

Parsheos Matos Masei

This week, we read two Parsheos and conclude Sefer Bamidbar. Parshas Matos covers the laws of vows, the war between Midian and the Jews, and the settlement of Reuven and Gad. The first Posuk discusses how Moshe speaks to the heads of the tribes, and the posuk uses the word “Zeh Hadavar” “this is what Hashem commanded”. Rashi explains that when the Torah uses the word “Zeh Hadavar,” it means it’s a clear edict directly from Hashem, as opposed to other places, where the Posuk says “Ko Amar Hashem”, which denotes a lower level. But since Moshe was on a higher level, he had a direct and clear communication about the law.

The first Rashi explains that there was honour bestowed on the leaders for being empowered to annul vows, a concept that relies heavily on Rabbinical leadership and clear definitions. The importance shows us that humans are empowered directly by Hashem to deal with matters in the physical world, because this is precisely what we must do as Jews. To serve Hashem in the physical realm and perform His Mitzvos as He commanded through the Torah, and empowered us to practice, learn and define it.

This empowerment is not only in action, but also in thought and speech, which vows are comprised of. The power of speech and action is also drawn out in the Torah, when it later describes the war with

Midian, who voluntarily and for no good reason joined against the Jews. The Torah 31:8 explains that the Jews killed the enemy by the sword. Rashi points out, explaining why the Torah needed to tell us how they were killed, because just as Balam tried to use his mouth against the Jews (i.e. to curse us), which was meant to counter the power of the Jews, which is to pray and petition. So too the Jews used their weapons against them, i.e. the sword.

What is drawn from here is that the Jews have the power of speech through prayer, and in other ways, manifesting vows, which often also require speech. The Torah teaches us about the power of our speech and what it can accomplish. It is so powerful that Balam tried to use it against us, but it also means that on a day-to-day basis, it must be used for good, and to ensure it is precise and for Hashem.

Going to the earlier them, about Jews being empowered to act according to the laws of the Torah, such as with the category of vows, connects nicely with the fact that this Shabbos is also Rosh Chodesh, which is the manifestation of our power to control the calendar. There is a nice reference to our power as servants of Hashem here on earth, and the power we must use to spread light and bring Mashiach.

On that note, may our prayers, petitions, and actions be rewarded speedily with Mashiach, and may there be peace on earth. Good Shabbos