

וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם – Vehshinantam

-Ryan Parsons-

I can remember vividly sitting in high school algebra. I hated it, and I rebelled in the only way I could: I challenged the relevancy of algebra. “This is stupid! I am never going to use this in the REAL world!” Years later, I found myself programming a quad pump IV station with a dosage calculation that would inevitably keep my patient alive or end their life. I needed to get that mathematical equation right. Low and behold! The dosage calculation was...you guessed it...algebra. It was clearly an “aha” moment for me.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 (ESV)

4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **5** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. **6** And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. **7** You shall **teach them diligently** to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

English translators have used a few different phrases to try to communicate the Hebrew word for *teach them diligently*. Vehshinantam (וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם) has been translated: to teach diligently, to impress, or to make sure your children learn them. As one rabbi has reflected, the goal of teaching was to teach well enough that the knowledge is on the tip of their tongues. This Hebrew word is only used once in this form. Its root word means: to sharpen or to prepare for action.

Scholars have stated that in ancient times, covenantal conditions and stipulations were passed on so that the following generations would know and pursue them diligently. Moses, as he was preparing Israel for the conquest of the promised land, suggested teaching in a way that considered the future generations of God’s people. Not only was this education focused on immediate results, but it also included a long term vision; thinking of and preparing for subsequent generations to remember God and His ways.

As we have looked at the Shema, we have discussed listening to God, recognizing the one and only God, loving Him with every fiber of our being, and having God’s word tattooed on our hearts. But what good is any of that if it dies with us?

Moses issued a command and a challenge to God’s people as a whole. He said, “You are responsible for making sure the children are equipped for the future, so that God’s people might continue in faithfulness.” The question for all of us is: How are we deploying our giftedness as teachers (Ro. 12:7) to ensure that our kids know God and know His ways?

Teach on!