

Zera Shimshon

Profound Divrei Torah culled from the writings of the Gaon and Mekubal Rav Shimshon Chaim ben Rav Nachman Michael Nachmani zy" a, author of Sefer Zera Shimshon on Chumash and Toldos Shimshon on Pirkei Avos, who promised that all who study his words will be blessed with an abundance of good, wealth and honor, and will merit to see children and grandchildren thriving around their table.



אמרות שמשון

The Difference Between a Vow of Tzedakah and a Vow to Study Torah

"If a man makes a vow to Hashem or swears an oath to bind himself with an obligation, he shall not profane his word; he shall do according to everything that comes out of his mouth." (Bamidbar 30:3)

The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De'ah, ch. 203, sec. 4) rules that every person must be extremely careful not to make any vows, even vows concerning the mitzvah of tzedakah, lest he fail to fulfill them, thereby committing a serious transgression.

However, in the same chapter, section 6, the Shulchan Aruch writes that if a person wishes to study a particular chapter or tractate of Torah and fears that he may become lazy, he is permitted to make a vow in order to motivate himself to study Torah, since the vow will serve as an incentive by obligating him to fulfill it.

At first glance, these two halachot appear to contradict one another. If, regarding the mitzvah of tzedakah, we are concerned that a person may fail to fulfill his vow, why do we not have the same concern regarding the mitzvah of Torah study? And why is it precisely with regard to Torah study that one is encouraged to make a vow in order to motivate himself?

Furthermore, the straightforward wording of the Shulchan Aruch seems to indicate that one may likewise make a vow in order to motivate himself to fulfill any other mitzvah, and that only with respect to the mitzvah of tzedakah is one warned not to make a vow. We must therefore understand the distinction between the mitzvah of tzedakah and all other mitzvot.

This apparent contradiction in the Shulchan Aruch may be resolved as follows:

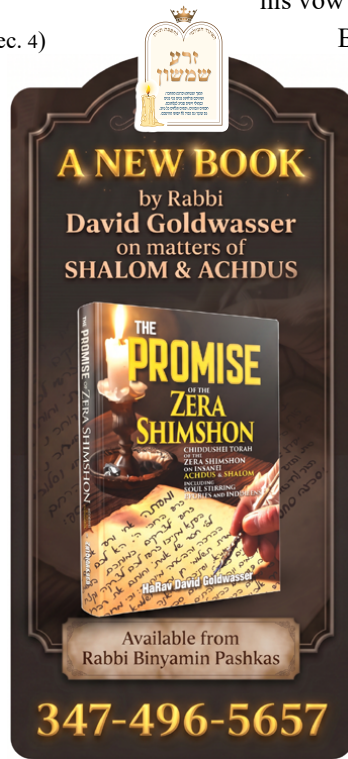
Indeed, it is specifically with regard to the mitzvah of tzedakah that we caution a person not to make vows. The reason is that the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 6a) teaches that one who pledges money for tzedakah becomes obligated to give it to the poor immediately. Since there are always needy people requiring financial assistance, the obligation to fulfill his vow takes effect at once.

Because a person has no opportunity to delay fulfilling such a vow, he is warned not to make vows, for it is very common for someone to postpone slightly or to be just a little negligent, and by doing so he has already committed a transgression.

In contrast, with regard to Torah study or the fulfillment of other mitzvot, a person may fulfill them at any time during the day and is not obligated to perform them at the very moment he makes the vow. Likewise, he may make the vow before the time for fulfilling the mitzvah arrives. Consequently, he has time to prepare himself to fulfill his vow and is not required to carry it out immediately.

For this reason, there is far less concern about a person making a vow concerning these mitzvot.

(Zera Shimshon, Parashat Matot, art. 2)



The Three Weeks (Bein HaMetzarim) An Explanation of the Verse: "All Her Pursuers Overtook Her Bein HaMetzarim"

"Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and harsh servitude; she dwells among the nations and finds no rest. All her pursuers overtook her bein haMetzarim ('between the straits')." (Eichah 1:3)

We must understand the meaning of the expression: "All her pursuers overtook her bein haMetzarim (בין המצרים: 'between the straits')."

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• This may be explained according to what our Sages teach in the *Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 36:4)*, namely, that the Ten Tribes were exiled because of wine, and that the tribes of Yehudah and Binyamin were likewise exiled because of wine.

Furthermore, the *Midrash (ibid. 36:3)* relates that when Noach went to plant the vineyard, he encountered Shed Shomron (a force of impurity and the *Sitra Achra*), who said to him: “Indeed, we are partners in this vineyard (for within a vineyard the destroyer has permission to operate). But be careful not to cross the boundary and enter my portion. If you enter my portion, I will harm you.” In other words: “Although you too have the right to enjoy wine, if you overindulge, you are taking from my portion—you have crossed the boundary into my domain—and then I will harm you.”

It should be noted that the Hebrew word *metzar* (מצר) besides meaning “distress” or “strait,” also means “boundary” or “limit” (*metzarim* being the plural).

Accordingly, this is the meaning of the verse: “All her pursuers overtook her *bein haMetzarim* (‘between the boundaries’).” Because they exceeded the proper limit and measure in drinking wine, they were therefore harmed and fell into the hands of the nations and of the *Sitra Achra*.

Another explanation of the verse may also be suggested.

The Children of Israel were exiled and dwelt among the nations. Even after a very long time they were not redeemed and found no rest—that is, the *Beit HaMikdash* was not rebuilt. Why did this happen?

Because “all her pursuers overtook her *within the boundaries*.”

This may be understood in light of what the *Zohar (Parashat Pekudei 236a)* teaches: as long as the side of holiness reigns, the side of impurity cannot prevail but instead submits itself to holiness.

Therefore, our Sages said that as long as the kingdom of Yerushalayim stands, the other kingdom must remain destroyed.

Thus, the moment Yerushalayim was destroyed, the other nations obtained dominion, for so it had been decreed by the Creator, as is well known (*Pesachim 42b*). However, that dominion will not endure forever, *chas v'Shalom*, but only “*bein haMetzarim*”—that is, within certain defined limits.

The primary purpose of Israel’s exile is to gather the dispersed—that is, the holy sparks and the souls that were cast into the *kelipot* (shells of impurity) throughout the world as a consequence of Israel’s sins.

It is well known that in the days of Nevuchadnezzar all the nations, together with all those holy sparks, became concentrated in Babylonia. For this reason, Israel was exiled specifically there: in order to gather them.

As long as the holy sparks remain absorbed within the *kelipah*, all abundance, wealth, and dominion belong to that force of impurity, which grows stronger and greater through the holy sparks trapped within it. Had Israel hastened to perform *teshuvah*, to do good deeds, and to remain separate from the nations, they would have gathered those sparks immediately and would likewise have been redeemed without delay.

This is the meaning of the expression “*bein haMetzarim*”—according to its second meaning, “within the boundaries.” Israel will remain in exile among the nations until there exists a clear and distinct separation between the boundary of holiness and the boundary of impurity; until all the holy sparks are separated from impurity and are no longer intermingled with it. When those boundaries have been clearly established, the Children of Israel will find rest, and the *Beit HaMikdash* will be rebuilt.

(*Zera Shimshon, Megillat Eichah, art. 3*)

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