



Annulment of Vows Parsha Matos - Masei

My Rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai of Lelov OB"m, suffered from a severe skin disease. The disease caused his skin to constantly itch, but he refrained from scratching. He kept his hands ritually clean, not touching his body at all. He would sit for many hours at a *Tisch*, his hands on the table. He would not express his suffering in any visible way, but his followers knew he was in agony.

The Rebbe suffered much throughout his life. Aside from his skin condition, in his last years he suffered from paralysis as well.

One day the Rebbe summoned a court of three judges to come to his bedside. Only one of the judges knew the reason for the ad hoc convening of the court. The Rebbe announced to them: "I once vowed not to touch my body under any circumstances. My reasoning was - How can one scratch his body when standing before the King of the Universe?" He then began to cry, "and he continued his words "lately, it has been decreed by Heaven that my body be paralyzed, I can't move my arms or legs. I am afraid that perhaps my paralyzed hands may have inadvertently touched my body, therefore I wish to annul this vow."

When I tell this story, the verses of our weekly Parsha come to mind: "If a man makes a vow to the Lord or makes an oath to prohibit himself, he shall not violate his word; according to whatever comes out of his mouth, he shall do".¹

The Ohr Hachayim illuminates a magnificent point. He asks – why is the verse repetitive – "If a man **makes a vow** to the Lord or **makes**

an oath" – and then – "**he shall not violate his word; according to whatever comes out of his mouth, he shall do**". Why the repetition?

The Ohr Hachayim explains that there are two types of vows and oaths. One pertains to the soul, the acceptance of a good deed or conduct one takes upon oneself. The other type relates the physical realm. There is a pedestrian vow, and there is a vow to the Lord:

"**If a man makes a vow**- any kind of vow which relates to the physical realm, **makes a vow to the Lord** – a righteous person who makes a vow and adds on a good deed or spiritual conduct **or makes an oath** – this denotes to the vow everyone has vowed at Har Sinai **to prohibit himself** – the Hebrew word for prohibition can also mean a bond, a righteous person's objective in life is to bind himself to G-d.

The three judges stood before the Rebbe, who was lying in bed with a tractate of Talmud opened before him. They now understood why he wanted his vow annulled. The judges complied, and annulled his vow. The Rebbe beamed with glee. A sense of elation was felt in the room.

¹ Bamidbar 30,3.