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The Fulfillment of Vows and Oaths

30: 1-16



Integrity is a matter of Torah. The ethics of Torah demand scrupulous honesty. Over and over again we encounter legislation regarding honest weights and measures, equity, **vows** and **oaths**. Integrity is a matter of internal and external consistency. The inside must be the same as the outside of a person, and vice versa. Disingenuousness and deceit may be measured by the size of the discrepancy between a person's words and the actual matter of which they are speaking. When our actions agree with our confessions, we are living out integrity according to Torah's standards. A central area in which integrity is tested is the matter of **oaths** and **vows**.

An oath (Hebrew: *shavuah*) **is a solemn, formal declaration or promise, typically appealing to a higher source of authority as proof of reliability. Oaths** can be formulated in any number of ways. Numerous examples might be cited from Scripture. **Abraham's** covenant with **Abimelech** is regarded as **an oath** (see the commentary on **Genesis, to see link click [Fk](#) - The Treaty at Beersheba**). **Abraham's** servant took **an oath** to find **a wife for Isaac** (see **Genesis [Fx](#) - Go to My Country and Get a Wife for My Son Isaac**). And in several places, **ADONAI** promises **an oath** to give **the land of Isra'el** to the descendants of **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**.

The matter of **oath** taking can be seen in the Ten Commandments. **You must not take the**

name of ADONAI your God in vain . . . (Deuteronomy 5:11a) is traditionally understood as a prohibition on false **oaths** invoking **the Name of God**. We see numerous instances of **oath** taking in the Hebrew Scriptures. A person in the Bible might make **an oath** to the effect, “May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not do such-and-such” (for example see **Ruth 1:17** or **First Samuel 20:13** and **25:22**). That is one example of **an oath** taken in **the Name of the LORD**. **Oaths** were often taken to prove one’s honesty in a matter of a dispute. Sometimes a rabbinical court might even require a person giving testimony to make **an oath** for **an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute (Hebrews 6:16)**. The idea of **the oath** is that it appeals to the authority of **YHVH**. Thus, a person making the **oath** claims “**God** as my witness.” The assumption is that if the person were lying, **Ha’Shem** would punish him.

In **Genesis 22:16-17** **God** swears by **Himself** to bless **Abraham** with the certainty of **His** promises. **When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.”** And so after waiting patiently, **Abraham** received what was **promised**. **People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all arguments.** In the **Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**) **there are also many discussions about the topic of oaths** (for example **b.Baba Meitza 82b**). **There is an entire tractate called Shevu’ot pertaining to oaths.**

A vow (Hebrew: *neder*) **is a type of oath by which a person binds himself or herself to perform a certain act or to refrain from a certain thing.** A **vow** is understood as a promise, obligation or prohibition that a person declares upon himself or herself. The Nazarite **vow** of is a good example of a biblical **vow** (see **Ba - The Nazarite Vow**). The person taking **the vow** prohibits himself from certain things (grape products, corpse contamination and haircuts) while obligating himself to other things (the sacrifices brought to complete **the vow**). Numerous other examples can be found in both Scripture **and rabbinic literature. Tractate Nedarim of the Oral Law is completely devoted to the subject of vows.** A **vow** to bring sacrifices is very typical in the biblical text. Again and again **the Psalms** refer to paying one’s **vows** by bringing sacrifices. In **Leviticus 7:16**, we learned that **vowing** Peace Offerings was so common that a certain class of Peace Offerings was called a **Neder** Offering.

Usually **a vow** is stated conditionally, “If such-and-such happens, then I will do such-and-such.” A person at sea in a dangerous storm might **vow**, “If **the Lord** will rescue me from this storm, then I will bring a Peace Offering,” or “then I will quit smoking.” In either case,

it is a **vow**. It is obvious that a person cannot bind themselves to violate Scripture. Therefore, a **vow** to bring sacrifice today (see the commentary on **Hebrews Bp - The Dispensation of Grace**) would automatically be null and void, but the smoking thing would stand.⁶⁸⁶

This chapter is an example of a chiasm in summation (see **Numbers Ac - from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: Chiasm and introversion**). The case for these mitzvot is presented in the progressive stages of the marital relationship:

A (The case of a woman under the authority of her father - **30:1-5**)

B (The case of a woman under the authority of her husband - **30:6-15**)

B These are the mitzvot . . . between a man and his wife

A and as between a father and his daughter . . . (**30:16**)