Matot: Bamidbar (Numbers)

What's it all about?

Moses teaches the heads of the tribes of Israel the **laws concerning the annulment of vows.** War is waged against the Midianites, and the Torah delivers an account of how to allocate the spoils among the people. **The tribes of Reuben and Gad, later joined by half of the tribe of Manasseh, ask for lands east of the Jordan River** as their portion of the Promised Land. Moses is initially furious with their request, but eventually agrees on the condition that they first help with the conquest of the lands west of the river.



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> “If a man makes a vow to God or makes an oath to prohibit himself, he must not profane his word; he must fulfill whatever he said.”

Take a deeper dive

One of the most curious aspects of this week's parsha is its discussion of vows. Here's what the Torah teaches us: **"If a man makes a vow to God or makes an oath to prohibit himself, he shall not violate his word;** according to whatever came out of his mouth, he shall do."

In other words, the thing we vow not to touch becomes sacred.

That's strange! Let's say someone really, truly, deeply dislikes parsley. That person can simply go ahead and say, "hey, you know what? I'm not going to eat cilantro ever again, because frankly it tastes like soap and I can't stand its flavor." That's simple enough! But when the same person takes a vow never to touch cilantro again, he makes parsley holy, a sacred item that lies outside of this person's world and reach. Why?

Because, Rabbi Aharon Loschak beautifully explained, there are two ways of dealing with things we don't like. The first is to double down on the darkness, to remind ourselves constantly how much we hate the things we hate and how miserable they make us. The second is to double down on the light, and make our lives so filled with joy and holiness that life's irritations, little and great alike, will simply pale by comparison.

In this week's parsha, Rabbi Loschak taught us, the Torah doubles down on the second approach. It gives us the idea of the vow as a novel approach to the things we want to cut out of our lives: **instead of constantly fighting them, treat them as sacred and untouchable**, so that instead of a never-ending menace they become something else, something more elevated, **allowing you, eventually, to see the positive side even of situations—or people—you previously found irredeemable.**

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