

# PARENTING *in the* PARSHA

## מטות

### The Promise of Faith

אִישׁ כִּי יָדַר נֶדֶר לַיהוָה אוֹ הִשָּׁבַע שְׁבַע לְאִסָּר אִסָּר עַל נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ כְּכֹל הַיִּצָּא מִפִּי יַעֲשֶׂה:

If a man makes a vow to Hashem or takes an oath imposing an obligation on himself, he shall not break his pledge; he must carry out all that has crossed his lips.

בעון נדרים בנים מתים שנאמר) [קהלת ה, ה](#) (אל תתן את פִּיךָ לחטִּיא את בשרך וגו' ואִיזוֹ הֵן מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו שֶׁל אָדָם הוּא אוֹמֵר

בְּנֵי וּבְנוֹתָיו [רַב נַחֲמָן](#) אָמַר מֵהֵכָא [ל](#) (לְשׁוּא הִכִּיתִי אֶת בְּנֵיכֶם לְשׁוּא עַל עֵסְקֵי שׁוּא

Due to the sin of unfulfilled vows, children die, as it is stated: "It is better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not allow your mouth to bring your flesh to sin...why should the Lord become angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?" ([Ecclesiastes 5:4-5](#)). And what is the work of a person's hands? You must say it is referring to his sons and his daughters. [Rav Na?man](#) said: A proof to the above idea may be brought from here: "In vain I smote your children" ([Jeremiah 2:30](#)). The phrase "in vain" means: For matters caused by vain words, meaning that you took a vow and did not fulfill it.

-Kesuvos 72a

Faith consists in believing when it is beyond the power of reason to believe.

-Voltaire

Aside for the 613 basic *mitzvos*, the Torah grants us the power to draft our own *mitzvos*, binding obligations bearing the weight and force of *neder*. When we take a vow to do or not to do something, that vow elevates the action in question to the level of *mitzvah* or *aveirah*. Honoring your vow is a *mitzvah*, violating, an *aveirah*.

That, explains Rav Kook, is why we enter Yom Hakippurim with *kol nidrei*, the communal nullification of all vows. It is not simply a cancellation of vows, but a reassertion of faith, a statement of our recognition of the severity of our promises and, in turn, a recognition of Whom we make our promises to and Who is watching to see that we keep those promises.

If I were to ask you what would be a greater violation, failure to observe a G-d given commandment or failure to observe one which you created on your own, you would most likely conclude that the violation of G-d's commandment is far more severe than the violation of your own. Yet, the *gemara* indicates that this is not the case. In *kesuvos* as well as a number of other places, the Torah emphasizes the severity of violating one's vow, stating that for the sin of *nedarim*, one's children will die prematurely, a severity not attached to many weightier *mitzvos* in the Torah. What about *neder* would be fatal to one's children in the omission?

Rav Kook's beautiful thought on *nedarim* and Yom Kippur sheds light on the relationship between *nedarim* and one's children. The *gemara* may mean something more than the physical death of the children at a young age. The *gemara* may also refer to the spiritual death of one's children due to the failure to keep one's vows. If keeping one's promises is a statement of faith in Hashem and violating them is an expression of lacking that faith, then it stands to reason that the failure of our own belief and faith places our children in danger.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook in *Oros Haemunah* offers a beautiful insight into the nature and value of *nedarim*. A *neder*, Rav Kook explains is the ultimate expression of faith and belief in Hashem. Vows and oaths are only of value for one who believes that there is a G-d watching over him. It is still common today, in the largely secular world, for oaths to be administered to one with his hand placed on the bible, and for the oath to end with the phrase, "so help me G-d." More so than any particular *mitzvah* making and fulfilling a vow expresses full faith that there is One to Whom that vow is made and One Who is watching to make sure it is kept.

Children draw on the faith of their parents, believing because their parents believe and acting out of faith based on the faith of their fathers and mothers. When children are led to think that their parents' belief is shaky, their faith is shaken as well. We can only pass on a tradition in which we ourselves have faith. If our personal belief is not strong, there is little chance that we will bring our children to believe.

Failure to keep one's word then, is not simply failure to keep one's word. It is a denial of that pure belief and faith in Hashem. The violation of one's vow is tantamount to a statement that there is no one watching and no one to whom one must answer for the vow taken. An atheist would have no qualms about swearing falsely on a bible and saying "so help me G-d" about a G-d he does not believe in. When we fail to keep our word, it is almost as though we too deny our belief in G-d.

When we fail to live up to our word, we present the appearance of little faith in the One Above. That is fatal to the task or raising children in the proper *derecho*, and precisely why the *gemara* associates the failure to keep one's promises with the loss of one's children. When we fail to keep our word and fail to show a strength of faith, we put the spiritual lives of our children at risk. Step one to bringing our children to the proper *derecho* is to assure that we are firmly ensconced on that *derecho* ourselves.

Good Shabbos,  
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Principal