## אלְמוֹד וּלְלְמֵּד וּלְלְמֵּד and יְשְׁנְּוְתְּם - Learning, Teaching, and "Sharpening" in Parashat Va'ethanan Rabbi Eliot Malomet August 13, 2022 16 Av 5782

Nothing conjures tedium and challenge more than the study of grammar. But without an understanding of Hebrew grammar, we won't fully understand the Hebrew text. In this week's Parasha, the root לַבְּבָּרָהְיִּלְּלְּבִּוֹרְיִּלְּבְּׁבִּרְּהָּ (learn/teach) occurs eight times. לְלְבִּוֹרְיִּלְ (kal infinitive) is to learn. לְלְבִּיִּרְ (pi'el infinitive) is to teach. Now that Moses is barred from entering the land, he understands that he will no longer be able impart God's instructions in person. What's he going to do? Answer: Teach. As a teacher - מְּלְבֶּיִרְ - Moses will teach the people what they need to know so that they will be able to live in the land. The greatest challenge of teaching, however, is retention. Without review and comprehension, it is very difficult to keep what we learn in our minds. True, some exceptional people can retain things as soon as they learn them, but most of us are not capable of that. Hence, the Torah's emphasis on learning, remembering, not forgetting. It is fascinating to note that in the Torah, the root לַבְּבָּרָ is found nowhere else but in Deuteronomy (17 times). Teaching and learning are central to Deuteronomy and that in turn shaped all of Judaism. We do not need necessarily to be "learned" but we always need to be "learning." Below are the different grammatical forms of יַרָּמָּר. in this parasha. Shabbat Shalom!

ל.מ.ד.	Verse in Hebrew	Verse in English
<mark>מְלַמֵּד</mark>	(ד:א) וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵׁל	(4:1) And now, O Israel,
I am teaching	שָׁמַע אֶל־הְחָקִים ׁ וָאֶל־הַמִּשְׁפַּטִים	hearken to the laws and to the regulations
Pi'el - intensive.	אֲשֶׁר <mark>אֲנֹכֵי מְלַמֵּד</mark> אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשֻׂוֹת	that <mark>I am teaching</mark> you to observe,
1st person masc. singular participle.	לָמַעַן תָּחְיֹּוּ	in order that you may live
singular paracipier	וּבָאתֶם וְירִשְׁתָּם אֶת־הָאָָרֶץ	and enter and take possession of the land
	אָשֶׁר ה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם נֹתַן לָכֶם:	that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving to you.

**Comment:** Moses' appeal to overturn God's verdict barring him from the entering the land has been denied. Having been told *not to speak of the matter again* Moses changes course and becomes "teacher". The explicit purpose of his teaching is to shape the people and create a sustainable society, so that they will live and thrive in the land based on God's law. But implicitly he is saying that *it is the learning is that gives us life. The more learning, the more life.* 

<mark>לַבַּּלְדְתִּי</mark>	(ד:ה) רַאָהוּ <mark>לֹמֶּדְתִּי</mark> אַתְכָּם	(4:5) See, <mark>I taught you</mark>
I taught	חקים ומשפטים כאשר צוני ה אלהי	laws and regulations as the Lord my God has commanded me,
Pi'el - intensive.	לַעשות בַּן בַּקרב הַאֹרץ	to do thus, amid the land
1st person masc. singular perfect.	אַשֶּׁר אַתָּם בָּאָים שָׁמָה לְרשִׁתָּה:	

**Comment:** God commands. But Moses teaches. The people are terrified of God and that is why Moses functions as God's intermediary. But is Moses delivering God's commandments word-for-word, exactly verbatim? How much is God's and how much of is Moses'? We don't actually know. By *teaching* God's commandments Moses is also *interpreting* them, even if it is only in the way he intones the words. All teaching is in fact, interpretation. Thus Moses is the first darshan-preacher, the first parshan-commentator, truly our first rabbi. Moshe Rabberry

Moses is the first aarsnan-preacher, the first parsnan-commentator, truly, our first rabbi. Moshe Rabbehu.			
<mark>יִלְמְדְוּך</mark>	(ד:י) יוֹם אֲשֶּׁר עָמַׁדְתָּ	(4:10) the day that you stood	
they may	לפְנֵי ה אֱלֹהֶּיךּ בְּחֹרֵב	before the presence of the Lord your God at Horev,	
learn	בֶּאֱמֵּר ה אֵלֵי	when the Lord said to me:	
Kal - simple. 3rd	הַקְהֶל־לִי אֶת־הָעָּם	Assemble the people to me,	
person masc. plural imperfect.	וָאַשְׁמִצֵם אֶת־דְּבָרֵי	that I may have them hear my words,	
יִל <u>מֶּלְוּן:</u>	<mark>אֲשֶׁר יִלְמְדֿוּך</mark> לְיִרְאָה אֹתִׁי	<mark>that they may learn</mark> to hold me in awe	
they are to	כָּל־הַיָּמִים	all the days	
teach	אֲשֶׁר הַם חַיִּים עַל־הָאֲדָמָה	that they are alive on the land,	
Pi'el - intensive	וְאֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם <mark>יְלַמֵּדְוּךְ:</mark>	—and their children, <mark>they are to teach!</mark>	
3rd person plural			
imperfect.			

**Comment:** Mount Sinai looms large in the story not only because of the content of the *Ten Utterances* but because of the overwhelming experience there, the mountain on fire, the billowing smoke, the thunder and the sounds. The purpose of the experience was not only to hear the *Utterances*, but to *learn to fear God*. In other words, Sinai would be so powerful that it would imprint them forever, and they in turn, would *teach that fear of God* to their own children. There is slight rhetorical trick here. The actual people who stood at Horev (Sinai) are already long gone,

and in this moment, Moses is talking to their children. By conflating his present audience with the ones who actually stood at Sinai, Moses artfully gets them to see themselves as if they were the ones who stood there.

to teach Pi'el - intensive. The infinitive form of the verb. (see also 6:1)

(ד:יד) ואֹתי צוה ה בַּעֵת הַהָּוא <mark>ללמד</mark> אָתִכֶּם חָקִים וּמִשְׁפַּטִים

(4:14) And me, the Lord commanded at that time to teach you laws and regulations לעשתכם אתם בארץ for you to observe them

:אַשֶּׁה לְרִשְׁחָה אַ שֶּׁה עַבְרִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁחָה in the land that you are crossing into to possess.

Comment: Like all great teachers, Moses is differentiated from his "students" by age, power, authority, and so much more. He is their teacher, not their peer. But the critical factor that differentiates Moses and the people here is that they will be entering the land and he will not. As such, the laws will always be an abstraction for him whereas for the people they will be concrete.

וּלִמַדְתֵּם vou are to learn kal - simple. 2nd person plural masc. perfect

(ה:א) וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֱל־כַּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל ׁ וַיִּאמֶר אַלָהָם שָׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַחָקִים וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים שָׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַחָקִים אָשֶׁר אָנֹכֶי דֹבֵר בְּאָזְנִיכֶם הַיָּוֹם **וּלְמַדְתָּב** אֹתַם וּשָׁמַרָתָּם לַעֲשֹׁתָם:

(5:1) Moshe called all Israel [together] and said to them: Hearken, O Israel, to the laws and the regulations that I am speaking in your ears today! You are to learn them, you are to take care to observe them!

Comment: While Moses is commanded to teach, לְלְמֵּד , the people are commanded to learn, לְלְמֵּדֹך . Moses issues the rules. He speaks them into their ears. Once the words are inside them, they are to learn them. Once they have been learned and understood, they are observed. Moses is not asking here for obedience. He's asking for partnership. A slave obeys orders. A partner becomes *part* of you through learning and conversation.

you are to teach them pi'el - intensive. 2nd person singular masc. imperfect

(ה:כז) וָאַמַּה פֿה עַמִד עַמַּדִי ואַדבָּרָה אֵלֵידְּ אַת כַּל־הַמִּצְוָה וְהַחָקִים וְהַמִּשִׁפָּטִים אַשֵּׁר <mark>תּלַמָּדֶם</mark> ועַשִּׂוּ בַאַּרִץ אַשַׁר אַנֹכֵי נֹתָן לָהָם לִרשִׁתָּה:

(5:27) *As for you,* remain-standing here beside me, that I may speak to you all the commandment, the laws and the regulations that you are to teach them, that they may observe [them] in the land that I am giving them to possess.

**Comment:** The context of this verse is important. When God issues the *Ten Utterances* the people are so completely overwhelmed that they are terrified they will be consumed by the fire of God's presence. They turn to Moses and ask him to be their intermediary so that they will remain alive. God hears their plea and agrees that, from now on, He will speak to Moses, and then Moses will *teach* the people what God said to him. Perhaps this is what is meant earlier in this parasha when it says, לְפָנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׁרָאֵל This is the Torah-teaching that Moses placed before the Children of Israel. (4:44) God gives the instruction to Moses and Moses places it before Israel. God speaks to Moses. Moses teaches Israel. There's a difference.

<mark>ושנותם</mark> Teach **Diligently** 

(ו:ז) <mark>ושׁנַנְהַם</mark> לְבָנִיךְ וְדַכַּרְתַּ בָּם בְּשָׁבְתָּךְ בְּבֵיתֶּךְ וּבְלֶכְתָּךְ בַּלֶּרְתִּ וְבְשָׁכְבָּהָ וּבְקוּמֶהְ: (6:7) You are to teach diligently your children and are to speak of

in your sitting in your house and in your walking in the way, in your lying down and in your rising up.

Comment: ישנותם does not occur anywhere else in the entire Bible. We know this word from in the Sh'ma and we usually translate it as: you are to teach them diligently. But the word משנה comes from שנה which means to sharpen or to whet the way one sharpens a knife on a whetting stone. Thus, according to the Sh'ma, Teaching is a constant process of *sharpening* and *resharpening*. The parent is to be constantly engaged in a process or clarifying and refining the words that God commanded this day that were placed on your heart. Which words? Well, if you read the Sh'ma paragraph in its original context in the Torah, it's reasonable to suggest that these words, קַּקְבָּרִים הַאָּלָה are the משרת הקברים - the Ten Utterances because they were just re-stated by Moses right before this passage! The Sh'ma is not simply a declaration that God is One. It is a call for total loyalty, devotion, and commitment, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. The way to demonstrate that totality is to place these words (ie. The Ten Utterances, the single most important set of instructions in human history that define how to live and create a moral society in fulfilment of God's will) on your heart. And because these Utterances are so crucial, you need to transmit them to your children diligently by talking about them constantly, by sharpening your understanding of them, by teaching, refining, rehearsing, reciting, and interpreting as if you were constantly whetting a blade. לשנותב It has to be a constant process when you are at home or on the road, or at the limits of your consciousness, when you lie down and when you rise up. Learning and Teaching ללמוד וּלְלָמֶּדְ is a crucial theme in Deuteronomy. All of life depends on it. In Judaism you learn...in order to live, and you live... in order to learn.