

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בשבת



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS
VA'ESCHANAN

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAH BENSOUSSAN

PERFECT PRECEPTS

Moshe Rabbeinu's parting words are continued in *Parshas Va'eschanan*, where he charges *Klal Yisrael* to keep the *mitzvos*, despite whatever outside influences they may encounter. However, before explaining the importance of the *mitzvos*, and the possible pitfalls *Klal Yisrael* may experience in *Eretz Yisrael*, *Moshe Rabbeinu* first warns the *Bnei Yisrael* that one should not do away with, nor add to, any of the *mitzvos*.¹

While it is completely understandable why we are specifically enjoined not to neglect any particular *mitzvah*, why are we told the importance of not adding a *mitzvah*? What harm could there possibly be in finding new ways to serve Hashem?

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch² (1808-1888) writes at length regarding this idea. He points out that the *passuk* is not referring to one who, out of an abundance of caution, decides to fulfill a *mitzvah* in all its possible ways (one example is blowing the *shofar* using different forms of the *תרועה*). Rather, the *passuk* refers to one who decides to add an additional uncalled for aspect of a *mitzvah*. Despite their good intentions ("If four strings of *tzitzis* are good, then five must be great!"), they are not only undermining the *mitzvah* itself, but they are undermining the entire Torah!

Hashem wrote the Torah, and the *mitzvos* that are given to *Klal Yisrael* are already in the ultimate and most perfect form. In no way can any human being come afterwards and 'add' to them, as there is simply nothing to add. If a person were to think that they are indeed making the *mitzvos* 'better,' they are really saying that Hashem did not make them with perfection.

In Rav Hirsch's words, "Whoever adds to them or subtracts from them tampers with Hashem's Word, introduces human opinion into the truth of Hashem's eternal thoughts, and drags Divinely ordained institutions down to the level of human superficiality."

This attitude does indeed undermine the entire Torah. However, once we understand how wonderful and amazing the *mitzvos* are, our entire demeanor and mindset changes. The *mitzvos* are perfect, and we human beings have the opportunity, on a daily basis, to connect to perfection!

¹ *Devarim* 4:2

² Rav S. R. Hirsch on the Torah, *ibid*.

The mitzvos are perfect, and we human beings have the opportunity, on a daily basis, to connect to perfection!

Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Mitzvos! What opportunities! Sadly, perhaps because they are so common, we can lose sight of their value and preciousness. What can we do to remind ourselves of what good fortune we have in our hands?

The first time we get or do something, it is often exciting and stimulating. As time goes on, though, the excitement wanes, and we become less interested in whatever we had.

The trick, then, is to put ourselves in a mindset of 'first time.'¹ But how?

When we know that we have a *mitzvah* coming our way, whether it is *tefillah*, a *chesed*, or anything else, we can sit down *beforehand* and think about what we would do if this were our only opportunity to do this *mitzvah*. How would we approach the *mitzvah*? What would think about, and what would we actually do?

When we use this thought process, it gives a greater appreciation for what we are about to do. Over time, we will accustom ourselves to viewing *mitzvos* as the cherished jewels they truly are.

¹ *Rashi* on *Devarim* 26:16 s.v. הימים הזה



Studying Mussar with the goal of refining one's own middos is an elixir of life. - Rav Sholom Schwadron zt"l, citing Chazon Ish zt"l, Sh'al Avicha V'yagedcha Vol. 3, pg. 4

Get Involved! We Can Only Do What We Do With Your Help!

If you would like to sponsor, or distribute in your shul, please contact us at info@ohr-yisrael.com or call 732-451-GROW (4769)

CONFRONTATION ON THE WATERFRONT

As World War II raged in 1942, American forces and their allies battled the Axis on three continents. At home, every American male between the ages of 18 and 45 had to register with his local draft board.

Married men with children were not sent to the front, but they could be assigned to war-related jobs. Sam Brand, who lived with his wife and children in Washington Heights, New York, was notified by his local board that he had been assigned to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, on the Williamsburg waterfront. He was to report Sunday morning.

From the moment he read the notice, Sam worried about what to do if he was assigned to work on Shabbos. He consulted rabbis and friends and received different ideas on how he should handle the situation. When Sam appeared on Sunday at the navy yard, he felt a mixture of trepidation and determination.

He was commissioned to do the welding of battleship parts, and he was told that he would be paid time-and-a-half for working Saturdays and double for working Sundays. The hourly wage at the time was 75 cents an hour. Sam decided that he would wait a day or two before he told his supervisor that he would not report for work on Shabbos.

There was tension throughout the plant from the stress of manufacturing the battleship parts on hectic deadlines. On Tuesday, Sam told his supervisor that he could not come in on Saturday because he was a Sabbath observer.

The supervisor flew into a rage and shouted sarcastically, "In case you didn't notice, there is a war going on, Brand. Everyone has to show up every day, even you!"

Sam held his ground and explained that he could not violate his Sabbath. "If you find any extra hours for me to work during the week I will be happy to do so, but I will not come in on my Sabbath."

"If you get fired from this job, you'll be sent overseas to the front lines," the supervisor threatened.

Sam tried to reason with him but to no avail. The supervisor walked away defiantly, when suddenly he whirled around. He pointed an accusing finger at Sam and said between clenched teeth, "If you say you're so religious, prove it! Show me your *tzitzis!*" Sam was startled. This supervisor knew about *tzitzis*?

Without saying a word, he lifted up his shirt and picked up his *tallis kattan*. He gathered up his *tzitzis* and held them tenderly in his hands. The supervisor was stunned. "Okay," he muttered, "but you'll only get time-and-a-half for Sunday."

Later that afternoon Sam quietly made the calculation that time-and-a-half meant he would get only \$1.13 an hour on Sunday, instead of \$1.50. What a bargain to remain a *shomer Shabbos*.

**Adapted from "Echoes of the Maggid," by Rabbi Paysach Krohn*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Every living creature needs sustenance, including our *neshamos* in the Next World. The 'food' for our *neshamah* is the *mitzvos*.¹
- Hashem gave us so many *mitzvos* so that through our lifetime, we will certainly perform at least one *mitzvah* with all the proper thoughts, and in all its proper aspects.²

¹ Introduction to *Mishnah Berurah*

² *Rambam* on *Makkos* 3:17, s.v. רבי חנניא בן עקשיא אומר