

Dvar Torah Outline — Parashat Matot: Nedarim, Hatarat Nedarim, and “Zeh HaDavar” as the Ideal of Human Speech

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman addresses the apparent tension in the Torah’s treatment of נדרים and Chazal often criticize making vows, yet the Torah opens Parashat Matot with the שבועות: laws of nedarim and even allows for their annulment. He explains (based on Rav Tzadok and the Zohar) that vows are spiritually valid only when a person’s רצון is profoundly aligned with ה’—to the point of “זה הדבר,” where speech becomes a vehicle for דבר. Hatarat nedarim then functions as a corrective mechanism when vows emerge from ה’. confused or misguided רצון rather than authentic דבקות.

I. The confusion and ambivalence around nedarim

A. Opening of Parashat Matot: vows at the forefront

- Rabbi Shulman notes that the parashah begins with **פרשת נדרים**, followed by the complex frameworks of:
 - **הפרת נדרים**
 - **התרת נדרים**
- He frames the topic as inherently confusing compared to more universally “straightforward” mitzvot.

B. Chazal’s sharp critique of making vows

- Gemara Nedarim: making vows is described as a practice associated with the **דרך of רשעים**.
- Yerushalmi: “לא דיין במה שאסרה תורה” (It’s not enough for you what the Torah already forbade?)—why add extra self-imposed prohibitions?
- Even when one fulfills the vow, Chazal suggest it would have been better not to have made it in the first place.

C. Yet Chazal also recognize a positive model of vows

- Rabbi Shulman cites the well-known episode of **שמעון הצדיק** and the young man whose **נזירות** was clearly **לשם שמים**, showing that some vows can be spiritually admirable.
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II. The deeper question: What “power” is a neder, and how can it be undone? (2:00)

A. The philosophical challenge

- Rabbi Shulman asks: what does it mean that a person can “add” obligations beyond the 613 mitzvot?
 - Hashem already gave **תרי”ג מצוות**, precisely fitted to the human being.
- Even more puzzling: if a vow becomes binding, how can there be a Torah mechanism of **התרת נדרים**?

B. Two conceptual models of what is violated

- Rabbi Shulman distinguishes two ways to define the transgression of breaking a vow:
 1. The Torah forbids violating what you declared—you violate the Torah’s command not to break your word.
 2. The neder itself becomes an obligation; breaking it is violating the newly-created that your speech generated (even though its authority ultimately comes from **וובה** the Torah’s parashah of nedarim).

C. Midrashic framing: even truthful oaths are restricted

- Rabbi Shulman brings a Midrash regarding **שבועות** (and extends the idea to nedarim):
 - Even if you are swearing truthfully, **“אי אתה רשאי להשבע”** (you are not permitted to swear),
 - unless you embody high spiritual traits—**עמילות בתורה**, **יראת שמים**, devotion to mitzvot, and **דבקות בה’**.

D. Illustration: a gaon willing to swear only under duress

- Rabbi Shulman tells a story where a gaon was pressured in a non-Jewish court to take an oath.
 - The gaon responded that in **שעת הדחק** he could rely on **“ובשמו תשבע”**—that there are extreme cases where taking a **שבועה** may be permitted.
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III. Rav Tzadok's "remez" in the opening pasuk: vows as "zeh ha'davar" speech (5:30)

A. The key opening phrase and Rashi's question

- Rabbi Shulman focuses on the opening pasuk:
 - "וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'"
("Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel, saying: This is the thing that Hashem commanded.")
- Rashi's issue (as presented by Rabbi Shulman): why address **ראשי המטות** if this is a command relevant to all of **כלל ישראל**?

B. Zohar: "rosh" as the highest spiritual level within Israel

- Rabbi Shulman cites Rav Tzadok bringing a Zohar:
 - There are **ten terms** used to describe **כלל ישראל** (different "names" reflecting different **מדרגות**).
 - "**ראשי**" corresponds to the highest **מדרגה**—associated with **כתר**.

C. "Zeh ha'davar" as Moshe's unique prophetic mode

- Rabbi Shulman explains:
 - Other prophets speak with "**כה אמר ה'**"—a mediated prophetic presentation.
 - Moshe speaks with "**זה הדבר**"—the level of **שכינה מדברת מתוך גרונו** (the Divine Presence speaking through his throat), i.e., unmediated **דבר ה'**.

D. The core insight: when a person's **רצון** is "כתר," a neder can be a form of Torah

- Rabbi Shulman develops Rav Tzadok's idea:
 - **רצון** is a **בחינה** of **כתר**.
 - If a person's **רצון** is truly unified with **דבר ה'**, then the vow that emerges from his mouth can be understood as participating in "**זה הדבר**"—a **סוג** of authentic **דבר ה'**.
 - In that case, the neder becomes a genuine **מצוה in its own right**.
 - By contrast:
 - When vows emerge from lower, confused, or ego-driven motives, they are discouraged and even criticized by Chazal.
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IV. Why only “roshai hamatot” can annul vows: discernment of true vs. false רצון (8:30)

A. Hatarat nedarim depends on evaluating the מקור of the vow

- Rabbi Shulman explains why annulment authority is placed with ראשי המטות:
 - At that מדרגה they can discern whether the vow came from:
 - an authentic, elevated רצון (then it should stand), or
 - a mistaken, poorly-considered, or spiritually distorted impulse (then it can be annulled).

B. Torah speaks in a “world of truth” and presents the ideal human potential

- Rabbi Shulman frames the Torah’s presentation as describing spiritual reality at its highest:
 - The Torah asserts that a human being can reach a level where speech becomes a conduit for Heaven—שכינה מדברת מתוך גרונו.
 - That is why the Torah grants the institution of nedarim at all.

C. The need for annulment: rescue from hijacked speech

- Because many people are not at that ideal מדרגה:
 - the power of vow-making can be “hijacked” by negative forces within a person,
 - and התרת נדרים is the Torah’s rescue mechanism when vows are not rooted in אמת.
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V. Conclusion: Torah she’be’al peh, human speech, and becoming a “mouthpiece” for malchut (10:00)

A. Vows as a window into the concept of Torah she’be’al peh

- Rabbi Shulman broadens the idea:
 - תורה שבכל פה means that human beings can, through עמילות בתורה and refinement of דבר ה’ in the world, genuinely contribute to the unfolding of רצון.

B. Final aspiration

- Rabbi Shulman concludes with a brachah-like hope:
 - that our mouths and our רצון should align with Hashem's מלכות,
 - and that we should merit being true “mouthpieces” for Divine purpose.
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In Summary

- Chazal often criticize vows, yet acknowledge rare cases where vows are deeply holy and לשם שמים.
- Rabbi Shulman explains the paradox by distinguishing between vows rooted in confused רצון and vows rooted in elevated דבקות.
- Through Rav Tzadok and the Zohar, “ראשי המטות” and “זה הדבר” signal that vows are only ideal when speech reflects a “level-כתר” רצון aligned with דבר ה'.
- Hatarat nedarim exists to undo vows that were generated by misdirected inner forces rather than אמת.
- The larger takeaway: Torah presents the ideal potential of human speech—approaching a reality where one's words can become a vehicle for קדושה and מלכות שמים.