

ב ס"ה

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

# Parshas Matos-Massei

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Compiled from the works of  
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi**  
**Parshas Matos-Massei**  
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**Rashi in His Own Words**

**במדבר ל', י"ז:** אלה החקים אשר צוה יהוה את משה בין איש לאשתו בין אב לבתו בוגריה בית אביה:

**Bamidbar 30:17:** These are the statutes which the Lord commanded Moshe concerning a man and his wife, a father and his daughter, in her youth, while in her father's house.

**Synopsis**

This week's Torah portion, Matos-Massei, begins by telling us the laws of vows<sup>1</sup>. The Torah then goes on to teach us various details about these laws. If a young girl makes a vow and her father hears about it on the same day, he can revoke her promise. Likewise, if a husband hears of an oath which his wife made, he may cancel it on the same day. At the end of this section, the Torah says that<sup>2</sup> "These are the statutes which the Lord commanded Moshe concerning a man and his wife, a father and his daughter in her youth, while in her father's house."

Rashi explains everything in the Torah, which would otherwise present a difficulty according to the simple explanation. By studying his commentary, even a beginner can understand the entire Torah. If Rashi does not address something in the Torah that seems to be difficult, it means one of two things. Either Rashi already explained it, or the answer is obvious. Yet something seems to be difficult here. The last verse in this section, quoted above, does not mention anything about the actual law of making and fulfilling a vow. However, that sentence appears to be a summary of the entire section, which begins by discussing the laws of promises. Only later does it mention how her father or her husband can revoke her vow. Why does the Torah seemingly "leave out" this relevant law?

The explanation is that the Torah does not need to teach us the laws of vows. Of course, one must keep his word. The Torah already commanded us to<sup>3</sup> "distance ourselves from falsehood." The Torah teaches us these laws here to tell us the exception to the rule, i.e., the instances that one can annul a vow.

1. The meaning of a vow is that someone says that a certain object should be prohibited to him, i.e. that he will not eat a particular food or will not perform a certain act.

2. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 30:17.

3. Parshas Mishpatim, Shemos 23:7.

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### Rashi's Explanation

This week we read the Torah portion Matos-Massei. It begins by telling us about "Nedorim – נדורים," meaning vows. The Torah then goes on to say tell us the law if a young, unmarried woman makes a vow. If her father hears of it on the day that she made the vow, and nevertheless remains silent, the vow remains in full force. However, if her father rescinds her vow, it is null and void. Whatever she prohibited for herself is permitted to her. If she is married, the law is almost the same. If she prohibits something to herself, which involves self-affliction<sup>4</sup>, and her husband hears about it, he may revoke her vow. However, if he remains silent, her vow remains in effect.

The Torah sums up this section, and concludes it by saying that, "These are the statutes which Hashem commanded Moshe concerning a man and his wife, a father, and his daughter, in her youth, while in her father's house." Rashi does not comment on this.

We know that Rashi explains every word of the Torah (which requires explanation) according to Peshat, the simple meaning of the verse. He explains everything that a beginning student needs to know to understand the Chumash. Hence, when there is seemingly a question according to Peshat and Rashi does not address it, either Rashi has already answered the question, or it can be answered so easily that there is no reason for him to say anything. This is reinforced by the numerous instances where Rashi says, "I do not know what this teaches us," or the like<sup>5</sup>. This is although many such instances do have explanations according to various Midrashim, the Talmud, or other commentaries. This is because those explanations are not in line with the simple meaning of the verse; he, therefore, says that he "does not know," meaning that he does not know how to explain the seeming difficulty according to Peshat. This makes it clear that wherever possible, Rashi explains every verse in the entire Torah, according to Peshat.

### Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The verse, "These are the statutes which the Lord commanded Moshe concerning a man and his wife, a father, and his daughter, in her youth, while in her father's house," are a summary of the verses which precede

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4. The reason for this is that if she afflicts herself, it affects him. Just what is considered self-affliction is defined in the Gemorah Nedorim 79, a - b.

5. These instances include Parshas Toldos Bereishis 28:5, Parshas Vayeishev Bereishis 35:14, Parshas Terumah Shemos 25:29, Shemos 26:24, and Shemos 27:10, Parshas Tzav Vayikroh 8:11, Parshas Shemini Vayikroh 10:15, Parshas Tazria Vayikroh 13:4, Parshas Chukas Bamidbar 21:11, Parshas Pinchos Bamidbar 26:13 and 26:16, and Parshas Ki Seitzei Devorim 23:34. There is also an assortment of places where Rashi says that he does not know and follows it by citing a second explanation. These include Parshas Vayeitzei Bereishis 30:11, Parshas Vayishlach Bereishis 32:15, Parshas Mikeitz Bereishis 43:11, Parshas Mishpotim Shemos 24:13, Parshas Terumah Shemos 25:21 and 27:19, Parshas Tetzaveh Shemos 28:4, Parshas Metzorah Vayikroh 14:14 and Parshas Shoftim Devorim 18:2.

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it. Those preceding verses discuss the laws of vows. As such, one would think that, according to Peshat, the concluding verse should describe, or at least mention, the general laws of vows. Yet the Torah only mentions the laws of a father or a husband annulling the vows of his daughter or wife. Rashi does not explain this obvious question.

The question is even stronger. This verse begins with the words "these are the statutes." The statute is the English translation of the Hebrew word "Chok – חוק," which refers to a Mitzvah which has no rational reason. This sort of Mitzvah must be fulfilled because it is Hashem's decree. Once the Torah refers to the laws of vows as a "Chok," it is implying that it is specifically not including the general laws of vows. The reason that one must fulfill a vow is stated here explicitly. The Torah says here that<sup>6</sup> "לֹא יְחַלֵּל דְּבָרָו" – he shall not violate his word." Rashi explains that these words mean "לֹא יְחַלֵּל דְּבָרָו" – he shall not make his words mundane." Instead, as the verse goes on to say, "according to whatever came out of his mouth, he shall do." The only part of this section of the Torah, which can be categorized as "statutes," are the laws of revoking one's daughter's or wife's vow. The Torah itself seems to exclude the actual law of keeping one's vow.

### The Explanation

There is no need for the Torah to specify that one must fulfill a vow. It is quite easily understood. It is included in what the Torah already said, (although it is not identical to these laws), that<sup>7</sup> "one must distance himself from falsehood." It is also quite clear from an oath and a covenant, which were both previously discussed in the Torah several times. This is why vows were also mentioned earlier in the Torah.

An example of this is that which is written:<sup>8</sup> "And Yaakov uttered a vow, saying ... then this stone ... will be an abode of Hashem ..." Hashem responded to this<sup>9</sup> "... where you pronounced a vow to me ..." Rashi cites those words and explains that "you must fulfill it."

From all of the above, it is understood, that when the Torah says<sup>10</sup> that "If a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to prohibit himself, he shall not violate his word; according to whatever came out of his mouth, he shall do," it is not coming to teach us a new law. It is merely an introduction to the laws of revoking vows. Hence, it is simple to understand why when the Torah sums this up, there is no need even to mention the laws of vows. The Torah only needs to mention the statutes, the "Chukim" of vows.

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6. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 30:3.

7. See Footnote 3.

8. Parshas Vayeitzei, Bereishis 28:20 - 22.

9. ibid., 31:13.

10. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 30:3.

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This also explains what Rashi writes at the beginning of the Torah portion. He comments on the verse<sup>11</sup> "Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Jewish people, saying, 'This is the thing the Lord has commanded.'" Citing the words "the heads of the tribes," he writes, "He honored the chieftains by teaching them first ... Why did the Torah see fit to mention it here? It is to teach us that annulment of vows may be performed by a single expert, and if no single expert is available, it may be annulled by three laymen." It is quite simple to know that, according to Peshat, there is a connection between the heads of the tribes and the laws of vows. However, how does Rashi know that the connection regards the *revocation* of a vow?

Based on the above, we can understand this. When this topic was first taught to the heads of the tribes, it was not to teach them the laws of making and keeping a vow. That is something which we know already. Instead, it is teaching us that a father or a husband may revoke a woman's vow. Since these verses regard revoking a vow were first taught to the heads of the tribes, we see that there is a connection between the two.

### A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The fact that the Torah emphasizes that the leaders of the tribe were first commanded the laws of revoking a vow can also be understood by looking at this law from a deeper perspective. The Talmud Yerushalmi says<sup>12</sup> that "Is it not sufficient what the Torah prohibited you to do? Do you seek other prohibitions?" The reason for this is that purpose of our fulfillment of Torah and Mitzvos is to build a dwelling place for Hashem *below*, in a physical world whereby its nature G-dliness is not revealed. Therefore, it is essential for us to work *with* the physical and material world, and not to refrain from dealing with it.

However, we also find that the Sages counseled us that<sup>13</sup> "Vows are a means of attaining abstinence," helping one fulfill the commandment to<sup>14</sup> "sanctify one's self (even) with that which is permitted." How can we reconcile these two teachings of the Sages?

The explanation is, that one who is righteous, a "leader of the tribes," is told that what the Torah prohibited is sufficient. On the contrary, it is not proper for him to make vows. By prohibiting something upon himself, he is losing an opportunity to elevate a physical object. However, one whose behavior is not (yet) perfect, must avoid dealing with worldly objects. There is a chance that rather than his elevating the object, the object would draw him down.

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11. *ibid.* Bamidbar 30:2.

12. Nedorim Chapter 9, Halachah 1.

13. Avos Chapter 3, Mishnah 13.

14. Talmud Yevomos 20, a.

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We see that the ultimate goal is for us to reach a spiritual level whereby vows are detrimental to our Divine service. Therefore, when Hashem addresses the leaders of the tribes or a group of three who constitute a Torah court regarding vows, He is discussing *revoking* vows rather than *keeping* them.

Based on this, we can also understand why these laws were taught close to the time that we entered Israel. Throughout our sojourn in the desert, we did not focus on physical things; it was more of a preparation for what was to come when we entered Israel. We ate food which was supplied from heaven, our drink was supplied from Miriam's well, and we did not need to be concerned with clothing. For forty years, our clothing grew with us.

Therefore, the laws of revoking vows were taught to us shortly before entering Israel. Both concepts have the same content; working with the physical world in order to create a dwelling place for Hashem.

However, since the Torah writes the laws of making vows as well, this also contains a lesson for us. As mentioned above, the reason for keeping a vow is so that his words are not profane. We all must, and therefore can, sanctify everything with which we come into contact, rather than becoming affected by it. Since the Torah begins by speaking about fulfilling vows, we see that every one of us, without exception, can elevate this world. That is true even if we have not yet reached the level of being able to *revoke* a vow. That is true because every one of us is, allegorically speaking, a daughter or a wife of the Almighty.

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Matos-Massei, 5726)*

**I hope that you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.**

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