

# **Dvar Torah** by **Rabbi Chanoch Yeres**

to his community at  
Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe  
*Graciously shared with PhiloTorah*

## **MATOT-MAS'EI**

**Why does this week's Parsha begin with the teachings of N'darim, Vows?**

First, we need to understand that there is no prayer that is as profoundly moving as is Kol Nidrei in our liturgy. Why was the Kol Nidrei, the prayer synonymous with onset of the Day of Awe, chosen to introduce the most moving moments of the Jewish year?

Rabbi E. Goldberg once wrote that the emphasis on Vows (N'darim) serves as a reflection on G-dly qualities that were granted by the Divine to his nation. The Talmud teaches us that a Vow is a prohibition that "we" create in some object around us by consecrating it with our speech. The person who makes the Vow changes the target of his oath into another reality. What was perfectly permissible has now been transformed into a prohibited thing through his verbal consecration. This is a G-dly quality. One may think that such powers of defining the status of objects in this world, would be reserved for the Divine. However, we see that it's G-d granted us the power of the Vow, the creative capability of speech to consecrate and define the

world around us, as if we were actual creators ourselves.

On the Eve of Yom Kippur, the prayer of Kol Nidrei reminds us of the tremendous Divine power at our disposal. The concept of Neder - Vow describes a world of good that we had a share in creating and recognize the force of consecration that we're given. Therefore, Kol Nidrei reminds us of what could have been this past year had we directed our actions and speech correctly.

Parshat Matot begins with Moshe teaching the laws of N'darim - Vows to the princes of the tribes. Why begin a Parsha with such a technical topic? Why specifically given over to the princes of the tribes?

One may answer that N'darim - Vows demonstrates the creative Divine character that was bestowed upon us, granting us power over the objects of our world. This is a Mitzva that speaks of leadership and power. It has within its framework our obligation to use this Divine mastery over our world for the distinct purpose of serving G-d. When we have failed to focus this control in the proper direction, we recount the theme of Kol Nidrei and beg G-d to pardon the misuse of our power as well as the apathy of its application.

Therefore, this week, it is Moshe alone who is given center stage in this Mitzva as it is the leadership of

the Jewish people who are targeted first to hear it. As we near the Fast of Tish'a b'Av, it is clearly an important lesson to learn, how after such destruction of the Temples, it is still up to us to consecrate and sanctify ideas in around us as a people, in rebuilding ourselves. 🕍