the camp clean without being literal in his interpretation of this commandment. Thus, one can obey the commandment without undue burden upon himself or others. Remember, YHWH states that the Torah is easy to do.⁵

Here is one final example from Torah about being too literal in one's view and interpretation.

B'midbar (Numbers) 15:38-40

38 "Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them tzitziot in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the tzitzit of each border a cord of blue;

39 and it shall be unto you for a tzitzit, that you may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of YHWH, and do them; and that you follow not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you use to play the harlot;

40 that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy unto your Elohim.

YHWH commands His people to make for themselves and then wear tzitziot (fringes or tassels). However, YHWH never commands us exactly how to make a tzitzit. The only thing for sure that we know is that it is to have a cord of techelet in it. The exact color of techelet is not even known for sure today. It could be some shade of blue or even some shade of purple. We simply do not know for sure. Some choose not to include this cord of techelet because we do not know for sure its exact color. Others do include it.

Furthermore, there are as many ways to tie or wrap a tzitzit as there are people. Is one way more right than another? No! Why? It is simply because YHWH never gives us details on how to make a tzitzit. Therefore, one cannot choose one method and attempt to make it binding upon another. To do so is breaking the commandment not to add to or take away from Torah. Since YHWH did not specify a particular way to tie or wrap tzitzit, then neither can man, for to do so exceeds his authority.

⁵ Devarim 30:11 "For this commandment which I command you this day, it is not too hard for you, neither is it far off."

Once again, one must look at the intended purpose of the tzitziot. It is recorded for us in this passage. The purpose of the tzitziot is to help His people to be reminded of His commandments. Regardless of how one ties or wraps his tzitziot, if this purpose is accomplished, then he has kept the commandment. However, he cannot make his method of tying or wrapping and his method of wearing them binding upon another person. To do so is breaking the commandment not to add to or take away from His Torah.

Ivrim (Hebrews) 13:9

Do not be carried away by various and strange teachings; for it is good that the heart be established by grace; not by food, wherein they that occupied themselves were not benefited.

Regardless of what aspect of Torah one is dealing with, what needs to be paramount is the concept of grace. That is, each person needs to extend grace to his fellow servants. As we have demonstrated above, a strict literal interpretation of Torah does not work very well. This is not what YHWH intended for us. He did not give us a strict list of dos and don'ts. He gave us a written code whereby we are to use it to learn to hear and obey His Voice, that is, to shema. Furthermore, we are to help our fellow brethren to shema as well. The method of their shema may not look exactly like ours, but that is well within the perimeters given by YHWH in His written code. For within His written code is the foremost principle to learn to hear and obey His Voice.

Let each one of us step back for a moment, stop pointing accusatory fingers at one another, and extend the same amount of grace we ourselves would like to receive not only from others, but especially, from our heavenly Father.

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