



## “This is the matter that Hashem has commanded” The Intimate Connection between the Nevuah of Moshe Rabeinu and an Oath

In this week’s parsha, parshas Matos, we learn about the unique quality of Moshe Rabeinu’s nevuah; no other prophet merited this level of nevuah. Let us examine the opening passuk of the parsha (Bamidbar 30, 2):

“וידבר משה אל ראשי המטות לבני ישראל לאמר, זה הדבר אשר צוה ה', איש כי ידור נדר לה' או השבע שבועה לאסור איסר על נפשו לא יחל דברו ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה”—**Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael, saying, “This is the matter that Hashem has commanded: If a man takes a vow to Hashem or swears an oath to prohibit a prohibition upon himself, he shall not profane his word; he shall act in accordance with whatever comes out of his mouth.”** Rashi comments in the name of the Sifre: **Moshe prophesied with** (Shemos 11, 4): **“So said Hashem, ‘At midnight . . .’; and the other neviim prophesied with “so said Hashem.” Moshe was superior to them in that he also prophesied with the expression “this is the matter.”**

The Yismach Moshe explains that when Moshe addressed the entire people of Yisrael, he employed the language **“כה אמר ה'—so said Hashem—**relating to them what was said in the name of the One who said it. When he addressed the heads of the tribes, however, he employed the language **“זה הדבר אשר צוה ה'—this is the matter that Hashem has commanded—**on these occasions, the holy Shechinah was speaking directly from his throat. This is the type of nevuah depicted in the opening passuk of our parsha.

Since it is the nature of the Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, we will elaborate on the differences between the prophesy granted to all the other neviim and the unique prophesy of Moshe Rabeinu. Additionally, we will explain the connection between Moshe’s unique quality of nevuah—employing the formula of **“זה הדבר”**—and the mitzvah of vows—**“nedarim”**—which immediately follows this formula.

It also behooves us to analyze the concept of **“nedarim.”** Rashi comments: A **“neder”** refers to **one who says, “See now, I take upon myself a ‘konam’ that I will not eat or will not do a particular thing.”** We learn from the passuk above that HKB”H granted a person the power to prohibit upon himself something that is otherwise permitted. If a person chooses to be stringent and not eat or do something, there is no reason to stop him. Furthermore, perhaps he employs a **“neder,”** because he fears that otherwise, without this formal prohibition, he will not be able to resist the persuasions of his yetzer hara. If that is his rationale, how can he be so certain that even after declaring the **“neder,”** he will be able to resist his yetzer hara?

### **A Vow Stems from the Fiftieth Level of Binah**

We will begin to shed some light on these issues by introducing a fundamental principle brought down by the Shela hakadosh (Matos-Masei) in the name of the kabbalists. They assert that the root of a **“neder”** comes

from “binah,” which is comprised of fifty gates. Let us refer to the Gemara (R.H. 21b): **“חמישים שערי בינה נבראו בעולם, וכולן וכו’”** **Fifty levels (gates) of “binah” were created in the universe, and they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one, as it is stated (Tehillim 8, 6): “Yet You have made him only a little less than the divine.”** With this in mind, the Shela explains that the word “נדר” can be broken down and read as **נדר**; in other words, a vow is a form of “binah” stemming from the “nun” gates.

Thus, the holy Torah provides anyone who studies it the amazing ability to annul the influence of the yetzer hara, preventing it from controlling him. It appears that we can explain this phenomenon based on the following Gemara (Shabbas 21b): **“וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי ונצחום, בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן, שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול, ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד, נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים.”** **For when the Greeks entered the Heichal (Sanctuary), they contaminated all of the oils in the Heichal; and when the Chashmonean dynasty triumphed and defeated them, they searched and could only find a single flask of oil that was hidden with the Kohen Gadol’s seal on it; it only contained enough oil to kindle the menorah for one day. A miracle occurred with it, and they were able to kindle with it for eight days.**

In Ner Mitzvah, the Maharal presents a vital concept that he repeats over and over again in his sacred sefarim. The number seven is related to the natural order of creation created by HKB”H during the seven days of creation. The number eight, on the other hand, relates to supernatural phenomenon—things that are above and beyond the natural order and cannot be explained based on the laws of nature. It is for this reason that Yisrael were commanded to perform the mitzvah of “milah” on the eighth day. In the merit of removing the natural, physical structure of the foreskin, Jews are able to ascend to a supernatural existence.

In this manner, the Maharal explains brilliantly why HKB”H commanded us to light the seven lamps of the menorah outside of the Kodesh HaKodashim, in the Heichal, whereas the Aron housing the two luchos, encompassing

the entire Torah, was located in the Kodesh HaKodashim. It is because the seven lamps in the Heichal are a clear-cut indication of the fact that HKB”H orchestrates the universe according to the laws of nature which He created. The Torah, on the other hand, which is concealed in the Kodesh HaKodashim, is a clear-cut indication of the supernatural management of HKB”H made possible by the Torah.

The Maharal proves this point based on the fact that HKB”H gave Yisrael the Torah on Chag HaShavuot after the completion of the seven weeks of Sefiras HaOmer. The seven weeks alluded to the natural order of the world that was created in seven days. The Torah, however, was given to them on the fiftieth day, which is akin to the number eight that comes after the number seven. Thus, it alludes to the world that is above the natural order. Therefore, in the Beis HaMikdash, as well, HKB”H commanded that the seven lamps of the Menorah, corresponding to the natural order, be lit in the Heichal. In contrast, He commanded that the Aron housing the luchos, the foundation of the entire Torah, be placed in the Kodesh HaKodashim corresponding to the world that exists beyond nature.

Based on this understanding, the Maharal explains why HKB”H arranged for the miracle of Chanukah to transpire over the course of eight days. When the Greeks invaded the Beis HaMikdash, they were only able to enter the Heichal, where the seven lamps of the Menorah were kindled. They were not able to enter the Kodesh HaKodashim, however, due to its enormous, supernatural kedushah. Therefore, HKB”H drew the miracle of Chanukah from the Kodesh HaKodashim. This enabled Yisrael to light the Menorah with pure olive oil for eight days, defying the laws of nature.

It is also for this reason that HKB”H orchestrated for the miracle of Chanukah to involve a single flask of oil **“stamped with the seal of the Kohen Gadol.”** For, the Kohen Gadol, who wore eight priestly garments, was also above the laws of nature. Therefore, he had the power to prepare for Yisrael a pure flask of olive oil stamped with his seal that would miraculously light the lamps supernaturally for eight days. This is the gist of his sacred explanation.

## The Supernatural Number Eight Represents Binah the Eighth Midah Counting from the Bottom Up

The Maharal has taught us that the number seven is associated with the natural order established during the seven days of creation. The number eight, on the other hand, indicates a supernatural order. Let us explain this by referring to the Mishnah (Avos 5, 1): **“בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם—the world was created by means of ten utterances.** The early scholars explained that these utterances correspond to the ten sefirot. These sefirot are the manifestations or attributes donned by HKB”H to create the world. Here are their names: **Keser, chochmah, binah, chesed, gevurah, Tiferes, netzach, hod, yesod, and malchus.** The source for this idea is found in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 14, 11): **“כף אחת עשרה זהב, כנגד עשר ספירות בלימה—“one ladle of gold weighing ten (shekel)” corresponding to the ten utterances with which the world was created and corresponding to the ten sephirot of “belimah” (nothingness, abstract, ineffable).**

Furthermore, it is accepted that the seven days of creation during which HKB”H created the natural world, align with the last seven midos (attributes): **Chesed, gevurah, Tiferes, netzach, hod, yesod, and malchus.** Now, if we count them from the bottom up, the eighth midah is **“binah,”** which transcends the natural order. Thus, it is not surprising that this is how the Sefas Emes and others interpret the divine, poetic words of Maoz Tzur: **“בני בינה ימי שמונה קבעו שיר ורגנים.”** **“Bnei binah”** refers to the sages of that generation, who were men endowed with **“binah”**—they perceived that the miracle of Chanukah was supernatural, related to **“binah.”** **“Therefore, the sages (men of binah) ordained these eight days for song and jubilation”** corresponding to the eighth midah.

It should be apparent that this concurs magnificently with what we learned from the Maharal: HKB”H gave the Torah to Yisrael after the seven weeks of Sefiras HaOmer, because like the number eight, it is above the natural order. This then is the significance of the teaching in the Gemara: **“Fifty levels of binah were created in the world.”** The

Torah encompasses fifty levels of **“binah,”** which is the eighth midah, counting from the bottom up. Thus, the Torah is above the seven midos that correspond to the seven days of creation of the world of nature.

In this light, we can begin to comprehend why HKB”H began the Torah with the passuk: **בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ**, upon which they expound in the Midrash (B.R. 1, 1): **The Torah says: “I was HKB”H’s arSisan’s instrument (blueprint)” . . . HKB”H would look in the Torah and create the world. The Torah said, “בראשית ברא אלקים” — “with ‘Reishis’ G-d created”—and there is no “Reishis” other than the Torah.** In other words, **“Bereishis”**—G-d created the heavens and the earth with the Torah which is called **“Reishis.”**

This coincides beautifully with what we have learned. The Torah represents **“binah,”** which is superior to the seven midos, which correspond to the seven days of creation. Hence, when HKB”H decided to create the world based on the laws of nature during the seven days of creation, he looked in the Torah representing **“binah,”** which is superior to the seven midos, to create the natural world.

## The Yetzer HaRa Has Seven Names Corresponding to the Seven Negative Midos

It gives me great pleasure to now explain the amazing power of the holy Torah to neutralize and eliminate the yetzer hara. In the words of HKB”H (Kiddushin 30b): **בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תכלין, ואם אתם עוסקים בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו—I have created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand.** For, the Gemara teaches us (Succah 52a): **“שבעה שמות יש לו ליצר הרע”—the yetzer hara has seven appellations.** Both the Maharsha and the Rama (in Toras HaOlah, Part II, Chapter 26) explain that these seven appellations relate to the seven negative traits of the yetzer hara. They also correspond to the seven days of creation, and they enable the yetzer hara to corrupt the seven positive midos of kedushah.

We can now apply this concept to the statement of our blessed sages (ibid. and Kiddushin 30b): **יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום—man’s yetzer overwhelms him every day.**

This implies that on every day of the week, corresponding to one of the seven midos, the yetzer hara activates the corresponding name and midah of tumah on that day.

Understood in this light, we can interpret the statement of HKB”H to Yisrael: **“My son, I have created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote.”** As explained, the Torah was given on the fiftieth day, because it is an embodiment of the eighth midah, the midah of “binah,” which is above the natural order. Furthermore, HKB”H referred to the Torah while creating the natural world. Therefore, the kedushah of the Torah possesses the capacity to negate the yetzer hara, because its seven names only function within the world of nature related to the seven days of creation.

This also explains very nicely the lesson taught by the Academy of Rabbi Yishmael (Succah 52b): **“If this despicable character engages you”**—because it employs one of its seven names on each respective day of the week to overwhelm you; **“draw it into the Beis Midrash”**—to engage in the study of Torah. The Meorei Ohr writes: **The Beis Midrash is “binah,” a house for the Torah.** By ascending to the level of “binah,” which is above the seven midos, the yetzer hara, whose powers of tumah only function within the world of nature, is neutralized and eliminated. In the words of the Gemara: **“If it is like a stone, it will dissolve; if it is like iron, it will shatter.”**

### **The Goal of a “Neder” Is to Ascend to the Level of “Binah” which Is Composed of Fifty Gates**

Following this line of reasoning, we will now proceed to achieve a better understanding of the concept of a “neder”—a vow. As the Shela hakadosh explains in the name of the kabbalists, “ג' דר stands for נדר. In other words, it stems from “binah,” which encompasses ג' (fifty) gates or levels. To begin with, we will introduce an apparent contradiction in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) addressed by the Arvei Nachal (Ki Seitzei). Initially, HKB”H tells Yisrael: **“My son, I have created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in**

**Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand.”** Subsequently, however, the Gemara says: **“Man’s yetzer overwhelms him every day and attempts to kill him . . . And if not for HKB”H, Who aids him, he would be unable to withstand it.”** According to the first statement, we possess the ability to overcome the yetzer hara on our own; according to the second statement, we do not.

It appears that we can reconcile this contradiction based on what the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh writes at the beginning of parshas Bechukosai. He asserts that when HKB”H says to Yisrael: **“I created the yetzer hara, and I have created the Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand”**—this only applies on the condition that Yisrael study Torah l’shma—sincerely, with proper intent. If, however, they do not learn l’shma, their studies will not subdue and eliminate the yetzer hara. The explanation for this is that when a Jew learns not l’shma, the yetzer hara receives some credit for his Torah-learning.

So, now, let us resolve the contradiction between the Gemara’s two statements. The first statement: **“I created the yetzer hara, and I have created the Torah as its antidote”**—applies to someone who learns Torah l’shma. His Torah is a spice that enhances and transforms the yetzer hara into a positive force. Someone who does not learn l’shma, however, because he has not yet achieved that rarefied level, requires divine assistance: **“A man’s yetzer overwhelms him every day and tries to kill him . . . And if not for HKB”H, Who aids him, he would be unable to withstand it.”** Therefore, the Gemara teaches us elsewhere (Pesachim 50b): לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ומצוות אף על פי שלא “לשמה, לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה”—one should always strive to engage in Torah-study and the performance of mitzvos even if one’s intent and purpose are initially insincere or misguided—“lo l’shma.” For, by performing mitzvos in this less-than-ideal manner, one will eventually come to perform mitzvos in the desired, ideal manner—“l’shma.” Clearly, the latter does not have the control over his yetzer that a Jew who is able to learn l’shma does.

Now, let us return to the subject of “nedarim.” We learned from the Shela hakadosh that a נדר is somehow related to “binah” and its “nun she’arim.” Consider a person who is harassed constantly and overwhelmed by the yetzer hara, but he has not yet achieved the level of learning l’shma. So, he is not capable of overcoming the yetzer on his own. Therefore, he accepts upon himself a vow to sanctify matters of Olam HaZeh through a degree of abstinence in order to avoid the influence of the yetzer hara. This then is the benefit of a “neder.” It enables him to elevate himself to the realm of “binah” with its “nun” gates. In this situation, the yetzer hara is powerless, since its seven names of tumah only function in the world of nature created during the seven days of creation.

This explains beautifully an idea discussed in our sacred sefarim. “Binah,” which has fifty levels, is associated with the “yovel”—the jubilee year. During that fiftieth year, all slaves are set free, as described in the passuk (Vayikra 25, 10): **”יקידשתם את שנת החמישים שנה וקראתם דרור בארץ לכל יושביה: יוכל היא תהיה לכם ושבתם איש אל אחוזתו ואיש אל משפחתו תשובו.”** **You shall sanctify the fiftieth year, and you shall proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants; it is a yovel year for you, and you shall return, each man to his ancestral heritage, and you shall return, each man to his family.** Let us develop this allusion. A person who does not learn Torah l’shma, is a slave to the yetzer hara. But if he achieves the level of l’shma with its fifty gates of “binah,” he is blessed with the kedushah of the “yovel”—he is released from his servitude to the yetzer hara; he returns to his ancestral land of kedushah. This is the message conveyed by the Mishnah (Avos 6, 2): **”שאינו לך—בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה—for there is no free man other than one who engages in the study of Torah.**

**Moshe Rabeinu Prophesied with the Formula “זה הדבר” because He Attained the 49th Level of “Binah”**

Proceeding along this sublime, king’s road, we will now endeavor to explain the passuk: **“Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael, saying, “This is the**

**matter (“זה הדבר”) that Hashem has commanded: If a man takes a vow to Hashem.”** Rashi explains that all of the other neviim prophesied with the formula **”כה אמר ה’—so said Hashem;** Moshe, however, was superior to them in that he also prophesied with the formula **”זה הדבר אשר צוה ה’—this is the matter that Hashem has commanded.**

Let us suggest an explanation in keeping with our current discussion. The heads of the tribes were distinguished men who had already achieved the rarefied status of learning Torah l’shma. Hence, Moshe prophesied to them with the formula: **“This is the matter”—“זה הדבר”**. He revealed to them the 49 levels of “binah” that he had perceived regarding all the mitzvos of the Torah. This is truly the intent of: **“This is the matter that Hashem has commanded”—**to attain the highest level of understanding and perception that we are capable of in Olam HaZeh.

However, when Moshe and the other neviim sent by HKB”H to encourage Yisrael to perform teshuvah addressed all of Yisrael, they prophesied exclusively with the formula **”כה אמר ה’**, since not everyone had achieved the level of learning Torah l’shma. As such, they had not ascended to the realm of “binah” and were still vulnerable to the yetzer hara. This enabled them to observe the mitzvos of the Torah according to the reality and physical constraints of Olam HaZeh. They were not, however, able to perceive the wisdom and precepts of the Torah according to the 49 levels of “binah” associated with the formula **“this is the matter that Hashem has commanded.”**

With this in mind, we can appreciate why Moshe Rabeinu presented the laws of “nedarim” to the heads of the tribes in the following manner: **”זה הדבר אשר צוה ה’, איש כי—ידור נדר לה”**. Recall that the Shela hakadosh explained in the name of the kabbalists that by making a “neder”—נדר—a person was able to elevate himself temporarily to the realm of “binah” comprised of “nun” gates. Now, the heads of the tribes already learned Torah l’shma. By teaching them the laws of “nedarim,” they would be able to discern whether or not a person making a vow had pure, sincere intents, i.e., l’shma. If the person making the vow did, indeed, qualify,

his “neder” would be upheld; however, if he was found to be lacking, his “neder” would be annulled.

### "זה הדבר אשר צוה ה" Appears Eight Times

We can support the claim that a nevuah presented with the formula “זה הדבר” constitutes a revelation of Torah from the realm of “binah,” the eighth midah, by noting that the language “זה הדבר אשר צוה ה” appears in the entire Torah precisely eight times. Let us list them:

1. Concerning the “mahn,” it says (Shemos 16, 16): “זה הדבר אשר צוה ה’ לקטו ממנו איש לפי אכלו עומר לגולגולת.”
2. Also concerning the “mahn,” it says (ibid. 32): “ויאמר משה זה הדבר אשר צוה ה’ מלוא העומר ממנו למשמרת לדורותיכם.”
3. Concerning the contributions to the Mishkan, it says (ibid. 35, 4): “ויאמר משה אל כל עדת בני ישראל לאמר זה הדבר אשר צוה ה’ לאמר, קחו מאתכם תרומה לה.”
4. When Aharon and his sons were anointed into the kehunah, it says (Vayikra 8, 5): “ויאמר משה אל העדה זה הדבר אשר צוה ה’ לעשות.”

5. Concerning the inauguration of the Mishkan, it says (ibid. 9, 6): “ויאמר משה זה הדבר אשר צוה ה’ תעשו וירא אליכם כבוד ה’”

6. Concerning the warning not to offer sacrifices outside of the designated areas, it says (ibid. 17, 2): “דבר אל אהרן ואל בניו ואל כל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם זה הדבר אשר צוה ה’ לאמר.”

7. In this week’s parsha, it says: “וידבר משה אל ראשי המטות לכני ישראל לאמר זה הדבר אשר צוה ה’”.

8. Concerning the inheritance of the daughters of Tzlofchad, it says (Bamidbar 36, 6): “זה הדבר אשר צוה ה’ לכנות צלפחד לאמר.”

Thus, we have demonstrated explicitly that throughout the entire Torah, encompassing “nun” gates of “binah,” the nevuah of Moshe employing the formula “זה הדבר אשר צוה ה” appears eight times. This illustrates that Moshe Rabeinu was able to reveal through them the roots of the Torah emanating from the realm of “binah.” Now, although Moshe did not attain the fiftieth level, nevertheless, he did attain 49 levels of “binah.” Those levels were revealed to the heads of the tribes when he prophesied to them with the words: “זה הדבר אשר צוה ה”—**this is the matter that Hashem has commanded.**



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