

## Speaking of Talking

### *Studies in the Shema, Part 7*

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Rob Vanhoff

“And [you] shall talk of them...” Deuteronomy 6:7

So reads the New King James translation of the Hebrew phrase **בַּם וּדְבַרְתָּ** *vedibbarta bam*. Appropriately, the verb *dibber* here is variously rendered as “speak” or “talk” in several English versions, though I prefer the former. Still, I am unsatisfied with the renderings of this phrase in the KJV, NASB, ESV, NIV, CEB, Old JPS, The Message paraphrase, and even the Artscroll Stone Edition.

What do these widely circulated versions share? They all translate the Hebrew letter ‘bet’ with the English “of” or “about,” resulting in *bam* being rendered as “of/about them” and therefore *dibbarta bam* as “speak/talk of them.” Why does this matter to me? Is it not a good thing for parents to fill the home and community with discussions about Scripture?

Would that the world be filled with such conversation! However, in this case I believe there is more to be mined from this simple snippet from the Shema’. Consider the reading offered by the New JPS (2000): “Recite them...” This has quite a different tone. But while “recite” is indeed a plausible rendering of *dibbarta*, it is not what attracts me to this translation. Rather, what I like here is the recognition of the letter ‘bet’ as a direct object marker. Instead of “and you shall speak of/about them” we get “and you shall speak them...”

What is the difference? For me, the command to “speak them” means that I read, speak, and recite Scripture as written, without comment. To “speak of them” almost implies that I am merely commenting upon or sharing the significance “these words” have had in my own life. Certainly both have their place. But which is more powerful?

My point is that Scripture, read aloud or recited from memory, is a powerful sword (Hebrew 4:12). Recall that in His temptation in the wilderness, Messiah Yeshua simply recited Torah, without commentary. I am convinced that this was the very “bread” He fed on for the 40 days! Let us not forget that we have these same, precious words. And if on occasion we do not immediately grasp the meaning of this or that passage, we need not be concerned. In all cases, let us remember to hold the actual words of Scripture in highest regard, and to allow for the Ruach haKodesh to work in and through us as we utter His text. As it says in Joshua, “Do not let the book of this Torah depart from your lips...” (Joshua 1:8)