

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Vaeschanan 5784

D. Mordechai Schlachter

Moshe adjures Bnei Yisroel to be faithful to Hashem and the Torah.

רַק הַשְּׁמֹר לָךְ וְשָׁמַר נַפְשְׁךָ מְאֹד פֶּן־תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ וּפְנֵי־יָסוּרוֹ
מִלְּבַבְךָ כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ וְהוֹדַעְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וּלְבָנֵי בָנֶיךָ:

“Only, you shall guard for yourself and watch over your soul greatly, lest you forget the matters that you have seen with your eyes; lest you turn your heart away – all the days of your life. You shall make them known to your children and your grandchildren.” (Devarim 4:9).

What should be guarded? Why the wording of watching over ones’ soul? What matters did they see with their eyes? And are these independent from passing the mesora along?

This pasuk refers to the Revelation at Har Sinai. Moshe is warning and beseeching Bnei Yisroel to recall that event. He drives home two points. First, Hashem spoke to them at Har Sinai. Second, they should not turn to any other deities or worship. From 4:1 through the end of the parsha, 7:11, Moshe repeats his cautions to keep the Torah, stay away from foreign deities, and remember that Hashem spoke to them on Har Sina. He briefly again states that he cannot go to Eretz Yisroel (ibid 4:21), and he set up the three cities of refuge for the unintentional killer (ibid 4:42-43). This is because Moshe was trying to rectify his sin. He could not go to Eretz Yisroel because he failed to instill in the people the proper faith in Hashem, failed to make the proper kiddush Hashem. Remembering the Revelation at Har Sinai and staying away from any other deities will create that faith.

Moshe, though, does not explain one point. He readily acknowledges that this entire generation is new – the old one all died out. (Ibid 1:36). This generation, that stands before Moshe, are all people that were less than twenty years old, forty years ago. One quarter of them might remember Har Sinai, the remaining do not. How can they “guard and watch” something “they saw with their eyes” when they were too young at the time, or not even born yet?

The word שָׁמַר “guard” means to watch and do something that the person knows about already. This is seen in how Moshe presents the Ten Utterances. Moshe, in his instructions, reminds Bnei Yisroel that Hashem spoke to Bnei Yisroel and gave them the Ten Utterances, personally. (Ibid 5:19). When reiterating the Ten Utterances here, however, it appears the Moshe does not use the exact wording. There are several wording and phrasing discrepancies between here and when originally recorded (Shmos 20:2).

Lest one think that Moshe was just repeating them based on memory or in his own words, it must be stressed that Moshe was giving over the commands exactly as Hashem gave them. The discrepancy in how Moshe recalls the Ten Utterances, and the historical narrative in general – there are many discrepancies there, too – is based on who he is talking to.

Hashem was talking a nation fifty days out of centuries of bondage and forced hard labor. Much was new to them and many laws had to be explained. A lot of contextual explanation was needed. They, certainly, could not digest the entire Torah in a short period of time. It had to be taught to them over time and in ways they could understand. The Torah records it like that, and also in wording that is meant to hold up and stand up to time and all future generations.

זָכוֹר אֶת-יְוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ: "Recall the Shabbos Day, to sanctify it." (Shmos 20:8). Shabbos, at the time of the Ten Utterances, was new to Bnei Yisroel. It was given to Bnei Yisroel as they traveled to Har Sinai. They could recall the day of Shabbos. That was about it. They still did not know the nuances of its laws and ordinances. The rules were still being taught. Therefore, they recalled the Shabbos Day. Forty years later, Moshe is talking to a generation that knows about Shabbos. They grew up with Shabbos and they were keeping Shabbos weekly. שְׁמֹר אֶת-יְוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ: "Guard the Shabbos Day, to sanctify it, just as Hashem, your Lord, commanded you." (Devarim 5:12). Bnei Yisroel – now knowing all about Shabbos and its laws – can guard it. They can keep the laws, they can observe them, and they can protect them. Chazal can make rules to prevent Bnei Yisroel from getting within the margin of error of violating the laws of Shabbos. The Shabbos Day can now be guarded with its rules, ordinances, and laws. Further, Moshe adds "just as Hashem...commanded you." Hashem could not say that in the Ten Utterances, because not all of the Shabbos laws were commanded yet, at that time.

"Only, you shall guard for yourself and watch over your soul greatly, lest you forget the matters that you have seen with your eyes." Moshe was talking to this generation. Yes, most of them did not see the Revelation and of those that did, many were too young to recall it. However, they heard about it from their fathers and they knew about it from the Torah. Moshe could not have fabricated an instance where the entire nation heard Hashem's voice if none did. All those 59 to 50 years of age would object and say they do not recall such a thing. The others would say they never heard about it. Therefore, Moshe was merely reiterating what they already knew to be true from their own observance or from their parents' actual personal experiences. They can guard and watch that concept by keeping the Ten Utterances and the rest of the Torah that Hashem already gave them. It also saved their soul because the Torah is the life-giving force. However, if they do not practice the Torah then they can easily forget. If they do not pass it on to the next generation, it will be forgotten and lost.

"Lest you turn your heart away—all the days of your life." The *trop* (Torah cantillations) make it clear that "all the days" is qualifying turning away. Turn away one time in a lifetime violates this *pasuk*.

"You shall make them known to your children and your grandchildren" This must be passed on to the next generations. Otherwise, the Revelation was for naught. It will be forgotten and lost. The Torah will just be words on a paper. It will not be the living Torah. The faith that the Torah is Hashem given is so important, life depends on it. The soul of the person and nation depends on it.