

## 'Living' truth – the Hebraic Mindset:

One of the most fundamental differences between the Western, Hellenistic mind and the Hebrew mind is found in the area of knowing vs. doing.

Says Prof Wiliam Barrett, *"The distinction...arises from the difference between doing and knowing. The Hebrew is concerned with practice, the Greek with knowledge. Right conduct is the ultimate concern of the Hebrew, right thinking that of the Greek. Duty and strictness of conscience are the paramount things in life for the Hebrew; for the Greek, the spontaneous and luminous play of the intelligence. The Hebrew thus extols the moral virtues as the substance and meaning of life; the Greek subordinates them to the intellectual virtues...the contrast is between practice and theory, between the moral man and the theoretical or intellectual man."*

In fundamentalist Christian circles, it is often more important to believe and espouse "the right thing," than to live the right way. This is why we are so obsessed with creeds, doctrinal statements, Systematic Theologies, orthodoxy vs. heresy, and creating various theologies. This mode of thinking is thoroughly Western, utterly Greek.

### Hebraic vs Western Thinking – A Comparison

Western Approach	Hebraic Approach
Life analyzed in precise categories.	<b>Everything blurs into everything else.</b>
A split between natural & supernatural	Supernatural affects everything.
Linear logic	<b>Contextual or "block" logic</b>
"Rugged Individualism"	<b>Importance of being part of group</b>
Equality of persons	Value comes from place in hierarchies
Freedom orientation	Security orientation
Competition is good	Competition is evil (cooperation better)
Man-centered universe	<b>God/tribe/family-centered universe</b>
Worth of person based on money/material possessions/power	<b>Worth derived from family relationships</b>
Biological life sacred	Social life supremely important
Chance + cause & effect limit what can happen	God causes everything in his universe
Man rules nature through understanding	God rules everything, so relationship with God

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and applying laws of science	determines how things turn out.
Power over others achieved through business, politics and human organizations.	Power over others is structured by social patterns ordained by God.
All that exists is the material	The universe is filled with powerful spirit beings
Linear time divided into neat segments. Each event is new.	Cyclical or spiraling time. Similar events constantly reoccur.
History is recording facts objectively and chronologically.	History is an attempt to preserve significant truths in meaningful or memorable ways whether or not details are objective facts.
Oriented to the near future	Oriented to lessons of history
Change is good = progress	Change is bad = destruction of traditions
Universe evolved by chance	Universe created by God
Universe dominated and controlled by science and technology	God gave man stewardship over his earthly creation. Accountability to God.
Material goods = measure of personal achievement	Material goods = measure of God's blessing
Blind faith	<b>Knowledge-based faith</b>
Time as points on straight line ("at this point in time...")	Time determined by content ("In the day that the Lord did...")

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**Sources:** *Irrational Man*, by William Barrett; *Christianity With Power* by Charles Kraft; *Hebrew Thought Compared With Greek* by Thorleif Boman; *Judaism and Christianity – The Differences* by Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, *Our Father Abraham*, by Marvin Wilson, *God in Search of Man* by Abraham Heschel.

Jesus/Yeshua was no theologian in the Western sense. Like the prophets before him he gave concrete biblical answers to the questions of daily life such as the payment of taxes, the issue of poverty, family feuds, etc. The Apostle Paul was the same – his letters also addressed very concrete, specific and contemporary questions.

**These prophets and their followers did not simply think truth they experienced truth.**

As they appreciated that everything came as a gift from the Creator, the Rabbi's even went so far as to say: "It is forbidden to a man to enjoy anything of this world without a benediction, and if anyone enjoys anything of this world without a benediction, he commits sacrilege" Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 35a). Thus a common expression to this day among orthodox Jews is "Barach attah Adonai elohenu, melekh ha'olam" (Blessed are you O Lord, King of the Universe) followed by thanks for the specific pleasure before them whether is be food or drink or a fragrant flower, the hearing of good news or bad news, even the ability to urinate! Everything is theological!

Thus we can perhaps better appreciate the Apostle Paul's call to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess 5:17). We also need to find the divine in the mundane; in the commonplace; in the mysterious reversals of life and like Job to bless God whether he gives or takes away (Job 1:21).

After all Paul tells us that 'all things work together for the good of those who love Him' (Rom 8:28).

If a person knows God then he is daily at God's disposal and walks in close fellowship with Him, along the road of life.

Ceremonialism and ritualism alone do not meet God's requirement for a good life (Isa 1:11-14; Amos 5:21-23)

*Amos 5:*

*21 I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.*

*22 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,*

*I will not look upon them.*

*23 Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen.*

Here is one of the apparent contradictions. It was God who instituted the ceremonial laws of burnt offerings, etc and yet God appears to be saying He now despises them?!

The answer is found in Ps 51:

*10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

*11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*

*12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*

*13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.*

*14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.*

*15 O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.*

*16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering.*

*17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.*

*18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem.*

*19 Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar*

We see in the last verse that God has not changed his mind; but that all offerings to Him are to be done from a pure and loving heart, not with insincerity and double-mindedness.

Rather we are to act justly, to love mercy and walk humbly with God (Mic 6:8). Thus the essence of life is relationships; with our Father and our fellow man.

If we are to understand the Bible, and what it means to be a follower of *Yeshua ha Mashiach* (Jesus the Messiah), then we will have to understand it hebraically, not hellenistically. This requires a philosophical and intellectual paradigm shift on our part. It means coming at Scripture from an entirely different angle. It means learning to think like the Hebrew who thought more like God.

**As part of this distinctly different approach, we may note that the Bible appears to be full of contradictions. The Bible in many ways is not a Book of strict logic and rationality. Up is down; High is low, first is last, infinitely wide is God's grace and yet narrow is His Way.**

To a scientifically trained mind like mine, there is much that can be seemingly discarded as error or lies or myth and yet, it is not. The deeper we go, the closer we get to the source, the Hebraic worldview or mindset, the more clarity and comfort that comes as contradictions become revelations.

The Greek or Hellenistic way is to find the strict path of logic, which while mathematically and rationally valid is not always ideal but worse the Hellenistic mindset starts with a set of core

principles and approaches that are so much in opposition to the One True God that the application of such rigorous logic only leads us further from not closer to the truth.

Let us investigate this issue a little to clarify the need to reassess our approach and then let us try, through the lense of Hebraic thought to grasp at the revelations that lie behind the contradictions, remembering also that, in the Hebraic approach, contradictions don't always need to be answered. The Hebraic way allows for thoughts to remain in tension, in conflict because much more important than *'thinking'* truth is *'living'* truth.

### **Truth is to be experienced, deed matters more than creed.**

Marvin Wilson *"Concepts were expressed in self-contained units or blocks of thought. These blocks did not necessarily fit together in any obviously rational or harmonious pattern, particularly when one block represented the human perspective on truth and the other represented the divine. ... Hence, polarity of thought or dialectic often characterized block logic.... Consideration of certain forms of block logic may give one the impression that divine sovereignty and human responsibility were incompatible. **The Hebrews, however, sense no violation of their freedom as they accomplish God's purposes.** The back and forth between human freedom and divine sovereignty is a function of block logic and the Hebrew mindset.*

Some examples of the great swath of scriptural contradictions:

#### **The Last shall be first and the first shall be last:**

*Matt 19:27-30*

*Then Peter said in reply, See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?  
28 Jesus said to them, Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

*29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.*

*30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*

This is one of the clearest and simplest examples of the human's perspective vs God's. In any ordering of human talent or gifts or stature, etc., those whom the world thinks are top of the tree or in the first places are often very much in the last places from God's perspective. God measures the heart not the external things of the world; he measures our giving; our loving; our serving not our power or toys.

#### **God makes us act and yet we choose our actions:**

*Ex 8:15*

*But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.*

vs *Ex 7:3*

*But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt,*

#### **Did God harden the Pharaoh's heart or did he do it himself?**

Rabbi Yaakov Youlous in his book 'A Better Understanding of the Biblical Hebrew Exodus' (p 33-35) argues that many of the verses here are mistranslated. He states than Ex 7:13; 7:22; Ex 8:15, etc are actually phrases that indicate that it was actually the Pharaoh that hardened his own hard. However in Ex 9:12, he states that with the plague of boils it was God who hardened

Pharaoh's heart, not the Pharaoh. Also he argues that in Ex 10:1, 10:20, 10:27 and 11:10 it was God who hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Yaakov goes on to explain that these later choices were really the result of the habit that the Pharaoh had instilled, a habit of evil choices. God's role was to institute the law of nature involved in our tending to repeat the choices that have become habitual. Rabbi Yaakov sees no obstruction of the Pharaoh's free choice in this episode.

God arranged the circumstances but the ultimate choice was still there for the Pharaoh.

**God is the maker of evil; He is wrathful and yet He is the maker of good; He is merciful:**

Isaiah 45.7

*I form light and create darkness,  
I make well-being and create calamity,  
I am the LORD, who does all these things.*

Vs Habakuk 3:2

*O LORD, I have heard the report of you,  
and your work, O LORD, do I fear.  
In the midst of the years revive it;  
in the midst of the years make it known;  
in wrath remember mercy.*

To offer us true freedom, true choice God must offer alternatives and alternatives to Him that appear desirable and attractive – so therefore God create's the evil that the world finds attractive and yet no matter how far we fall into the calamity of this present evil age, God's mercy is always on offer as well.

**Yeshua is the Lamb of God and also the Lion of Judah:**

John 1:29,36

*29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold, **the Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world!*

*36 And he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, Behold, the Lamb of God!*

vs Rev 5:5

*And one of the elders said to me, Weep no more; behold, the **Lion of the tribe of Judah**, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.*

This is really no conflict but two very different roles that the Messiah was predicted to fulfil. Judaism has always taught that there would be two ultimate Messiah's – The Son of Joseph (representing the Lamb) & the Son of David (the warrior King – the Lion).

In his life 2000 years ago he came as the Lamb; in his return he will come as the Lion.

**The end of unbelievers (Hell) is described as 'utter darkness' and a 'lake of fire'.**

Jude 11-13

*11 Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion.*

*12 These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted;*

13 wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom **of utter darkness** has been reserved forever.

Rev 19:20

*And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into **the lake of fire** that burns with sulfur.*

Again, these apparent contradictions in the ultimate destiny of the wicked are really no contradictions at all but just two different stages – in the first where He burns up the wicked and their evil and in the second where there is the darkness of their permanent death and extinction.

### **God determines who is 'saved' and who isn't and yet we can choose him**

John 6:37

*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and **whoever comes to me** I will never cast out.*

Deut 30:19-20

*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. **Therefore choose life**, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.*

Jn 6:44

***No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.** And I will raise him up on the last day.*

This has been partly responsible for the grave errors of Calvinism; the error of predestination, the belief that all have been marked before birth and nothing we do can chance whether we end up 'saved' or condemned.

Part of the error here is that God does indeed draw everyone; he offers a universe that declares Him and a community within which there are always people who declare his virtues and His love. But the choice is always ours.

### **You can find your life but in doing so you will lose it!**

Mat 10:39

*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

Again a seeming contradiction, but a reality I believe we can probably all testify to. Before knowing our God and our Messiah we thought we had a life, but when we find God we realize that any life without Him is really meaningless, a life of vanity and ultimate emptiness, because it is a life without true purpose. When we give up this 'life', when we 'lose it' to God, when we surrender to God, then we find true life, the life of real peace, real love, real satisfaction and purpose and we look we great anticipation to a time when:

*And in that time there will be neither hunger nor war, neither jealousy nor competition, but goodness will spread over everything. And all the delights will be as common as dust. And the whole world will have no other occupation but only to know the Lord. And therefore Israel will be great sages, and knowers of secret things, and they will attain a knowledge of their Creator as far as the power of man allows, as it is written, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters covers the sea (Isa. 11:9)" (**Maimonids, Yad haHazaqa, Shoftim, Hilkhot M'lakhim 11-12**)*

## **When you are weak you are strong!**

2 Cor 12:10

*For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Again, we are to thank God for all that comes our way. When we see everything as from our loving Father we recognize that in our struggles, in our weakness, we can turn the struggles over to our God and our Messiah and then find the strength that they supply, knowing that they will never desert us nor forsake us. We become stronger in our relationship with God.

## **If you lift yourself up you will be lowered but if you lower yourself you will be lifted up!**

Luke 14:11

*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

Very much like the first vs last scripture, we see here that putting God first brings true joy, true gain and true achievement. In Him we find true exaltation.

## **The Messiah is the Prince of Peace and yet he comes with a sword.**

Matt 5:9:

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

Isaiah 9:6-7

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called .... **Prince of Peace.***

Matt 10:34 - 36

*“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. **I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.** For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.*

Yeshua will bring peace ultimately at his return. After his victory the whole world will know true peace. But for now, we can also know peace when we put him first in our life's then his peace falls upon us. Until the Messiah's return he has brought division and separation as all who follow him may be called to walk a different path from their mother or brother or family. In putting God and His Messiah first, believers may be called to a very different lifestyle from their family, their friends and community because they are called to a life of justice and mercy.

*Preaching of cross is foolishness ...(my argument with my sister?)*

1 Cor 1:18-19, 26-29

***For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.** For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

*26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.*

*27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;*

28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,  
29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

## Dealing with fools?

*Prov. 26:4 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.*

*Prov. 26:5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

So what are you **supposed** to do? Answer a fool according to his folly or not? This leads us to a fourth kind of contradiction - Intentional. Here you need to get into the Hebraic mindset, where one learns by contrast and contradiction. The point? When dealing with a fool, it's always a lose/lose situation. Either you will join the fool in his foolishness, or you will make him think he's wise in his own eyes. The only way to avoid the dilemma may be not to deal with a fool at all.

Some of these contradictions are far from easy to process. For example:

Rom 14:22 ... Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.<sup>1</sup>

## Conclusion:

The Hebrew view of the world was grounded in the earthy, material reality in which they lived, and yet it was overshadowed at every point with spiritual truth.

**In contrast to the Greek view that the highest human experience was knowledge, to a Hebrew scholar like the Apostle Paul, moral beauty and righteousness was the highest human experience.**

In today's common view influenced by **Greek dualism, faith is a mystical, non-rational thing, not related to reason.**

Dualism leads to asceticism which is a debasement of life. Physical appetites and pleasures are considered unworthy indulgences which foster entrapment – the abstention through dietary limitations, self imposed silences, forfeiting of possessions, social seclusion, glorification of hardships and other austere observances are a result of a Greek mindset. Such an approach is rejected to the apostle Paul (Col 2:21).

In stark contrast, the Hebraic approach is not the ascetic denial of such pleasures, but to humbly dedicate these to God and to be a responsible steward of the Creator's good gifts. The Rabbi's consider that to not enjoy every legitimate pleasure is in essence to be an ingrate before the Master of the Universe! (1 Cor 10:31)

In the Hebraic approach **faith and reason are inextricably intertwined**; they are not in competition. **Instead, faith is a posture of the heart toward God.**

The heart of the believer will seek knowledge of God at some level. Knowledge is not irrelevant.

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<sup>1</sup> see CEB Cranfield 'Romans' p352  
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**But it will be an outworking of the heart of faith rather than a prerequisite for it.** The primary issue of the gospel is the problem of moral bankruptcy and God's deep grace that reaches into the heart to change its natural posture. And only this change will allow us to seek and to embrace truth. Our moral problem is deeply involved with our willingness (or unwillingness) to seek and embrace the truth about ourselves and about God.

Practically speaking, how does holding a Greek mindset differ in everyday life from holding a Hebrew mindset? To separate our experience into spiritual and material, leads us to place value on the pursuit of "spiritual" things over the pursuit of "earthly" things.

Since God is not in "the flesh," the most valued vocations for a Christian are those involving spiritual things. Thus, for the Christian mother, tending to the needs of her children becomes "fleshly," and perhaps frustrating to her, when she would rather pursue loftier, "spiritual" things. She may consider ministry, Bible study, and church activity the "better" things to do; when in reality, loving her children the best she can is the higher task.

**If instead** we carry with us an integrated view of the spiritual and the material worlds, we are free to pursue the plethora of options God has laid before us. **If the highest human experience is moral beauty, then it matters less what I do (non-moral) and more how I do it (moral).** I can pursue expressing myself in the arts, literature, or science as a joyous expression of the creature God created me to be.

The fragmentation fostered by Greek dualism ultimately breaks down any relevance for Christianity in the post-modern world. Because Christians are called to live "spiritual" lives, our dealings with the material world become less and less relevant to us; we separate ourselves from our neighbors, our co-workers, and our culture at large. And we will have little impact on our world because we have little contact with it. **As a Christian sub-culture, we have abandoned the arts, literature, films, music, and science to post-modernism.** And we have called this abandonment spiritual.

Greek dualism has also led to the loss of community, to the exaltation of the individual.

Human beings were created to be social. Our true and most complete meaning is derived from and experienced through our relationships with God and with other human beings (Mark 12:28-34).

Jewish prayers emphasis 'we' not 'I'; and express the 'cry of the whole community'. This is seen in the first line of the Lord's prayer '**Our** Father in Heaven'. A community of people dedicated to God have a corporate personality which in the Jewish understanding involves not only those now present, but those who have gone before and even those who are to come (i.e. future generations – see Deut 29:15).

The community accountability and shared values is also seen in the Mishnah saying: "he who destroys a single life is considered as if he has destroyed the whole world, and he who saves a single life is considered as having saved the whole world" (Sanhedrin 4:5).

We see Paul calling us to the same corporate identity in his famous 'Body of Messiah' dissertation (1 Cor 12). We should read this chapter regularly and reflect on how we live it; how we rejoice together but also grieve and suffer together.

Because the Christian world was Hellenized very early in its life (within 70 years of the ascension), the Greek philosophical mind tried to address these apparent contradictions from a false basis (seeking to know yourself rather than know God), and as a result the church developed a great many false concepts and doctrines which were then perpetuated and unthinkingly acceptable by the great majority of church goers.

Our challenge is to recognize the great error of church history in disconnecting from its Jewish foundations.

The times we live in now involve much uncertainty, pessimism, rootlessness, dishonesty and great change. Many may be seeking something permanent, stable and truthful to bring hope and encouragement. We need not be rootless – As Paul tells us in Romans 9-11, the ‘root that supports us’ is the godly living faith of Israel. This is our foundation, it is to know the God of history, Israel’s history. Hebrews 11 tells us a beautiful summary of the people of Israel and their trust in God. When we align ourselves with such men of faith as Abraham, Moses, King David and even Jephthah we align ourselves with Israel and we are not alone. We also have a secure future because the God of Israel has begun to restore His people and the time of their redemption draws near when their Messiah and ours, the Jew Yeshua will return as the warrior King of Ps 2.

By accepting and learning to think Hebraically, we are not calling for a return to Judaism, we are not calling for Gentiles to become Jews, but for us to really understand what our Messiah Yeshua is calling us to.

To understand that true faith is faith in action, it is faith that is evidenced by obedience to God. This obedience is very simply identified in one who loves God with all his heart and loves his neighbour as himself. Such a person will, in fulfilling the two greatest commandments, actually fulfill the Ten Commandments from which these are but a summary.

The true fulfillment of the Ten Commandments though must be an obedience from a circumcised heart, a heart that recognizes that, where it’s desires are towards actions that would dis-honour God, he/she needs to repent, to cry to God for His help and to change his/her behaviour so as to reduce or eradicate the circumstances that bring such wrong desires into prominence.

May you all embrace life, enjoy the blessings that the Almighty has bestowed upon you and constantly thank Him for all that comes your way because regardless of your comprehension of it, God can and will use it all for your benefit if you love Him.

Use the talents that He has given you to glorify and honour Him and so draw others to Him as they see joy in your life in good times and bad.

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