

The Seven Rules (*Middot*) of Torah Interpretation as Taught by Rabbi Hillel

Beginners Torah Lesson # 8 - By Rabbi Edward L. Nydle-B'nai Avraham

“Do your best to shtel zich (apply yourself), to present yourself to Elohim as one approved, a po’el (workman) without bushah (shame), keeping on a derek yasher (straight path) the D’var HaEmet”
2 Timothy 2:15 (Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha)

In understanding how to interpret the Torah, we as Messianic Yisrael and trustworthy students of the D’var Yahweh need to be proficient in the regulations as taught by our Yahudim Brethren from the Second Temple Period of our Master Yahshua. These rules would have been well-known to our Rebbe, Yahshua min Natsareth, and all His early talmidim. My prayer for you in this teaching is: “That the Elohim of our Rebbe, Melek HaMoshiach Adoneinu Yahshua, the Avi of Hakavod, would give you a ruach of wisdom chochmah, and hisglus in knowledge (*Da’at*) of Moshiach.” Eph. 1: 17 Rav Shaul.

A Little Background

The Seven Hermeneutic Rules of Rabbi Hillel the Elder (late First Century BCE to the early First Century CE) existed long before they were ever recorded on paper for future generations of Torah scholars. Rabbi Hillel was the first sage to write them down. Rabbi Hillel was one of the leading rabbinical authorities during the Second Temple Period. Hillel studied under Shemaiah and Avtalyon. He along with Rabbi Shammai constituted the last pair of the *zugot* sages. Rabbi Hillel was a master at teaching the “spirit of the Torah” and Shammai the “letter of the Torah”. He was known for his love for people and his patience. He taught, “Be like disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing it, loving human beings and bringing them close to the Torah.” There was a saying in his day, “Let a man always be humble and patient like Hillel, and not passionate like Shammai.” Later Rabbi Ishmael, a *tanna* (Torah teacher) from the late first and second Century CE, would expand Hillel’s rules to thirteen and Rabbi Eliezer ben Yose ha-Gelili would enlarge the code to a total of thirty-two to connect the laws to morals, ethics, and etiquette.

Our Rebbe Yahshua’s teachings and *Halakah* more closely resembled the teachings of Rabbi Hillel rather than the *Halakah* handed down from the House of Shammai. The essence of his teachings were a love for mankind, and leading Yisrael to a knowledge of the Torah. The teaching of Rabbi Hillel in b. Shabbat 31a reads, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor that is the whole Torah.” This is the fundamental principle of the Yisraelite moral law in the Torah AND *Brit Chadasha*. “Do not hate your brother in your heart. Reprove your neighbor, for certain, and bear no sin because of him. Do not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the children of your people. and you shall love your neighbor as yourself-*V’ahavta l’rayahcha kamoecha.*” Wayyiqra 19:17-18. Our Rebbe Yahshua taught in Mattithyahu 7:12, “Therefore, whatever you wish B’nai Adam to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Torah and the Neviim.” This is also expounded upon in Mark 12:31 and Luke 10:27. Rav Shaul also wrote in Galatians 5:14, “For the entire Torah is completed in one word, in this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Also in Romans 13:8, “Owe, Be indebted/obligated nothing to anyone except a choiv (debt) of ahavah (love), for he who has ahavah has fulfilled the Torah.” Yochanan also teach this in 1 Yochanan 3:11, “Because this is the divrei Torah which we heard from the Beginning, that we have ahavah for one another...” and in 1 Yochanan 4:21, “And we have this mitzvah we have from Him, that one having ahavah for Elohim should have ahavah for ach (brother) b’Moshiach of him.”

Hillel later became head of the *Sanhedrin* and was called the *Nasi* (prince). He was the master of the great school or *Beit*, at first associated with Menachem and afterward Shammai, his peer. His School advocated the milder *HALAKHIC* rulings. His influence as a restorer of Scriptural exegesis is his most significant contribution to the Yisraelite world. He lived as a great teacher who lived what he taught—the practice of *tzedakah*, fear of Elohim, and humility. After Hillel’s death the mantle of his rabbinical leadership fell upon his son, Simeon. Later, it was passed on to Rabbi Gamliel, who was Rav Shaul’s teacher and Gamliel supported the early talmidim of Yahshua.

Gamliel was the first to carry the title “Rabban” (our master or great one), rather than the more common title “rabbi” (my teacher). His name means “El is also for me”. He was the grandson of Hillel and a leader of a yeshiva. He was a *Parush* (Pharisee) and a great Torah scholar. According to the Mishna he was greatly respected (see Sotah 9:15). Gamliel paved the way for a more liberal Pharisaism by his *takkanot* (Rabbinical regulations-or improvements). His counsel for moderation was accepted in Acts 5:35-39, but was later abandoned in Acts 7:51-58. Tradition holds that he later became a Believer in HaMoshiach Yahshua but there is no clear evidence from history of this report from “Christian Tradition”.

- “I am an ish Yahudi, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but having been brought up in a yeshiva in this city of Yahrushalayim at the feet of Rabban Gamliel, having learned with irreproachable frumkeit according to all machmir chumra strictness the Torah of avoteinu and I have kinat Elohim just as all of you do today.” Acts 22:3
- ‘And Rabban Gamliel said to them, “Anshei Yisrael, pay attention to yourselves what you are about to do with these anashim...And now I say to you, stay away from these anashim, and leave them alone, because if this cheshbon (plan) or this matter is of B’nai Adam, it will be overthrown. But if it is from Elohim, you are not able to overthrow them-in that case you may even be found to be fighting kenegeg (opposing) Elohim” And they were persuaded by Rabban Gamliel.’ Acts 5:35-39

Rav Shaul wrote to Timothy his pupil in 2 Timothy 2:15 “Do your utmost to present yourself approved of Elohim, a worker that does not need to be ashamed, RIGHTLY HANDLING THE WORD OF TRUTH (*EMET*).” Rav Shaul was indicating that there was an appropriate way and an improper way to handle and interpret the Torah. Since Rav Shaul sat at the feet of Gamliel to learn the Torah, then I am sure in this letter to Timothy he was referring to the methods he had been taught as a yeshiva student of Hillel’s grandson. When we closely investigate his letters in the *Brit Chadasha*, we will find that they are filled with usages of these Seven Rules-*Middot* of Hillel the Elder.

The Seven Rules of Hillel the Elder

ONE

Kal V’Khomer (the light and the heavy): The kal v’khomer is used to make an argument from a lesser weight based on one of the heavier or greater weight. The philosophers called this *a fortiori* (Latin for “with even greater strength”). Example: If X is true of Y then HOW MUCH MORE X must be true of Z (this would be where Z is of the greater weight than Y). Watch for the phrase “HOW MUCH MORE THEN-*kol sh’khen*” There are two forms of kal v’khomer: **KAL V’KHOMER MEFORESH-** This is where the kal v’khomer argument is explicitly apparent in the text. **KAL V’KHOMER SATUM-** This is when the kal v’khomer argument is implied by the teaching given by the rabbi. EXAMPLE in the TaNaK: “See, the righteous in the earth shall be rewarded, HOW MUCH MORE the wrong and the sinner!” Mishle 11:31; “If you run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then HOW do you contend with horses?” Yirmeyahu 12:5a; Also look up Devarim 31:27; 1 Shemu’el 23:3; Yechezqel 15:5; Hadassah (Esther) 9:12.) EXAMPLES of the implied: Bemidbar 12:14 & b. BK25a; Devarim 21:23 & m. San.6: 5; Wayyiqra 21:16-21 & Bemidbar 8:24-25 & b. Hul.24a. The limitation of the kal v’khomer argument is the *dayo* principle or enough principle. This is that the conclusion of an argument is satisfied when it is like the major premise. The conclusion is equalized to the premise and neither a stricter nor a more lenient view is to be taken. This principle is used over 21 times in the *Brit Chadasha*. Our Rebbe Yahshua used the kal v’khomer in Yochanan 7:23, “If a man receives brit milah on the Shabbat, so that the Torat Moshe should not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a man entirely well (*refu’ah shleimah*) on the Shabbat?” also in Mattityahu 12:11-12, And He said to them, “What man is there among you who has one sheep (*keves*), and if it falls into a pit on the Shabbat, shall not take hold of it and lift it out? HOW MUCH MORE worth is a man than a sheep! So it is mutar (permissible) to do hatov (the good) on the Shabbat.” Our Rebbe used this principle in His teaching in these other verses: Mt. 6:26, 30; Mt.7: 11; Mt.10: 25; Mat.12: 12; Luke 12:24, 28; Luke 11:13; Yochanan 15:18-20; Yochanan 7:23. Rav Shaul used this argument in Romans 5:8-10, “But Elohim proves His own ahavah (love) for us, in that while we were still chote’im (sinners), Moshiach died for us.

HOW MUCH MORE THEN, having now been declared right (yitzdak im Elohim) by His dam (blood), we shall be saved from wrath-burning anger of Elohim (Charon Af Elohim) through Him. For if, being enemies (oyevim), we were restored to favor with Elohim through the death (mavet) of His Son, HOW MUCH MORE, having been restored to favor, we shall be saved by His life (Chayyim).” Also look up: Romans 11:12, 24; 1 Cor.9: 11-12; 1Cor.12: 22; 2 Cor. 3:7-9, 11; Phil.2: 12; Phil.1: 16; Ivrim 2:2-3; Ivrim 9:13-14; Ivrim 10:28-29; Ivrim 12:9, 25.

TWO

G’zerah Shavah (Equivalence of expressions): This is when an analogy is made between two separate texts based upon a similar phrase, word, or root word in Hebrew. EXAMPLE from the TaNaK of Shemu’el: 1 Shemu’el 1:10, “And let no razor come upon his head.” Shofetim 13:5 of Shimshon, “And let no razor come upon his head, for the youth is a Nazirite to Elohim.” We can conclude then Shemu’el was a Nazirite as was Shimshon (Samson) by comparing these two related verses. In the *Brit Chadasha* the writer of Ivrim (Hebrews) compares Ivrim 3:6-4:13 to Tehillim (Psalms) 95:7-11. Ivrim 3:7-11 is compared to Bereshith 2:2. Ivrim 4:4 uses the word “works-*ma’asim*” and “day/today –*hayom*”. So the writer concludes that there will a 1,000-year REST-*Shabbos menuchah* following a literal 6,000 years of this world for those who are obedient (*mishma’at*) to the Torah (Ivrim 4:11-13) and Moshiach.

THREE

Binyanab mikathub echad (Building of the father from one text): One explicit text serves as a foundation or a starting point so as to constitute a rule or FATHER for all similar texts or cases. From the *Brit Chadasha*: Ivrim 9:11-12, “ But when Rebbe, Melek HaMoshiach came as the Kohen HaGadol of the coming tovot (good things), he entered through the Mishkan Gadol, the greater and more perfect Mishkan, not made with hands, that is, not of this B’ri’ah (creation); not through the dam of se’irim (goats) and of agalim (bulls) but through his own dam he entered the Kodesh HaKodashim once and for all, having secured for us the Geulah Olamim (Eternal Redemption)”. The writer applies the word “blood”-*dam* from Shemot 24:8 to Ivrim 9:20 then compares it to Yirmeyahu 31:31-34 in Ivrim 10:16-17.

FOUR

Binyab ab mishene kethubim (Building of the father from two or more texts): This means two texts or provisions are a text to serve as a foundation for a general conclusion. EXAMPLE from the TaNaK: Shemot 21:26-27, “And when a man smites the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he is to let him go free for the sake of his eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he is to let him go free for the sake of his tooth.”

In the PASHAT these texts provide for only an eye or tooth, but we can conclude it may also be applied for other body parts as well. In the *Brit Chadasha* book of Ivrim, the writer in 1:5-14 sites from the TaNaK Tehillim 2:7 and compares Ivrim 1:5; 2 Shemu’el 7:14; Ivrim 1:6 is compared to Devarim 32:43 and Tehillim 97:7; Tehillim 104:4 is compared to Ivrim 1:7; Tehillim 45:6-7 is compared to Ivrim 1:8-9; Tehillim 102:25-27 is equal to Ivrim 1:1-12; and Tehillim 110:1 is equal to Ivrim 1:13. All this is to build an argument that Rebbe Yahshua Ha Moshiach is of a higher order of being than the *malakim* (angels).

FIVE

Kelal uferat (the general and the particular): A general statement is first made and is followed by a single statement that particularizes the general principle stated. EXAMPLE from the TaNaK: Bereshith 1:27, “And Elohim created the man in His image, in the image of Elohim created him-male and female He created them.” Then in Bereshith 2:7, 21 we have this general statement particularized.

SIX

Kayotze bo mimekom akhar (analogy made from another passage): This is where two passages that seem to contradict each other are resolved by a third passage that solves the apparent conflict.

EXAMPLE from the TaNaK: Wayyiqra 1:1, “And Yahweh called to Moshe, and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying...” But Shemot 25:22 says, “And I shall meet with you there, and from above the lid of atonement, from between the two kerubim which are on the Ark of the Witness, I shall speak to you all that which I command you concerning the Bnai Yisrael.” This seems to be a contradiction in Scripture. When we look at Bemidbar 7:89, “ And when Moshe went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of ONE speaking to him from above the lid of atonement that was on the Ark of the Witness, from between the two kerubim. Thus He spoke to him.” This reconciles the apparent conflict and we realize that Moshe entered the Tent of Meeting to hear Yahweh speak to him. 1 Dibre ha Yamim (Chron.) 27:1 explains the numerical conflict between 2 Shemu’el 24:9 and 1 Dibre ha Yamim 21:5. Shemot 19:20, “And Yahweh came down upon Mount Snai, on the top of the mountain.” This appears to disagree with Devarim 4:36, “From the heavens He let you hear His voice, to instruct you, and on earth He showed you his great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire.” Shemot 20:19-22 reconciles these two accounts by stating that Elohim brought the heavens down to the Mount and spoke with Yisrael. In the *Brit Chadasha* Rav Shaul shows that Romans 1:17 (Hab.2: 4), “For the righteousness of Elohim (*Tzedek Olamim*) is revealed from belief (*emunah*) to belief, as it has been written, But the just shall live by belief-*V’tzaddik be’emunato yiche’yeh.*” Seems to conflict with Tehillim 14:1-3; Tehillim 53:1-3; Qoheleth (Ecc.) 7:20 in Romans 3:10, “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one-*Ein Tzaddik Ba’aretz!*” Then He uses Romans 2:6 (Tehillim 62:12; Mishle 42:12), “Who shall render to each one according to his works-*k’ma’a’sai hu.*” With Romans 4:7-8 (Tehillim 32:1-2), “Blessed (*ashrey*) are those whose lawlessness (or lawless deeds) is forgiven, and whose sins are covered over, blessed is the man to whom Yahweh shall by no means reckon sin-*Ashrey Adam Lo Yakhshov Yahweh Lo Avon.*” This apparent conflict is resolved by quoting Bereshith 15:6, “And he believed in Yahweh, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” Rav Shaul as a rabbi resolves the conflict by showing that under certain circumstances, BELIEF /trust-*Emunah* can act as a substitute for righteousness or being just.

SEVEN

Davar hilmad me’anino (Explanation obtained from the context): This means that the total context of the verse in question must be considered for an accurate exegesis of the verse. Otherwise stated, you cannot isolate a verse from its context or the book in which it is written to arrive at the full meaning of the text. A verse out of context ends up as a pretext. This is where most commentators make mistakes.

- **Context:** *Contextus*-connection of words, coherence. 1. the parts of a discourse which surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning 2. the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*

In the *Brit Chadasha* in Romans 14:14 Rav Shaul writes, “I know and am persuaded in the Master Yahshua that none at all is common (*tamai*) of itself (*beetzem*-intrinsically). But to him who regards whatever to be common, to him it is common-profane.” Rav Shaul, from the tribe of Binyamin, a Yahudite would NOT be teaching against the Torah of *Kashrut* (clean and unclean foods). Nor is he advocating moral relativism. He knew Wayyiqra 11-17 and the laws of ritual uncleanness. These are *chukim*-or commandments without any apparent reasons. He is merely pointing out to the congregation at Rome that things are unclean not of themselves but because Elohim said they are unclean in His Torah then they are indeed unclean. This is very similar to a statement in the Talmud N’darim 15a, “It was taught: If there are things which are allowed but which some treat as prohibited, you must not permit them in their presence.” They must also be aware of their behavior and the deliverance of the unbelieving Yahudim who are watching their Torah observance, as they are looking at the Ephraimites coming back to the belief of Yisrael to be acting in an inappropriate manner as a true test of Rav Shaul’s ministry to the lost Sheep of Yisrael and also the Messiahship of our Rebbe Yahshua.

Conclusion

By looking at these Seven Rules of Rabbi Hillel we can conclude that both our Rebbe Melek HaMoshiach Yahshua and Rav Shaul used and were taught these Seven Rules. Rav Shaul clearly uses them in his exegesis of Scripture.

This proves from Scripture that the men who penned the *Brit Chadasha* participated in the Hebraic thought pattern of the sages and rabbis of their time period in interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures. We cannot justify ignoring the culture, historical, religious, social, and intellectual ambiance of this time (Second Temple Period), and try to isolate Yahshua and His talmidim from this environment. The *Middot* were part of everyone's background in how to approach the Torah and Scripture. It is gratuitous to assume our Rebbe Yahshua and all the writers of the Renewed Covenant constituted the exception from the traditional rabbinical viewpoints. If these Rules were used by Rav Shaul and our Rebbe, then we as Messianic Yisrael must also use these same rules to teach, study, and interpret the Scriptures. It will allow us to follow the command given to Timothy to "rightly divide the Word of Truth (*D'var Emet*).

May Yahweh bless your study of His holy Torah.

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