



Yeshivat Ma'alot
Parashat Matot- Masei
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ישיבת מעלות
 פרשת מטות – מסעי
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Turning Everything into Torah

This week's Parasha, Matot-Masay, opens with the laws of nedarim, oaths. As an introduction to the laws of nedarim, the Torah says the following¹: "And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the children of Yisrael, saying, this is the thing which Hashem has commanded. If a man is to vow a vow to Hashem, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that he says."

The medieval commentator, the Rashbam, finds great difficulty in this pasuk. How could it be that Moshe instructs the leaders as to the laws of nedarim without first being instructed by Hashem?

Chazal² explain the opening pasuk of the parasha in the following manner. When Moshe tells the leaders "zeh hadavar", "this is the thing which Hashem has commanded", it is not that Moshe is relaying a message, rather Moshe is prophesizing on a very high level. All of the other prophesies to the different prophets begin with the words "ko amar", "thus spoke", yet Moshe's prophesy begins with "zeh hadavar" because he is on a higher spiritual level. Unlike the other prophets who did not always have totally clear visions, Moshe saw every one of his prophesies as clear as daylight. Chazal describe that when Moshe spoke, it was not him who did the talking, rather the Divine Presence within him. In essence, he was a means by which the words of the Divine Presence were conveyed. Based on this, it is understood why Moshe commanded the leaders of Bnei Yisrael the laws of nedarim without waiting for Heavenly instruction; there was no need for such instruction because the Divine Presence spoke through him.

With this said, there is an obvious question that must be asked; why did Chazal choose to teach this to us in the parasha of nedarim? What special connection is there between Moshe's prophesy and the laws of nedarim?

¹ Bamidbar 30, 2-3

² Sifri, Bamidbar, 153

Based on a pasuk at the end of this week's parasha, Chazal³ learn that the mitzvot consist only of what was given at Har Sinai, and the no new mitzvot can be added by prophets or other people. However, this is only true within the realm of the mitzvot given to the Nation. An individual is able to "add a mitzvah". When a person takes a neder, an oath, to do a certain action or to refrain from a certain action, this new obligation is considered a mitzvah, and if the person fails fulfilling this neder, he has not only violated his neder, but has also violated a mitzvah.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, the great- grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, expounded on this idea⁴. A person has the power within him to turn everything in the world into Torah. By making a neder towards an object, the object becomes part of a mitzvah, as explained above. Therefore this object has entered the realm of Torah. Through the simple act of making a neder, one has the power to turn almost anything in the world to Torah.

Just as Moshe was able to "add mitzvot" because the Divine Presence spoke through him, so too every individual has the potential within himself to be his own personal Moshe; he too can add mitzvot and turn the entire world into Torah.

Aside from being applicable to the individual, this lesson is also applicable to how we view certain ideas and concepts in the modern world. What exactly are the boundaries of Torah? For example, how do we view medicine, is it part of the realm of Torah or is it an everyday matter? The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat⁵ relates that Raba, the son of Rav Huna, wanted to go learn from the renowned sage Rav Chisda. When he arrived and heard Rav Chisda speak about health issues, he felt this was a waste of his time. He had come to have an intellectually and spiritually uplifting experience, and to his dismay found himself listening to what sounded like a lecture in physiology. Rav Huna rebuked his son and said "Rav Chisda is teaching about life and you think it is mundane?!" This response teaches us that everything is Torah, from the deepest spiritual teachings to lessons on human anatomy, and everything in between. One must be able to see the light of the Torah in everything, and be able to understand what the Torah wants to teach us with regard to every issue and subject. This is in essence what the laws of nedarim are coming to teach us. Everything can be turned to be Torah.

We must pave the way that connects the Torah to the mundane. By doing so, we are able to see and understand exactly what the Torah wants from us in each and every situation. By doing this, all of our actions will be connected to Torah, and there won't be any contradiction between living a life of Torah and living within the boundaries of the everyday world.

³ Megillah 2a

⁴ Likutey Halachot, Hilchot Nedarim, 2

⁵ 82a