

## Do Not Swear At All

*“<sup>33</sup>Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall carry out your oaths to Adonai.’ (Lev. 19:12: “You are not to swear by My Name falsely, and so profane the Name of your God. I am Adonai.”) <sup>34</sup>But I tell you, **do not swear at all** – not by heaven, for it is the throne of God; <sup>35</sup>or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. <sup>36</sup>And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. <sup>37</sup>But let your word ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’ – anything more than this is from the evil one” (Matt. 3:33-37).*

The reading on this *Shabbat* is from the double *Torah* portion *Mattot-Massei*, in *Numbers 30:2-36:13*. These two portions start with a command of *The Almighty* to the *heads of the tribes of Israel*. Their commands and oaths are to be taken seriously and adhered to in the strictest sense. This command initiates a new paradigm of obedience to *The Almighty* and the leadership of Israel, adhering to every promise and commitment made in the conquest of the Promised Land of Israel. It all begins with the value of our words: *“Whenever a man makes a vow to Adonai or swears an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he is not to violate his word but do everything coming out of his mouth (Nu. 30:2)”* We must keep *our word* like those heads of the tribes of Israel because our most important tool and weapon is *our word*. If our words don't carry meaning, we are not taken seriously. The heads of the tribes needed to have *a firm commitment to every one of their promises*, or they risked losing their authority as leaders of *B'nei Israel*. Unfortunately, some leaders make promises that they never intend to keep. A leader who doesn't have the prestige to lead his people is not a true leader. One of the most important weapons that the leader of *Yah Adonai's* people possesses is *integrity*, and *integrity* is closely tied to a leader's promises and words, *without any filters*. If a *leader fails* to keep *his words and promises*, his disciples will not follow.

The essence and main points that our reading in this *Shabbat* stands upon are the *importance of the promises and vows that our leaders make*. There is no tool more important for spiritual leaders and teachers of *The Almighty's Word* than the *weight of the words they speak*. In the face of turmoil, *integrity* in commitments can foster trust within the community. If the *integrity* of the leaders is not cemented, trusted, and consistent, the leader cannot maintain their respect and trust, which is the most essential tool for every leader of *The Almighty's people*. I urge leaders to reflect on their promises to *The Almighty* and to one another, reinforcing the importance of mutual support and dedication.

On June 28, 2025, I spoke on leadership (*Where Have All the Leaders Gone?*). The last two paragraphs of the message focused on integrity, a virtue I highly value. Let's quote these again for your convenience:

*Virtue* refers to a trait or characteristic deemed to be morally good and is valued as a foundational element of a person's character. *Virtues* are typically developed through habitual actions and are essential for leading a morally good life. Examples of *virtues* include *courage, temperance, prudence, and justice*. I want to add my own favorite character quality to the mix. In order to lead in *The Almighty's* economy, we must also have a good dose of *integrity*. David did and so do we: *“Of David. Vindicate me, Adonai, for I have walked in my integrity, and trusted in Adonai without wavering...<sup>11</sup>But I – I will walk in my integrity. Redeem me and be gracious to me (Psalm 26:1, 11).”* This psalm reflects on the theme of *personal integrity* and trust in divine judgment. It serves as a prayer of vindication, where the psalmist pleads for *The Almighty* to judge him and prove his innocence. I like the KJV version of *Psalm 26:11*: *“But as for me, I will walk in my integrity; redeem me and be merciful unto me.”* *Integrity* is often described as the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that one *consistently adheres to*. It involves *coherence and consistency between one's beliefs, values, and actions*. *Integrity* can be seen as a commitment to one's principles, even in the face of temptation or adversity.

While virtue is about cultivating morally good traits and behaviors, *integrity* is about maintaining a consistent and coherent moral identity and adhering to principles. Both are essential for ethical living, but they approach morality from different angles – *virtue* through the cultivation of good habits and *integrity* through the *steadfast adherence* to moral values. In ethics, *integrity* is regarded as the honesty and truthfulness or earnestness of one's actions. *Integrity* stands in *complete opposition to hypocrisy*. It regards internal consistency as a *virtue*, and suggests that people who hold apparently conflicting values should account for the discrepancy or alter those values. *Integrity* is the inner sense of *wholeness* deriving from qualities such as honesty and consistency of character. In other words, you are what you are no matter where or who's looking, the same at home as in the congregation.

Perhaps the most vivid example of the severe trouble associated with a leader's vow is the story of *Yiftach (Jephthah)*: a judge of Israel during six years (*Judges 12:7*); conqueror of the Ammonites. According to *Judges 11:1*, who was a *Gileadite*, son of *Gilead* and a harlot. Driven from his father's house by his father's legitimate sons, he settled in the land of *Tob* as chief of a band of freebooters (*Judges 11:3*). On the occasion of the war with the Ammonites, *Jephthah's* aid was sought by the elders of *Gilead* and obtained on the condition that they would accept him as their chief; and he was accordingly solemnly invested with authority at *Mizpah (Judges 11:4-11)*. Before taking the field, *Jephthah* resorted to diplomacy, sending an embassy to the King of Ammon. This failing, *Jephthah* attacked and completely defeated him, taking from him twenty cities (*Judges 11:12-33*).

The most prominent act in *Jephthah's* life was his vow to sacrifice to *The Almighty* whatsoever came first out of his house to meet him if he should return victorious. His vow fell upon his only daughter, who came out to meet him dancing to the sound of timbrels. *Jephthah*, having given her a respite of two months, *consummated his vow*. After this it became the custom for the daughters of Israel to lament four days in every year the death of Jephthah's daughter (*Judges 11:34-40*) (See Jewish Encyclopedia.com)

What a tragedy! Evidently *Jephthah* was not familiar with what the *Torah* states in today's *Parashat*: “<sup>3</sup>Suppose a woman in her youth vows to Adonai or obligates herself by a pledge in her father's house. <sup>4</sup>If her father should hear her vow or her pledge with which she obligated herself and her father says nothing to her, all her vows and every pledge by which she has obligated herself will stand. <sup>5</sup>But if her father **should forbid it on the day of his hearing it, none of her vows or pledges by which she has obligated herself will stand. Adonai will forgive her because her father has forbidden her.**” So as a father *Jephthah* had the power to annul this vow. But his apparent ignorance of *Torah* resulted in *Jephthah consummating his vow* and his own daughter paid the ultimate price. This is also an example of the great damage cause by *cutting words*: *We have decided that you are not entitled to any inheritance in our family because of the fact that you were born of a harlot*. Those were *cutting words* spoken to *Jephthah* by his brothers. They cut deeply because they came from those with whom he had grown up (his own family). Do you recognize the danger in that the surface of a cutting wound can heal first and leave infection underneath? This is what happened to *Jephthah's* wounds. The surface healed, but deep within him bitterness festered, which surfaced years later. “<sup>7</sup>Didn't you hate me so much that you forced me out of my father's house? Why are you coming to me now, when you're in trouble?” (*Judges 11:7*). Longer time will always be required for the true healing of *cutting words* and during that time there will be pain. Even after healing, a cutting wound will be sensitive to the touch. Complete healing comes when the victim is directed to meditate on the *Torah* and *Psalms* daily.

*Yeshua said do not swear at all!* People die for lack of knowledge, especially the knowledge of *The Almighty's Word*. Without question the *Messiah Yeshua* came to gave us the very best antidote/cure for vows: *do not swear at all! Shabbat Shalom!*