



Point of View

Dear Marketplace Friend,

Tradition! Brings to mind ol' Tevia, the Jewish father featured in *Fiddler on the Roof*. He agonized through the decisions of his three daughters' husband selections, always reverting to **Tradition!** for his anchoring point. Without tradition, reasons Tevia, decisions can be as shaky as a fiddler on a roof...

Holidays are past, now. All that's left are the NFC and AFC Championship Games... and the Super Bowl. Then we'll be able to declare 2007 a distant memory; file your 1040 on April 15th, and put the boxes back in the attic. We're done...

Once again, **Tradition!** served me well. As the "old guy" in my family system, my preferences pretty much prevail. Example: the menu for Christmas midday looks like a reprise from Thanksgiving. Turkey, dressing, mashed taters, gravy, yams. For 363 days, I'm nearly carbo-free; on T'giving and Christmas, the limitations lift. Don't EVER mess with the menu on those two days, **Tradition!** demands consistency...

I watched everyone scurrying to do their Christmas shopping. Boy, did I establish a meaningful Bob-o **Tradition!** on that one! When my daughters were in their teens, I observed our Christmas routine. I would break my pick trying to find "just the right gift," watch them open it on Christmas morning...



then drive them to the mall the day after Christmas to exchange it for what they really wanted. *Hmmm...*

About 20 years ago, here's what I determined: the day after Christmas, all of the retail prices dropped by staggering percentages. Old approach: pay retail on the 24th; watch it unwrapped on the 25th... then drive them to the mall to stand in the exchange line on the 26th. *Duh.* New approach: do my Christmas shopping at the ATM. Get the girls what they really wanted: official US Government portraits of early heroes of American History (cash). Slip the bills into envelopes, pass them out around the tree... and then, on the 26th, take them to the mall to buy what they REALLY wanted, and pay wholesale. For two decades, the **Tradition!** has served all of us well. *Tevia had it partly right...*

At the mall, I was entrusted with my three grandsons while Mom & Daughters hit the shops. "Can you handle them?" was the

moms' momentary concern. "Just shop!" was my response. Now, really: three of these guys - ages 9, 7, 6 - with six legs taking them three directions, and shorter than the mean-average of the mall crowds. How could one Old Guy handle THAT challenge? With short people, you have to make a game out of it...

Huddle up, guys: here's the deal. I don't have leashes; only two arms, so we can't hold hands. Mob at Mall disallows walking four abreast. Solution: listen for my voice. Every few minutes, I'm going to raise my voice (*holler*, as they'd say in Huckabee's neighborhood) and say, "**Touch!**" When you hear me say "**Touch!**," you have to physically touch my bod. First one to touch gets a point; at the end of the game - and I say when the end is! - the one with the most points gets a food treat. *Any questions?*

When you're 9 or 7 or 6, games ARE life. They understood the rules. They are fierce competitors. I tried it out a few times before we waded into the multitudes; boy, was I smart! All it took was "Touch!," and my lil' buddies convened at my thigh. At treat time, I awarded a three-way tie for "first." They all won...

That's the way God operates. Jesus compared himself to a *shepherd*, he called us *sheep*. Shepherds are smart; sheep are less (truth be told, they're pretty dumb). Sheep can get themselves into trouble, so shepherds keep their eyes on the sheep. Here's what he described about "life in the mall," for us: *"...the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him*

because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice..." (John 10:3-5)

Every day, I'm reminded that we're in a virtual mob, and the strangers' voices are constantly calling the crowd to follow them. Like you, I march to the sound of a different drummer. Jesus said that we'd know his voice, and he would be watching and reconnecting with us frequently, to keep us on track in the midst of an off-course culture. Boy, am I glad to hear him holler, "Touch!"...

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