



**RABBI SHALOM**

**ROSNER**

RAV KEHILLA, NOFEI HASHEMESH  
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# With Respect to Mitzvot - Adding Detracts

לא תוסיפו על הדבר אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם  
ולא תגרעו ממנו (דברים ד:ב)

In Parshat Va'etchanan we are instructed not to add or detract from the commandments. What is wrong with adding? Why not take two etrogim or add a fifth parsha to tefillin. Why is this viewed in a derogatory manner? Why can't kohanim add another blessing when they perform birchat Kohanim? Isn't there a cliché of "the more the merrier"?

The Torah Temima suggests that once one is able to add mitzvot, it will eventually lead to subtracting mitzvot as well. The precise number of mitzvot and the manner in which they are to be performed will not be understood as an exact measure and will

be adjusted in both directions.

Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein, who was the author of the Torah Temima, expands upon this idea in his sefer Tosefet Bracha. He claims that the wording of the pasuk itself indicates that one should not add as it will **result** in one also reducing. The term **result** – is not to be understood as "don't" detract but rather "so that" (למען) it does not lead one to detract.

There are several examples where the simple understanding of the term **לא** (don't) means **למען** (so that). In Parshat Shoftim (Devarim 17:16) it states: **לא ירבה לו סוסים ולא** – a king is prohibited from gathering too many horses, "so that" he does not lead the nation to Egypt (which had an abundance of horses). Similarly, the Torah states: **לא ירבה לו נשים ולא יסור** – a king is prohibited from having an abundance of wives, "so that" his heart not be swayed in the wrong direction. These are but a few examples where the word **לא** is not to be understood as "no" but rather as a lead in to providing the reason for a prohibition.

Our pasuk may be understood in this manner as well. Do not add mitzvot **so that** you do not come to subtract from the mitzvot.

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Perhaps that is the intention of the Gemara in Sanhedrin (29a) that states: כל המוסיף גורע – anyone who adds, will eventually come to detract.

At times, Chazal established gezerot סיג (boundaries) to prevent transgressions. It is important to distinguish between the Rabbinic prohibition and the Biblical law. According to Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, that was the sin of Hava. God commanded Adam not to **eat** the fruit and Hava relayed to the snake that one is prohibited from **touching** the fruit.

May we take care in fulfilling all of the Taryag mitzvot, recognizing they are divine. As the Gemara in Shabbat (21) states: קבעת עיתים לתורה – were you careful to adapt the times (עיתים) to the Torah and not adjust the Torah to the times. ■



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