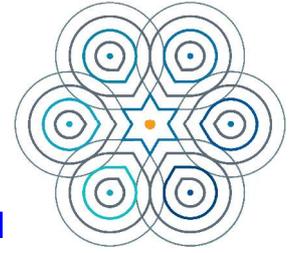


**Torah MiTzion** was established with the goal of strengthening Jewish communities around the globe. Over the past twenty two years Torah MiTzion's shlichim have inspired and enriched their host communities through a network of Religious Zionist Kollels. These Divrei Torah originally appeared in Torah Mit Zion's weekly publication, **Shabbat MiTzion**



## The Essence of Nedarim by Rabbi Shlomo Sobol

As befitting the conclusion of Sefer Bamidbar, Parshat Matot and Parshat Masei's two main topics are Bnei Yisrael's travels and the preparations for the upcoming entrance into Eretz Yisrael. Yet, the Torah chooses to open Parshat Matot with a discussion of nedarim (vows):

"If a man makes a vow to Hashem or swears an oath..." (Bamidbar 30:3)

In order to understand why, we must understand the nature of nedarim.

Nedarim are unique in that their halachic clout is based on the strength of an individual Jew's private initiative. In stark contrast, when it comes to all the other mitzvot, the prohibitions are imposed by a command from Above or in accordance with HaKadosh Baruch Hu's Will or the thoughts of our great Sages. Yet, with a neder, even a 13-year-old boy or a 12-year-old girl has the ability to create a prohibition with all the halachic implications and consequences. Indeed, an unfulfilled neder or a person who transgresses a neder is punished with malkot (lashes) – as is the case with any Torah prohibition. For instance, if a person made a neder to refrain from eating bread but then did just that, the Gemara teaches us that he is liable for malkot – just as if he had eaten non-kosher food!

How can we explain this astonishing idea that each and every simple Jew has the wondrous power to invent prohibitions and obligations?

Typically, nedarim stem from emotions. They are produced naturally; they are the result of my sentiments: I feel a certain way. I cannot tell someone else, "Listen, we must make a neder right now." Your personality causes you to feel a certain way, but I may feel differently. They are your challenges, your personal efforts, and your own sense of gratitude. They do not obligate others.

We tend to disparage emotions and belittle their value. We use expressions such as, "it's just a feeling," and "that sentiment will soon pass." Experiencing a miracle or a spiritual uplifting may move a person to accept certain spiritual matters upon himself. Similarly, when a close friend becomes sick, a person may be stirred to make a number of resolutions in the hope that the friend will be cured in their merit. These are feelings; they are not permanent; they are transient; he is moody; he is sentimental. There is an intellectual tendency to deride emotions.

But the truth is that emotions are a profound manifestation of human nature and serve as a basis for our



avodat Hashem (service of Hashem). We must protect, preserve, and respect our emotions. They are venerable and very important; they assist us throughout our lives. If we value our religious, ethical, and spiritual feelings, they will continue to express themselves and help us.

Upon occasion, a neder may be the result of a fleeting emotional high. But many of life's positive inspirations and changes were caused by transitory emotions. A neder takes that momentary feeling and extends it. A neder permits a person to "capture" the feeling and to use it as the starting point for practical and constructive decisions and projects.

Thus, nedarim infuse our lives with emotions and, therefore, are an appropriate way to end Sefer Bamidbar and to prepare to enter Eretz Yisrael. 