

CULTURE SHOCK

by Matthew Day

When I tell people that I am a Torah keeper, often the reaction I get is “Why would you want to put yourself under that burden?” That is the view of Torah that most people have been raised with. But is it true? At first glance it seems so. You have to check every item you buy to see if it has things like pork or shellfish or human hair (commonly used to make L-cystine) in it. You have to tell your boss that you can't work on Saturday (and no housework or shopping on Saturday either). No leavened bread for seven days in the spring and you have to live in tents for eight days in the fall. Sounds like a bunch of restrictions.

Let's take a look at it from another angle. Imagine that you lived in a country where everyone kept Torah. Every store would be closed on Saturday. Unclean foods would be impossible to find. Sukkot and Passover would be national holidays. You could let your children watch television without having to worry about immoral shows. Every seven years all of your debt would be forgiven. Imagine what it would be like if King David reigned today.

My point here is that in a different culture keeping Torah would be as normal as following America's thousands of laws. It's not a burden—it's a culture shock.

I must say when we started keeping Sabbath, it was hard. We live in a energizer bunny society where we just keep going and going. Mark Schultz sings a song called “Running just to catch myself” that describes our daily lives perfectly. It's a culture shock to rest one day every week.

When we started keeping kosher, we thought we could avoid ham, bacon, and shellfish and we would be good. Then we began learning that gnats and pork and horse and even human hair are hidden in everything. It took time to learn what is kosher and what is not.

One argument I have heard against keeping Torah is that the Israelites lived in a different culture. In our American culture, Christmas and Easter and Fourth of July are our holidays. Sunday is the day of worship. We eat pork and shellfish, but we avoid snakes and horses. It's a different culture than that of the Israelites. And yes, the Torah was made for the culture of the Israelites. But so are we. The culture of the Israelites was given to them by God. He offers that same culture to us.

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant-- these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

(Isaiah 56:3-7 ESV)

Let's play pretend again. Imagine that you live in a country where it is forbidden to rest on Sabbath. People kill you if you refuse to eat their pork. Reading the Bible is not only frowned upon, but illegal. Nothing comes out of the television and magazines except trash. Lying and cheating is a way of life. Homosexuality is widely accepted. Do you conform with the culture of that nation?

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,
(Philippians 3:20 ESV)

It is true that Torah does not apply to the American culture. But neither does the American culture apply to us. Your culture doesn't have to be determined by your country or location—the Jews have proven that. We are citizens of heaven and with that comes Heaven's culture. Therefore, we should make an effort to learn the ways of Heaven's culture. So, no, in my experience Torah is not a burden; but it is a culture shock. It is replacing our American culture with the culture of Heaven.

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