

You shall not add... nor shall you subtract from it. (4:2)

The Torah is complete. It requires no addition and no subtraction. If Hashem has commanded us to perform a *mitzvah* in a specific manner, it is perfect in the manner it was given. To append or amend is to impugn the integrity of Hashem's command. Thus, the *mitzvah* of *Lulav* is comprised of four species – not two or five; *Tzitzis* are fringes on the four corners of a garment – not five or three. While it is understandable that one may not diminish from Hashem's word, but what is wrong with giving a little extra? Why place restrictions on augmentation? Indeed, why not allow for "creativity" in *mitzvah* observance?

The *Sefer HaChinuch* puts it quite simply when he writes: "For the Master Who commanded us concerning the (observance of the) Torah is the essence of perfection. All of His actions and imperatives are perfect and good. (Therefore) to add is to decrease – and this is certainly true if one decreases." With these succinct words, the *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that making any change, either by adding or subtracting from Hashem's words, makes the statement: the Torah is not perfect. Its Divine Author has given us something upon which we can improve. This is the gist of his explanation, but it goes deeper than that.

In his *sefer*, *Ikvei Eliyahu*, **Horav Akiva Adler, Shlita**, draws upon the exhaustive educational and ethical discourses of *Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl*, with whom he studied, gleaning significant lessons from them. He delves into the idea of *Bal Tosif*, adding to the *mitzvah*. In *Sefer Bereishis*, we find the tragic consequences of such erroneous behavior. When the primordial serpent attempted to convince Chavah to partake of the forbidden fruit, she replied, "Of the fruit of the tree which is in the center of the garden, G-d has said, 'You shall neither eat of it nor touch it, lest you die'" (*Bereishis* 3:3). *Rashi* observes that here Chavah was appending Hashem's command. The Almighty forbade them only from eating – not touching. The result of this seemingly minor addition was dire. By adding, she actually decreased, for, when the serpent pushed her against the tree and nothing happened, it said, "Just as you did not die from touching it, so you will not die from eating of it." This was to convince her that Hashem only wanted to intimidate them into not eating. They would, however, not die.

The serpent is the symbol of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, which seeks to trip us up at every juncture. We derive from this episode the ramifications of adding to Hashem's perfection. Yet, we may wonder why Hashem punished Chavah for her actions. Her purpose in adding was to cordon off the *mitzvah* with greater scope. Thus, she was distancing herself even further from the remote possibility of sin. How did this expression of self-improvement backfire to the point that it was the catalyst for her sin?

The *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, explain that the Torah is *matim*, corresponds, perfectly with the strengths and weaknesses of the human being – for whom it serves as the blueprint for life. *Mistakel Hakadosh Baruch Hu b'Oraisa ubara alma*, "Hashem looked into the Torah and then created the world (mankind). Every *mitzvah* is custom-made to fit perfectly with man's nature,

proclivity and character. Therefore, when one changes the Torah, he undermines his own ability to carry out its commands properly.

This was the serpent's objective in manipulating Chava's addendum to Hashem's command. The serpent was acutely aware that once a human being becomes personally involved in *mitzvah* "enhancement," it is the beginning of his journey on the road to sin. Once Chavah made that slight addition, the serpent knew exactly what to do to take her down.

Rav Adler applies this lesson to child-rearing and to all areas of educating a child. Parents and educators must weigh their instructions to-- and demands of-- their children/students. Every demand must be consistent with the child's ability and total psychological profile. One should not "choke" a child by demanding too much, or allow the child to waste away by cutting back on expectations and demands. Every added responsibility or demand can become the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. Who does not know a family that has fallen victim to this inappropriate and unforgivable manner of raising children?

The *Talmud Megillah* 31b relates that when Rechavam became king following the passing of his father, Shlomo *Hamelech*, the nation entreated him to ease up on their yoke. The people claimed that they were overworked and could not continue for long at this rate. Rechavam turned to his royal advisors who were divided into two groups: the older generation and the younger generation. The older advisors were far more experienced than the younger advisors. They claimed that Rechavam should listen to the demands of the people. This would solidify and harmonize his monarchy. In contrast, the younger advisors felt that a nation becomes strong when people work hard, when strong demands are made of people. Rechavam was a good person, but a weak king. He listened to inexperience, which resulted in rebellion and a chasm in the nation.

Another lesson can be derived from *Bal Tosif* and *Bal Tigra*. The primary purpose of *mitzvah* observance is to immerse oneself totally in servitude to Hashem. The greatest goal for a Jew is to achieve the appellation of *avda d'Kudshah Brich Hu*, to be "A servant of the Holy One, Blessed be He." A slave abrogates his selfhood and devotes himself completely to his master, 24/7. He does not have his own will. He is subservient to his master in all ways. Thus, when a person makes changes in the Torah, he undermines its very essence, making a farce of his subservience to Hashem. He does not belong to Hashem; on the contrary, Hashem belongs to him! This attitude ultimately leads to rebellion.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen* were our quintessential leaders. Regarding them, the Torah attests, *shelo shinu*, "they made no changes." They followed Hashem's command unequivocally. So should we.