

## **Veschanan -Adding is Subtracting** **by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh**

In Devarim 4:2 and 13:1, the Torah states that we are to follow all of Hashem's commandments and not to add or subtract. Rashi explains that these verses are talking about adding a fifth parsha to tefillin or a fifth set of Tzitzis or similar examples. We are to follow the Torah exactly as it was given to us. In both cases, the prohibition of adding and subtracting is placed next to some facet of the prohibition of avodah zara in our parsha we are reminded of the incident of worshipping Baal Peor. Why this juxtaposition? Furthermore, it is very easy to see why we cannot subtract. But why can we not add? After all we are doing what Hashem commanded us plus more.

My Rosh Yeshiva, Harav Dovid Feinstein, Shlita, explains that when we add to what Hashem commanded to us it is not only wrong but on the road to avodah zara. This is true even if the additions are leshaim shamayim. Rav Feinstein quotes from the Rambam in the very beginning of the halachos of avoda zara that avoda zara developed from such a concept. In the days of Enosh, people started giving the sun, moon, stars and the celestial beings special honor. They reasoned that all of these bodies were Hashem's servants and just as honoring a king's servants brings honor to the king, so too, honoring Hashem's servants is bringing honor to Hashem. This honor and so-called mitzvah that people took upon themselves degenerated into avoda zara and spread throughout the entire world. We see this in the way almost all primitive cultures place an emphasis on worshiping the various forces of nature. Rav Dovid Feinstein further explains that just as we see how the world was corrupted by making new mitzvos that Hashem did not give us, so too, it will always be that way

anytime we add to what Hashem commanded us. If we start to make up mitzvos and redefine what Hashem wants from us, we then are really starting to worship something other than Hashem. Such a path will sooner or later not only lead to avoda zara but the worst forms of it such as Baal Peor which was worshipped in the most disgusting ways. As almost all wrong paths, they may start in seemingly innocent ways, but they 'graduate' to the worst things. The only way to be uplifted and grow properly in our service of Hashem is to follow the guidelines that Hashem gave us. Only by following his guidelines do we become holy and worthy of being Hashem's children.