

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Re'eh 5784

D. Mordechai Schlachter

Moshe teaches Bnei Yisroel how to avoid straying.

את כל-הדבר אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם אתו תשמרו לעשות לא-תסף עליו ולא תגרע
ממנו: {פ}

“All of the matter that I command you, it is what you shall guard to do. You shall not add upon it and you shall not eliminate from it.” (Devarim 13:1).

This pasuk is clearly attached to the previous three. Why does it not commence with a vav connecting it? Also, the word *davar* “matter” is singular. Should it not read plural, all the matters? What should not be added and what should not be reduced? And why?

This is not the first time the Torah teaches not to add or to take away from the mitzvos in the Torah. Moshe already taught them earlier, לא תספו על-הדבר אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם, ולא תגרעו ממנו לשמר את-מצות ה' אלקיכם אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם: “You shall not add upon the matter that I command you and you shall not eliminate from it, in order to guard the commandments of Hashem, your Lord, that I command you.” (Ibid 4:2). This charge is connected to a teaching that Bnei Yisroel keep all of the Torah (Ibid 4:1). It follows that they should not add or take away from it. Do all and only what Hashem commands.

What does the Torah mean by adding or subtracting? The word to add is qualified in the Torah. “And she added to her birthing, a brother, Hevel.” (Bereishis 4:2). Moshe told Bnei Yisroel, about the Egyptian army, by the Yam Suf “You will no longer continue to see them forever.” (Shmos 14:13). There will be no additions to the times you see them anymore. Noach “in addition sent out the dove from the ark.” (Bereishis 8:10). Yosef was so named because Rochel prayed that Hashem would add a son after him. (Ibid 30:24). Avraham added prayers (ibid 18:29) and a wife (ibid 25:1). Besides numerically, the Torah says, the brothers added hatred to Yosef, more reasons and more severe. The king of Egypt feared that Bnei Yisroel would add numbers and might to Egypt’s enemies. (Shmos 1:10). *סף* means to add numerically and holistically.

The word for reduce, *גרע*, is also qualified in the Torah. When those who were tameh asked about missing korban pesach, they said, למה נגרע לביתי הקרב את-קרבן, “Why should we be reduced the ability to perform this offering?” (Bamidbar 9:7). They were asking why they should have one mitzvah less. Similarly, the daughters of Tzelophchod asked why their father’s name should be reduced just because he had no sons. They were asking why his land stakes should be reduced. Pharaoh told Bnei Yisroel not to reduce their quota of bricks even though he was no longer providing them with straw. (Shmos 5:8). The word is also used when one takes a second wife, his support of her and his obligations to her may not be reduced. She must be treated to the same standard. Conversely, when selling land before the Yovel (when land is returned) the price must be reduced to accommodate the lack of fee simple interest. The pasuk is saying, do not

reduce from the quantity or the quality of the mitzvos. Doing so will reduce the entire Torah.

A question asked, is how can Chazal add restrictions and mitzvos to the Torah when it says twice that nothing should be added? How can they reduce mitzvos when nothing should be reduced? An example is how can Chazal rule that there should be a second day Yom Tov (adding) when Tefillin will not be worn that day (reducing)? How can Chazal add mitzvos like brochos and taking lulav and esrog all days of Yom Tov when the Torah does not say so? The answer is in the wording of the pesukim. The words אָנֹכִי "I" and שָׁמַר "guard" are repeated in both pesukim that teach not to add or subtract. Anochi, means Hashem. Guard means something that is already known and studied. Therefore, the pasuk earlier (Devarim 4:2) is read *You shall not add to the matter that Hashem commanded you.* Hashem taught the Torah so nothing should be added to it. Hashem's Torah cannot be perfected. *And you shall not eliminate from it, to watch and do the commandments of Hashem, your Lord.* Taking away will prevent observance of the Torah. Guarding it means along with all restrictions and observances that Chazal put in place. They did so, only for the sake of being able to actually observe and follow the commandments. *That Hashem commanded you.* By following the additions of Chazal, it is all meant to follow the Torah. Chazal will only create additions that will enhance observance of the Torah. Chazal will never eliminate or reduce any mitzvah d'oreisha (Torah law), because that will be contrary to the authenticity of the Torah.

Our pasuk (ibid 13:1), can be read in this context, too. The Torah says when Hashem destroys all of the enemies living in Eretz Canaan then Bnei Yisroel has to be wary of being lured to the practices of the defeated. (Devarim 12:29-30). הַשָּׂמַר לָךְ מִפְּנֵי תַּבְּנֻקָּשׁ אַחֲרֵיהֶם "Guard yourself lest you seek after them." (Ibid 12:30). Do not inquire after the defeated and find out how they were able to possess the Land while still worshipping idols; how they were able to function and grow and prosper and still be idol worshipers. That is a dangerous road to travel. "Do not act thusly toward Hashem, your Lord." (Ibid 12:31). Even though it seems like they were able to act like that and get away with it, and that is quite enticing, know that their conduct was an abomination to Hashem. What the others in the world do and seem to live good lives from is only an illusion. "They have swept up their sons and daughters in this, they have burned them up by fire." (Ibid). Even though it seems like they are able to sin and worship idols and act in their total "freedom," they have ruined their children and it is unsustainable. Living such a life cannot last through generations. It will deteriorate until it is complete abomination.

In this context the Torah again reminds Bnei Yisroel and says, "It is this entire matter," the matter of seeing that goyim live a better life, "that Hashem / anochi commanded you, to watch it and to do," the entire Torah. "You shall not add upon it and you shall not eliminate from it." Do not think that the Torah can bend. Do not add more holidays that the other nations keep, keep other rituals, observances, or customs that they keep. It seems like it adds to a good life. It does not. Do not eliminate anything from the Torah thinking it unimportant, antiquated, or anachronistic. Keeping the Torah, along with what Chazal added to safeguard its observance, is the only way to assure the quality, quantity, and integrity of the Torah.