

Kol Ha-Rav May 2018

God says to Moses: "Thou shalt not boil a Kid in its mother's milk." And Moses says: "Ah, you mean we have to have separate Milchig and Fleishig dishes..." And God says, "No. Thou shalt not boil a Kid in its mother's milk." And Moses thinks, and says "Oh, you mean we can't put a piece of cheese on a hamburger." And God replies "No – thou shalt not boil a Kid in its mother's milk." And Moses says, "Yes, now I understand. We have to wait six hours after we eat meat before we can eat dairy." And God says "Fine. Have it your way..."

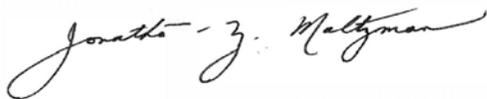
If we had less regulations, would we have a lot more Jews keeping Kosher?

You can make a similar case about Shabbat observance. The Torah merely says "Don't work", and "don't kindle a fire." But along came the Rabbis and asked: "What, exactly, does the Torah mean by work?" And in the Mishnah, they came up with 39 categories of work – each category having several sub-categories. So Jewish law went on to prohibit turning on and off electricity, cooking, carrying objects from one realm to another, writing, using a phone or a computer, driving a car, playing a musical instrument and a hundred other activities. Orthodox communities utilize the legal fiction of an Eruv to make public property into private property by means of stringing wires between telephone poles, thus allowing carrying. Opening an umbrella outside is forbidden because it is considered the equivalent of constructing a building. There is an entire category of things which we are not even allowed to handle on Shabbat – called *Muktzeh* – such as money, or a pen, or tools.

Halacha spends so much time on the "Thou Shalt Nots" that we can easily forget the part about making Shabbat a day of joy i.e. the family meals, the special foods, time spent with friends, being freed from work, and stress, and technology. Would fewer restrictions open the door for a greater number of people to embrace the beauty and brilliance of the Jewish invention of Shabbat?

And there are many other examples. Think about Pesach, and how difficult it can be to make a kitchen Kosher for Passover. Or the Jewish laws of mourning, which require the recitation of Kaddish, with a minyan, every morning and every night for 11 full months for a parent.

I'm not looking for the Easy Way. I'm looking for the Better Way. And that means embracing Tradition, even as I recognize that I still have choices. I don't have to do everything but I can't try to get away with as little as possible. I believe those traditions not only make me stronger, but make me wiser. And make me a better person.



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