

Our parsha talks about vows and oaths.

A vow or נדר is an obligation that someone takes on oneself voluntarily to forbid to oneself something that is normally permitted. An oath or שבועה is normally imposed on one by the בית דין

There is no commandment saying we must make vows but there is a commandment that if we did make such a vow or oath we must keep it.

במדבר ל, ג: ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה

“When a man vows a vow to the Lord or swears an oath to prohibit something on himself, he shall not break his word, everything that goes out of his mouth he shall do.”

נדר also means to keep off or abstain.

There is a whole Mesechta in the order of נשים called נדרים which comes after כתובות and before נזיר (all these three deal with taking on obligations). This contains 11 chapters and 91 (double) pages including chapter 8, time-constrained vows which are conditional and chapter 9, how to cancel vows by a חכם and the method of finding the פתח or opening, so as to cancel the vow.

You can't vow to do something that is halachically forbidden, such a vow has no force, But only to not do, or refrain from something, that is normally allowed to you.

The Gemara describes two kinds of נדר – נדר-הקדש which forbids the use or enjoyment of something to (practically) everyone and נדר-איסור which apply only to oneself.

Our parsha describes how a father can annul a vow made by his unmarried daughter living in his house on the same day that he hears it, similarly a husband can annul a vow made by his wife. If a girl is engaged to be married but still living in her father's house, her vows must be annulled by both her father and her fiancée.

התרת נדרים

Vows made by a girl or married woman and not annulled in the same day, or made by anyone else, can be annulled by an expert judge or מומחה . He normally finds some changed circumstance in the person's life which if they had known about this at the time, they would not have made the vow, or a lack of understanding of the consequences of the vow at the time it was made that also allows for its annulment.

A vow can also be cancelled by three ordinary people meeting as a בית דין or court. This is still done today on the day before Rosh Hashanah, as we say before them:

שמעו נא רבותי, כל נדר או שבועה או אסור ...

Hear me, gentlemen; any vow or oath or prohibition ...

Our sages tell us that our teeth are set at the exit of our month to guard against what our tongue might say. By closing the door of the teeth, we stop any foolish or wrong words from our tongue from going outside.

May Hashem grant us the wisdom to guard our tongues and always be careful of what we say.