

Discourse 38

*“Vayedaber Moshe el Roshei HaMatot... -
Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes...”*

Delivered on Shabbat Parshat Matot-Masei,
Shabbat Mevarchim Menachem-Av, 5726
By the grace of *HaShem*, blessed is He,

1.

The verse states,²⁴¹⁷ “Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the children of Israel, saying: This is the thing that *HaShem*-יהוה has commanded: If a man makes a vow etc.” Now, we must understand²⁴¹⁸ the matter of vows (*Nedarim*) in general. For, it states in Talmud Yerushalmi,²⁴¹⁹ “Is it not enough what the Torah forbade you, that you want to forbid other things from yourself?” [That is], why should a person make the permissible forbidden to him?

We also must understand why this Torah portion was specifically said to the tribal heads, unlike all other Torah portions which were said to all of Israel. Rashi comments on this stating, “He showed respect to the princes by teaching them first, and then [taught] all the children of Israel,” and adds, “How do we know that this was so of **all** his declarations [in *HaShem* ’s-יהוה Name]? Because the verse states,²⁴²⁰ ‘Aharon and all the Princes of the community returned to him and Moshe spoke to them. After that,

²⁴¹⁷ Numbers 30:2

²⁴¹⁸ With respect to the coming section, see the beginning of the discourse entitled “*Vayedaber... HaMatot*” 5675 (*Hemshech* 5672 Vol. 2 p. 1,069).

²⁴¹⁹ Talmud Yerushalmi, *Nedarim* 9:1; Also see *Likkutei Sichot* Vol. 13 p. 107 and on (from this gathering).

²⁴²⁰ Exodus 34:31-32

all the children of Israel approached him [and he commanded them everything that *HaShem*-יהו"ה had spoken to him on Mount Sinai.”]

However, we still must understand why the Torah notifies us of this (that “he showed respect to the princes by teaching them first”) specifically in the Torah portion that deals with vows (*Nedarim*). Rashi explains, “Why is this stated here? To teach us that one who is expert in the laws can annul vows etc.” We therefore must understand this.

We also must understand what Rabbeinu Bachaye wrote,²⁴²¹ that the Torah portion about vows is juxtaposed [directly after] to the Torah portion about the festivals, because at the end of the Torah portion of the festivals the verse states,²⁴²² “These are what you shall make for *HaShem*-יהו"ה on your appointed festivals, besides your vows and your free-will offerings etc.”

However, at first glance, this is not understood, because in general, the matter of the festivals does not come by way of vow. On the contrary, at the conclusion of the Torah portion about the festivals it states, “besides your vows etc.” This being so, what connection is there between vows and the festivals?

2.

The explanation is that, as known,²⁴²³ the Holy One, blessed is He, desired a dwelling for Himself in the lower worlds. That is, *HaShem* 's-יהו"ה Supernal intention is specifically to dwell below. This is why the Jewish people must engage in matters of this lowly world, to refine and clarify them. From this it is understood that the matter of vows (*Nedarim*), which is the matter

²⁴²¹ Numbers 30:2

²⁴²² Numbers 29:39

²⁴²³ Midrash Tanchumah Naso 16; Bechukotai 3; Bereishit Rabba Ch. 3; Bamidbar Rabba Ch. 13; Tanya, Ch. 36

of abstinence, is unnecessary. This is as our sages, of blessed memory, taught,²⁴²⁴ “Vows are a fence to abstinence,” because by separating oneself from the permissible, he neither refines nor clarifies them.

This is like the well-known teaching of the Baal Shem Tov²⁴²⁵ on the verse,²⁴²⁶ “If you see the donkey (*Chamor*-חמור) of one you hate crouching under its burden... help you shall help him.” He explained that the manner of toiling in service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is not by way of breaking the materiality (*Chumriyut*-חומרייט), but on the contrary, “help you shall help him.” That is, the toil and service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה must be done together with one's body and animalistic soul, to refine and clarify them, so that they too will ascend to Godliness.

This is why Torah states that what the Torah forbade you is enough, and one should not make the permitted forbidden to himself, being that the matter of affecting refinements (*Birurim*) is *HaShem*'s-יהו"ה ultimate Supernal intent.

However, all the above applies to “man who walks upright (*Yashar*),”²⁴²⁷ meaning that he goes in the straight path etc. However, for one who has sinned, blemished, and left the path, and he sees in himself that he is incapable of refining this [particular] thing, the solution is to abstain from it by way of taking a vow forbidding himself from benefitting from this permissible thing.

This is like the words of his honorable holiness, my father-in-law, the Rebbe, who said that a well-known [Chassidic] saying is,²⁴²⁸ “What is forbidden is forbidden, and what is permitted is

²⁴²⁴ Mishnah Avot 3:13

²⁴²⁵ Igrot Kodesh of the Rebbe Rayatz Vol. 3, p. 325, copied in HaYom Yom for the 28th of Shvat; Keter Shem Tov, Hosafot, Section 21.

²⁴²⁶ Exodus 23:5

²⁴²⁷ See Ecclesiastes 7:29

²⁴²⁸ Sefer HaSichot 5705 p. 72; Igrot Kodesh of the Rebbe Rayatz, Vol. 4, p. 74 (copied in HaYom Yom for the 25th of Adar II).

dispensable.” This is because in his state and standing, it can be that not only will he not refine the food, but on the contrary, the food will draw him down and lower him all the way down etc. Therefore, for him it is necessary to abstain and forbid it to himself.

3.

The matter of the two above-mentioned manners as they are in the worlds in general, is the difference between the world of Emanation (*Atzilut*) and the worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action (*Briyah, Yetzirah, Asiyah*). The world of Emanation (*Atzilut*) is a refined world, about which the verse states,²⁴²⁹ “Evil shall not dwell with You.” It also is called “the world of Oneness” (*Olam HaAchdut*).²⁴³⁰ This is because in the world of Emanation (*Atzilut*), not only are “He and His life force one,” but also “He and His organs are one.”²⁴³¹

In contrast, this is not so in the worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action (*Briyah, Yetzirah, Asiyah*), about which the verse states,²⁴³² “From there it divided,” meaning, that is where the matter of division begins, to the point of the existence of evil etc., in that even in the world of Creation (*Briyah*), at the very least, there already is a minority of evil.²⁴³³

From this it is understood that the matter of vows (*Nedarim*) only applies in the levels of the worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action (*Briyah, Yetzirah, Asiyah*). In contrast,

²⁴²⁹ Psalms 5:5; Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar 3c and on; Also see Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gate of Unity, Ch. 54, and elsewhere.

²⁴³⁰ See Avodat HaKodesh of Rabbi Meir Ibn Gabbai, Vol. 1, Ch. 2; Likkutei HaShas of the Arizal, Mesechet Shabbat, and elsewhere.

²⁴³¹ Introduction to Tikkunei Zohar 3b

²⁴³² Genesis 2:10; See Torah Ohr, Bereishit 3a; Va’era 57a, and elsewhere.

²⁴³³ See Etz Chayim, Shaar 43 (Shaar Tziyur Olamot), Hakdamah L’Drush; Also see Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gate of Unity, Ch. 54 *ibid*.

from the perspective of the world of Emanation (*Atzilut*), there altogether is no need for the matter of vows (*Nedarim*).

In the matter of the *Sefirot*, this is the difference between the *Sefirah* of Understanding-*Binah* and the *Sefirah* of Wisdom-*Chochmah*.²⁴³⁴ For, the *Sefirah* of Understanding-*Binah* is the source of the chaining down (*Hishtalshelut*). That is, even though it transcends the seven days of construct, nonetheless, it has a relation to them, in that it is their source etc., and it is therefore applies for there to be the matter of vows (*Nedarim*) there.

In contrast, the aspect of Wisdom-*Chochmah* transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshelut*). For, as known, in Wisdom-*Chochmah* there is an illumination of the limitless light of the Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, since it is sensed in it that He is Alone and there is nothing besides Him etc.²⁴³⁵ Thus, from the perspective of Wisdom-*Chochmah*, it does not apply for the forces of externality to derive any vitality, as the verse states,²⁴³⁶ "They die, but not in wisdom." It therefore is inapplicable for there to be a matter of vows (*Nedarim*) there.

4.

Now, just as there is the above-mentioned difference within space (the worlds and the *Sefirot*), there also is this difference within time. That is, this is the general difference

²⁴³⁴ See Likkutei Torah, Matot 85a; Ohr HaTorah Matot p. 1,309 and on; Discourse entitled "*Vayedaber... HaMatot*" 5679 (Sefer HaMaamarim 5679 p. 543 and on); End of the discourse entitled "*Vayedaber... HaMatot*" 5675 (*Hemshech* 5672 *ibid.* p. 1,076).

²⁴³⁵ See Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, Ch. 35 in the note.

²⁴³⁶ Job 4:21; See Torah Ohr, Lech Lecha 12d and elsewhere; Also see Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gate of Unity, Ch. 35, and elsewhere.

between the mundane days of the week,²⁴³⁷ the holidays, and Shabbat.

This is as explained before,²⁴³⁸ about the matter of refinements (*Birurim*), that there is a refinement (*Birur*) that has relation to dross, whether in a way that the dross is separated from the food, or in a way that the food is separated from the dross.²⁴³⁹ This is the general matter of the toil of the mundane days of the week.

However, on the holidays there also is a matter of refinement (*Birur*) that relates to dross, as the verse states,²⁴⁴⁰ “The dung of your festival celebrations.” This is why [on the holidays] one must be careful that the forces of externality will not derive any vitality etc.

This is evident from the law regarding the joy of the holidays, that it must be in a way that obligates him to feed the convert, the orphan, and the widow, together with all other poor etc., as the verse states,²⁴⁴¹ “You shall rejoice in your festival – you, [your son, your daughter, your servant, your maidservant, and the Levite,] the convert, the orphan and the widow who are in your cities,” and without this, the verse states,²⁴⁴² “I will spread dung on your faces, the dung of your festival celebrations.”

This is to such an extent that the courts must appoint officers for the festivals who are to circulate and check [and ensure

²⁴³⁷ See Ohr HaTorah *ibid.* p. 1,308 and on; Discourse entitled “*Vayedaber... HaMator*” 5630; 5679 (Sefer HaMaamarim 5630, p. 220; Sefer HaMaamarim 5679 p. 544 and on).

²⁴³⁸ In the discourse of the 12th of Tammuz of this year, 5726, entitled “*Mi Manah* – Who has counted the dust of Yaakov,” Discourse 35, Ch. 4 and on (Sefer HaMaamarim 5726 p. 259 and on).

²⁴³⁹ See *Hemshech* 5672 Vol. 2, p. 1,045 and on; p. 1,058 and on.

²⁴⁴⁰ Malachi 2:3; See Zohar II 88b; Torah Ohr, beginning of Chayei Sarah, and elsewhere.

²⁴⁴¹ Deuteronomy 16:14

²⁴⁴² Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yom Tov 6:18

modesty] etc.,²⁴⁴³ so that the joy of the holidays will be celebrated appropriately. All this is because the holidays (*Yom Tov*) stem from the aspect of the intellect (*Mochin*) of the Mother-*Imma* (Understanding-*Binah*).²⁴⁴⁴ This is because about the holidays it states that they are²⁴⁴⁵ “festivals for joy (*Mo'adim L'Simcha*),” and it is written,²⁴⁴⁶ “The mother of the children rejoices,” referring to the aspect of Understanding-*Binah*, this being the level of the world of Creation (*Briyah*), as in the teaching,²⁴⁴⁷ “The Supernal Mother (*Imma Ila'ah*) dwells in the Throne.”

Now, since Understanding-*Binah* is the source of the chaining down of the worlds (*Seder Hishtalshelut*) (as mentioned in chapter three), it therefore applies for there to be a matter of derivation of vitality [by the forces of externality] etc.

Higher than this is the day of Shabbat, which is the aspect of the intellect (*Mochin*) of the Father-*Abba* (Wisdom-*Chochmah*),²⁴⁴⁸ that transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshelut*), in which the matter of dross does not apply. This is why it states, “The dung of your festivals,” and does not state “The dung of your Shabbats.”²⁴⁴⁹ This is why it is a *mitzvah* to

²⁴⁴³ Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yom Tov 6:21; Shulchan Aruch of the Alter Rebbe, Orach Chayim 529:13

²⁴⁴⁴ See Pri Etz Chayim, Shaar Mikra'ei Kodesh, Ch. 1; Likkutei Torah, Tzav 11d; Discourse entitled “*Vayedaber... Matot*” *ibid.* 5675 (*Hemshech* 5672 *ibid.* p. 1,073); Also see Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gate of Unity, Ch. 26 *ibid.*

²⁴⁴⁵ In the Amidah and Kiddush liturgy for the holidays.

²⁴⁴⁶ Psalms 113:9; Zohar I 219a; Zohar II 84a, 85b; Shaarei Orah of Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, translated as Gates of Light, Gate Eight (*Binah*); Pardes Rimonim, Shaar 23 (Shaar Erchei HaKinuyim), section on “*Eim HaBanim*-אֵם הַבָּנִים”; Likkutei Torah, Shemini Atzeret 88d; Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe translated as The Gate of Unity, Ch. 6 & Ch. 26.

²⁴⁴⁷ Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 6 (23a)

²⁴⁴⁸ See Pri Etz Chayim, Shaar Mikra'ei Kodesh, Ch. 1; Likkutei Torah, Tzav 11d; Discourse entitled “*Vayedaber... Matot*” *ibid.* 5675 (*Hemshech* 5672 *ibid.* p. 1,073); Also see Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gate of Unity, Ch. 26 *ibid.*

²⁴⁴⁹ Zohar II 88b

make Shabbat delightful with food and drink,²⁴⁵⁰ such that even sleeping on Shabbat is a matter a delight,²⁴⁵¹ since it is impossible for there to be any derivation of vitality [by the forces of externality] etc.

The general service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, on Shabbat is not a matter of refinement (*Birurim*) in which it applies for there to be waste and dross, being that on Shabbat the act of separating (*Borer*) is forbidden. Rather, the service of Him on Shabbat is as indicated in the verse,²⁴⁵² “And you will eat the eaten (*Achaltem Achol*-אכלתם אכול etc.),” referring to the matter of separating food from food, as explained before at length.

With the above in mind, we also can understand the relationship between the matter of the holidays and the matter of oaths (*Nedarim*).²⁴⁵³ For, in the aspect of Understanding-*Binah* (which is the level of the holidays), it also is applicable for there to be the matter of oaths (*Nedarim*) (as explained in chapter three).

5.

However, based on this we must understand the verse,²⁴⁵⁴ “Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the children of Israel, saying... If a man makes a vow etc.” For, at first glance, based on what was explained before, the matter of oaths (*Nedarim*) only applies specifically on lower levels, specifically in the aspect of the Understanding-*Binah*, it being the source of the chaining down

²⁴⁵⁰ Shulchan Aruch of the Alter Rebbe, Orach Chayim 242:1 and elsewhere.

²⁴⁵¹ See Yalkut Re’uveini to Deuteronomy (Va’etchanan) 4:19; Siddur HaArizal (Kol Yaakov), Acharei Se’udat Shabbat; Shnei Luchot HaBrit, Mesechet Shabbat 134b; Shulchan Aruch of the Alter Rebbe, Orach Chayim 281:1; 292:2

²⁴⁵² Joel 2:26; See *Hemshech* 5672 *ibid.* (p. 1,058 and on).

²⁴⁵³ See Likkutei Torah, Matot 85a; Ohr HaTorah Matot p. 1,309 and on; Discourse entitled “*Vayedaber... HaMatot*” 5679 (Sefer HaMaamarim 5679 p. 543 and on); End of the discourse entitled “*Vayedaber... HaMatot*” 5675 (*Hemshech* 5672 *ibid.* p. 1,076).

²⁴⁵⁴ Numbers 30:2

of the worlds (*Hishtalshehut*), as well as specifically in the worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action (*Briyah, Yetzirah, Asiyah*), which are in a way of division etc.

The same is so as it is in the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of the Jewish people, that the matter of oaths (*Nedarim*) only applies when a person sees in himself that it is not possible for him to refine the thing etc. From this it is understood that the matter of oaths (*Nedarim*) is more relevant to simple people, who because of their low level must have the matter of abstention etc.

This being so, why was this Torah portion said to the heads of the tribes, who are on a high level, like the elders who were on the level of Moshe, as the verse states,²⁴⁵⁵ "I will emanate some of the spirit that is upon you and place it upon them." However, on the level of Moshe, which is the aspect of Wisdom-*Chochmah*, the matter of oaths (*Nedarim*) does not apply (as explained in chapter three).

However, the explanation is that the primary intention of this Torah portion is (not the matter of vows (*Nedarim*), but on the contrary, it is) the matter of the annulment of vows (*Hatarat Nedarim*).²⁴⁵⁶ This is as explained (in chapter two) that according to Torah, the matter of oaths (*Nedarim*) is unnecessary.

This is why this Torah portion was said to the heads of the tribes, so that they should annul vows (*Hatarat Nedarim*). This is because the annulment of vows (*Hatarat Nedarim*) must specifically be done by a wise sage (*Chacham*) and in a way that he [retroactively] uproots the oath from its root.²⁴⁵⁷ In other

²⁴⁵⁵ Numbers 11:17

²⁴⁵⁶ See Likkutei Torah, Matot 85a; Ohr HaTorah Matot p. 1,309 and on; Discourse entitled "*Vayedaber... HaMatot*" 5679 (Sefer HaMaamarim 5679 p. 543 and on); End of the discourse entitled "*Vayedaber... HaMatot*" 5675 (*Hemshech* 5672 *ibid.* p. 1,076).

²⁴⁵⁷ Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 74b

words, they cause the Jewish people to be on a higher state and standing, in which the matter of vows (*Nedarim*) is unnecessary.

The general matter of the wise sage (*Chacham*) nullifying the vow, meaning that that which is forbidden becomes permissible, stems from the aspect of the limitless light of the Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, which is in Wisdom-*Chochmah*, this being the aspect of the Might-*Gevurah* of the Ancient One-*Atik*,²⁴⁵⁸ which is why it is in his power to make the matter permissible.

Now, there also is another way to annul vows (*Hatarat Nedarim*), which is done by three regular people (*Hedyotot*). The explanation is that it is explained in the Siddur²⁴⁵⁹ about the fact that when three Jews sit together at a meal, they recite "Let us bless-*Nevarech*-נברך," that this refers to the [three] aspects of Kindness-*Chessed*, Might-*Gevurah*, and Splendor-*Tiferet*, which become included together as one. The blessing is then that of the many, and is drawn forth from the aspects of the Crown-*Keter*, Wisdom-*Chochmah*, and Understanding-*Binah*. The same is so of the matter of three regular people (*Hedyotot*), that they draw from the aspect of the Crown-*Keter*, and it therefore is in their power to annul the vow.

Based on this, we can add in explanation of the juxtaposition of the Torah portion of the festivals to the Torah portion of vows. That is, the verse,²⁴⁶⁰ "These are what you shall make for *HaShem*-יהו"ה on your appointed festivals, besides your vows and your free-will offerings etc.," hints at the connection and relationship between the holidays and the vows, since they both are from the aspect of Understanding-*Binah*, from which it is

²⁴⁵⁸ See Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gate of Unity, Ch. 24, and the notes and citations there.

²⁴⁵⁹ Siddur Im Da"Ch – Shaar Birkhat HaMazon (102a and on; 104a and on).

²⁴⁶⁰ Numbers 29:39

possible for [the external forces] to derive vitality etc., and therefore the matter of abstention is necessary etc.

However, after this comes the Torah portion of vows (*Nedarim*), which primarily is the matter of the annulment of vows, this being from the aspect of Wisdom-*Chochmah* which transcends Understanding-*Binah*, just as the matter of Shabbat transcends the holidays.²⁴⁶¹ This is so, until we come to the ultimate elevation of the day of Shabbat, “a day that is entirely Shabbat and rest for everlasting life.”²⁴⁶²

²⁴⁶¹ There is a small portion of the discourse missing here.

²⁴⁶² Talmud Bavli, Tamid 33b