



RABBI SHALOM

ROSNER

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Ensuring A “Safer” Torah

In Parshat Re'ah we are instructed for the second time in Sefer Devarim (previously in Va'etchanan), not to add or detract from the mitzvot:

את כל־הדְבָר אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִי מִצְוֶה אֲתֶכֶם אֹתוֹ תִשְׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת לֹא־תִסֹּף עָלָיו וְלֹא תִגְרַע מִמֶּנּוּ: (דברים יג:א)

Everything I command you that you shall be careful to do it. You shall neither add to it, nor subtract from it. (Devarim 13:1)

Rashi offers an example – that one should not add a fifth parsha to the four parshiyot of tefillin. The Rambam (Hilchot Mamrim 2:4), asks how is it that Hazal at times add or limit mitzvot? Is there a clergy exemption? We are one of the only religions that demands of all individuals to fulfill commands, not just priests.

The Rambam explains that just as a doctor at times has to amputate a limb to save a life, so too Hazal are authorized to “cut-off” a mitzva (like Shofar on Shabbat) in order to ensure proper observance of mitzvot in general. So that one will not carry on Shabbat, Hazal initiate a “shev v'al ta'ase” and restrict blowing shofar on Rosh Hashana that falls on Shabbat.

Since Hazal have permission to limit certain mitzvot, we have to be careful not to change a mitzva, like permitting eating milk and meat. Hazal may, however, restrict something as a Rabbinic decree so that the masses avoid engaging in a prohibited activity. For example, although one is Biblically permitted to eat chicken and milk, Hazal can prohibit it, so long as they make it clear that it is a Rabbinic decree.

עשו סייג לתורה

In fact, the very first Mishna in Pirke Avot lists three declarations that Anshe

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K'nesset Ha'Gedola initiated to protect religious observance in exile. They knew that this was the last generation of prophets and that future generations needed certain protection in order to ensure proper observance of mitzvot. One of these declarations is עשו סיג לתורה – to enact certain decrees in order to protect the Torah. Similar to erecting a fence around the Torah to establish a boundary or “gezera” that should not be crossed, lest it lead to a violation of a prohibition. Essentially to ensure a “safer” Torah! (pun intended).

The Meiri has a novel interpretation of this phrase “עשו סיג לתורה”. The Meiri suggests that when one speaks to others, especially when delivering words of Torah, it is crucial that they know their boundaries. That the speaker sizes up his or her audience and addresses them properly.

Not sharing ideas that are too complicated or simple for them to follow. Not speaking too long or short. That his or her message is targeted and within the “boundaries” that are comprehensible to the crowd. One must be careful to address the crowd properly so as to achieve the greatest impact.

“Make a fence around the Torah” means making sure that the Torah is within the grasp of the people. It is not enough to gather knowledge. The mode of transmission of the material is crucial in order to inspire others. Our message needs to be adjusted to the recipient. The way we phrase something to our children may differ from the way we deliver the same message to our comrades. May we be successful not only in our observance of Torah but in our mode of communication of its content. ■

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