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Parshiot Matot-Masei July 10, 2021 – 1 Av 5781

The power of the tongue is unique in that speech can “create” new realities. Our first of the double parshiot opens with the rules of pronouncing a “neder”. The Hebrew word “neder” is translated in English as an oath, a vow, or a promise but it means so much more.

The “neder” can make something permissible in the Torah, forbidden. This is a voluntary adopted prohibition and must be observed. The second type is a vow to obligate oneself to an optional commandment (such as charity), and also must be followed. The “neder” is so powerful that a violation can result in corporal punishment.

A promise, vow, or oath must be clear and precise for the one making it. For those hearing it, because, in theory and practice, one cannot break a vow.

The mouth allows us to make promises all of the time. Too often we let them fall by the wayside. A vow, promise, or oath is serious business, “zeh hadavar” “this is the thing”... Clear and precise in the transmission of what is being said, promised or prophesied.

When G-d created the universe G-d spoke clearly and with precision and the earth came into being. G-d vowed not to flood the world into complete destruction again and it was spoken with precision. Moses, with his speech impediment, spoke clearly from the Divine source of G-d.

The message is simple. The same G-dly connection that we possess, enabling us to create new realities through speech, is the vehicle through which Moses was able to bring the clearest of all messages.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Nathan W. Langer

