

STUCK WITH A STICK

by Rabbi Label Lam

Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes (MATOS) of the children of Israel, saying: This is the thing (Davar) HASHEM has commanded. If a man makes a vow to HASHEM or makes an oath to prohibit himself, he shall not degrade his speech (D'varo); according to whatever came out of his mouth, he shall do. (Bamidbar 30:2-3)

Here we have a chapter in the holy Torah named "sticks". That's what MATOS means. It is the term that describes the branches/ the tribes as various parts emanating from a common, singular trunk, root system, and seed. I am struck and stuck with this word "stick". What's in a word?

When Moshe introduces the laws surrounding the making of vows, an unusual introduction is employed: "This is the thing-matter-Davar". "This" implies something that can be seen or pointed to concretely. Just as when the then entire nation went through the split sea, there was a collective declaration, "This is my G-d..." Rashi is compelled to tell us that everyone, even the least likely candidates, shared a unique vision of the loftiest of spiritual dimensions. When the laws of declaring a new moon was given to Moshe he is told, "This month is for you..." Rashi is again forced to explain that Moshe was shown a sliver of a new moon as a visual aid. What is the meaning of "this" in "this is the D'var HASHEM"? Where is the concrete object being referred to?

This is all an introduction to the power of vows. Moshe delivers the commandment, "he shall not violate (make profane) his word- "D'varo". "Davar" means a thing- a matter, and "D'var" means speech?

What is the common denominator between speech and thing? The Talmud tells us, "The kingship of the earth is like the kingship of the heavenly domain." That means that there is a correspondence, a metaphorical parallelism between the physical and the spiritual realm.

Therefore it is not just a flight of fancy or a cute metaphor if we observe that just as there is in the physical universe three states of matter, so it is in the spiritual world. Everything is either in a state of being solid, liquid, or gas. Water can be frozen solid like a rock, or can be fluid and flowing like a river, or it can be floated away in an invisible cloud of vapor. Everything we do as humans is either in the form of thought, speech, or action. Thought is more hidden like water in a gaseous form. Speech is a more concretized form of the same substance. Action is real-solid and tangible.

What we learn here is that speech, the things we say, what flows so easily from our mouths is not

only one step closer to hard reality. It is a force of physical reality already. It is not only potential or almost something. It is closer to the solid side of the equation than it is to the airy and abstract. Water is heavy. Water is powerful. It can be a life giving force and it can be a devastating force.

So it is that speech can be a life giving force, and it can be a devastating force. That is the introduction to exercising extreme care in the declaration of vows. What we say is powerful. Once it passes the discrete filters of the mind and it exits the mouth, it becomes a force in our lives to reckon with.

Alternately, everything in this world is a result of the speech of HASHEM. The universe is created and made concrete by the speech of The Almighty. The world itself and everything in it is speaking. Every Davar is an expression of HASHEM, an actual D'var.

Matos- sticks are also articulate. When the juices of life, the waters absorbed by the roots, flow successfully up through the xylem and the phylum, defying gravity and navigating the veins of the tree, then miraculously we have beautiful flowers and delicious fruits. When speech is degraded we are **stuck with a stick**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).