



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

MATOT-MAS'EI

## Taking Your Own Words Seriously

Moshe warns the leaders of the tribes, "Whatever comes out of one's mouth he shall do" (Bamidbar 30:1-3).

Rashbam and others take this as a command not to delay the fulfilment of a vow or oath. If you promise something to the Almighty you should carry it out promptly.

This interpretation has a great deal to commend it. It recalls the recommendation, "When a mitzva comes into your hand, don't let it get stale" (Mechilta, Parshat Bo).

A particular example which is part of daily living has to do with saying one's prayers. When it is time to daven one should not find every possible excuse to delay and to keep God waiting.

There is another way of understanding Moshe's warning. "Whatever comes out of one's mouth he shall do" can also be telling a leader to listen to his own words and heed his own message.

The Mishna lays down something similar in the laws of saying the Sh'ma: "He who says the Sh'ma but does not make it audible to his ears has not carried out his duty" (B'rachot 2:3). *Ed. note: This is the opinion of R' Yosi. The Tana Kama says that one is yotzei and that is the halacha. However, saying Sh'ma audible enough for you to hear it is definitely the proper way to say Sh'ma.*

There is a rabbinic saying that a person who speaks well but does not take his own advice is like someone who does the washing but remains unwashed himself (Tosefta Yevamot 8:4).

Unfortunately it sometimes happens that a leader, even a rabbi, is a genius at preaching values and ideals but is no role model. No wonder his audience says, "Why should we listen to you? You are no better than we are!"

## End of Story

The end of Bamidbar is not yet the end of the Torah, but it is more or less the end of the story. The wanderings are almost over and the people are on the verge of the Promised Land.

It now remains only for Moshe to prepare the Israelites for life on their own soil, but first comes, in this week's reading, a detailed listing of where they had been and what had befallen them.

The purpose of the list is not so much historical and geographical as spiritual. "Write the stages of Israel's journeys in the wilderness", God says to Moshe according to the Midrash, "so that they will know the miracles I performed for them."

Some of the miracles we know about already, dramatic events that impressed themselves on that generation and those that would follow. The biggest miracle, however, is not spelled out. It happened so regularly, day by day, that it was like a constant backdrop - the miracle of sheer survival.

Here was a people facing an unfriendly environment that in all logic should have defeated them and brought an end to their history. Here was a people that normally would have been overcome by the ruthless heat, hunger, thirst and lack of shelter.

The miracle was that they lived, and this was the beginning of their history. -OZ

**Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH**