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Hand Washing

Luke 11:37-41 and Mark 7:1-5

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In **Luke 11:37-41**, the **Master** has a confrontation with some **Pharisees**. **Yeshua** is invited into the home of a certain unnamed **Pharisee** for a meal. The host proceeds to perform the ritual **hand-washing** before the meal and is shocked to notice that this **Galilean Rabbi** does not **wash His hands** at all. This lack of concern for ritual purity at a **Pharisee's** table would have been very offensive. But **the Master** proceeded to rebuke **His** host (and presumably the others present), beginning with a parable which refers to the purity of **cups** and **dishes**. **Then the Lord said to him: Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you - be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you (Luke 11:39-41).**

Without knowing the background to which **Yeshua** is referring, the statement is unintelligible. How did He go from **hand-washing** to a discussion of cups and plates? There is a connection. According to **Mark**, where the same concern is raised about the disciple's

lack of ritual **hand-washing**, the Gospel writer also connects the ritual purity of one's **hand** with the ritual purity of one's **dishes**. **For the Pharisees and all the [Judeans] do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots (Mark 7:3-4).**

In the Mishnah (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click [Ei - The Oral Law](#)**) tractates *Kelim* and *Yuadayim*, the two subjects are also connected very closely. **Both purification rituals are matters of traditional application which rise, not so much from a literal reading of the Torah, as from the traditions of the elders.** So, it is very appropriate for **the Master** to speak this way. The subjects are related one to another.

Then why did **Yeshua** not ritually **wash His hands** before eating? Was **He** shirking a Torah mandate? No. In fact, **Yeshua** was upholding the Torah by **His** abstention. In the commandments, the ritual purity of people eating food was only a concern in regard to the sacrifices in the Temple. However, the sacrifices and priestly portions were easily contaminated and needed to be eaten in a state of ritual purity (see the commentary on **Leviticus [Bk - Ritually Clean and Unclean Animals](#)**).⁷¹⁸

The Pharisees taught that not washing one's hands was a violation of the Oral Law (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ [Es - Why Do Your Disciples Break the Tradition of the Elders?](#)**). But **Messiah** knew that **He** did not author **the Oral Law**, and therefore, **He** and **His** apostles paid no attention to it. **The Lord** abstained because **He** disapproved of creating sin by adding anything to the Torah (**Revelation 22:18**). In fact, all the conflict between **Yeshua** and Pharisaic Judaism in the Gospels was over **the Oral Law**. There were no conflicts over the Torah, because **the Master** is **the Word of God** and authored the Torah. **Yeshua** refers to **the tradition of maintaining the ritual purity of hands and dishes at the common tables of Isra'el** as setting aside the commandments of **God** for the sake of **the traditions of men (Matthew 15:2; Mark 7:8)**. We can be fairly confident that **He** had the same issues in mind at the home of **the Pharisee** in **Luke 11**.

The Oral Law sheds further light on Messiah's comments about the "inside" and "outside" of dishes. In tractate *Kelim* of the Oral Law, the halachah relates that when something is capable of being used as a receptacle, it then (by virtue of its capacity as a dish) becomes ritually unclean and becomes in need of purification

before it can be used. This “purification,” according to the Sages, was accomplished by immersing the utensils in a mikvah. Once a receptacle is initially purified, its inner and outer surfaces are considered, in most cases, to be independent of one another in terms of the ritual status. This halachah allows for occasions where an outer surface is unclean, while the inner surface is considered clean, leaving only the outer surface in need of immersion. The question then is raised as to whether one should only immerse the outside by displacing the water up to the brim of the receptacle, or simply immerse the entire object regardless. For example, in the case of a soup ladle whose outer surface had become defiled, but whose inner surface remains ritually clean, the whole vessel is simply immersed (m.Kelim 25:3).

Talk about bondage!

Understanding the above, **the Master’s** rebuke becomes clear. In **Matthew 23:25**, **Yeshua** likens **the Pharisees** to a dish which has an “inner” surface and an “outer” surface, and has become entirely unclean. **The Pharisees** had, in the estimation of Heaven, only immersed **their** outer surface, leaving **their** inside full of impurity. **Messiah** directed **them** to immerse **their vessel** with the intent of purifying **their** inner surface. As a consequence of immersing the inner surface, the outer surface will also become clean. However, if **the Pharisees** purified **their** lives, focusing on **their** outer status, **their** inner lives would remain defiled and full of wickedness. **The Lord’s** illustration transitions well into the following verse about **the white-washed tombs** which are beautiful, bright and “clean” **on the outside, but filled with defilement of death on the inside.**

Yeshua chides **the Pharisees** for cleansing only **their** outer appearance while neglecting **their** inner person. However, in this instance **He** not only takes issue with **their** lack of moral purity, but also with **their** established methods for determining the impurity of **dishes**. **The Master** simply does not seem to buy the idea that a dish can have two independent surfaces, and thus be both clean and unclean at the same time. We see this when **He** says: **You fools! Didn’t the one who made the outside make the inside as well (Luke 11:40)?** By coupling this rebuke with **His** ignoring **the Pharisaic ritual of handwashing**, we are able to plainly see **the Lord’s** disapproval of such practices. **He** not only disagreed with the idea of ritual purity being a mandatory part of table fellowship, but also with the reasoning regulating such a practice.

How are the disciples of **Yeshua** to deal with the whole subject of purifying **vessels** and **hand-washing** today? We must bear in mind that the requirements of ritual purity are

applicable only in the context of the Temple. It is far more critical that we concern ourselves with **the Master's** instructions and cleanse our inner persons from the defilement of **sin (First John 2:15-16)**. We need only to look at **Matthew 15** and **Mark 7** to see that **the Lord's apostles** didn't concern **themselves** with **the Oral Law's** ritual of **hand-washing** or the immersion of eating utensils.⁷¹⁹

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, How wonderful it is that when **You** choose those who will enter **Your Kingdom (Colossians 1:12)**, **You** do not look at the outward appearance, nor choose the richest, nor the wisest, nor the most good looking. **Your** criteria for entrance into heaven is by looking into the heart of each person. **For He does not see a man as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but Adonai looks into the heart (First Samuel 16:7c)**. When you looked into the heart of David, you saw that he was a man after your own heart (**Acts 13:22** and **First Samuel 13:14**).*

*The heart is not the ear. The ear hears the message of salvation and that is good; but it is the heart that decides to accept it on faith and decide to live a life loving and following you. **You** state that ancestry is not good enough to qualify someone for heaven. It is so important that each person makes his own personal decision to love and follow you and then you make him your child. **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)**. **You** will welcome all who have become **Your** children by faith, into **Your** holy home of heaven. (**John 14:1-4**).*

God** has great love for **Isra'el, His firstborn (Exodus 4:22)**, yet even being **the firstborn** is not enough to qualify one for heaven. **God** swore that **the Israelites** that **He** had rescued from Egypt and redeemed from their hard slavery, would not enter the Promised Land of rest. Why not? **Now which ones heard and rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt with Moses? And with whom was He provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest? Was it not to those who were disobedient (Hebrews 3:16-18)?

***God** gives the answer to why they were not permitted to enter. They had a disobedient, hard heart that did not believe/trust **ADONAI**. **Therefore, just as the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** says: **Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness. . . So we see that they were not able to enter in because of lack of trust (Hebrews 3:7-8, 19)**.*

*May we be careful to move beyond the outward merely hearing the Gospel, to having an internal heart of faith that loves **God** as **Lord and Savior (Romans 10:9-11)**, and they we*

can rest assured of entrance to **God's** heavenly Kingdom because **God** has cleansed our heart with the blood of **Messiah Yeshua's righteousness**. **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21)**. Thank **You** our dear wonderful heavenly **Father**, for so lovingly bestowing **Messiah's righteousness** of those who have faith, loving **You** from their hearts and eager to follow **You**. **We beg you on behalf of Messiah, be reconciled to God. He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:20c-21)**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy Name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen