



THE SHALOM BAYIT JOURNAL



Parashat Matot

When Words Carry Weight

Understanding the Torah and the Human Experience

Communication is one of the core foundations of every healthy relationship. Learning how to express ourselves with kindness and respect is essential, but so is learning what not to say in emotionally reactive moments. Healthy relationships require words that carry weight. Our partners should be able to trust that our words today will still be true tomorrow.

Psychologists refer to one common tendency as confirmation bias—our minds naturally look for evidence that confirms what we already believe about others while overlooking evidence that challenges it. When we become convinced that our spouse will fail, we often stop encouraging, supporting, or guiding them. We quietly step back and allow the mistake to happen, and when it does, it seems to confirm what we believed all along.

Parashat Matot opens with the laws of vows before discussing the unique role of a father and husband in affirming or annulling certain vows made within the household. The opening verse sets the tone for the entire section:

אִישׁ כִּי יִדָּר נָדָר לַיהוָה אִוְּהִשְׁבַּע שְׁבָעָה לְאִסֵּר אֶסֶר עַל־נַפְשׁוֹ
לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ כְּכֹל הַיֵּצֵא מִפִּיו יַעֲשֶׂה (במדבר ל:ג).

"If a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath imposing an obligation upon himself, he shall not profane his word; according to whatever comes out of his mouth, he shall do."

Although the verse speaks about vows, Rashi's language points to a broader lesson. Rashi explains,

"לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ — כִּמוֹ לֹא יַחַלֵּל דְּבָרוֹ, לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה דְּבָרוֹ חֲלִין"

*"He shall not profane his word;
he shall not make his words ordinary or empty."*

The opposite of קֹדֶשׁ (holy) is חֹל (ordinary). Our words are not meant to become ordinary, cheap, careless, or disposable. They should carry enough weight that the people we love can rely on them.

*Our partners should be able
to trust that our words today
will still be true tomorrow.*





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The Torah then discusses a husband who initially confirms his wife's vow but later attempts to reverse it by claiming that he annulled or disagreed with it. Ramban connects this law back to the opening verse, explaining that the husband is considered as though he himself violated the commandment of, "לֹא יַחֲלֵ דְבָרָיו".

The Torah continues,

"וְנָשָׂא אֶת עֲוֹנָהּ"

"He shall bear her iniquity."

Rashi explains that if a husband misleads his wife into believing that her vow was annulled and she errs because she trusted him, the husband bears the responsibility. One who causes another person to stumble shares responsibility for the outcome.

While the Torah speaks specifically about vows, the principle extends beyond this case. The Torah presents us with a different model. Rather than standing by while another person stumbles, we are called to help prevent it in the first place.

Healthy relationships are not built by collecting evidence that our partner is incapable. They are built by creating the conditions that help one another succeed.

When confirmation bias takes hold, we stop investing in another person's success. We become less encouraging and less willing to guide them, quietly creating the conditions that make failure more likely.

Healthy relationships are built by creating the conditions that help one another succeed.

Their stumble then feels like confirmation, when in reality our withdrawal may have contributed to it. Like the husband who bears responsibility for causing his wife to stumble, we too share responsibility when our assumptions lead us to withhold the support that could have helped them succeed.

Our words should never become ordinary, our commitments should remain consistent, and our words should protect the people who rely on us.

The next time you find yourself in a tense moment, assuming you already know how things will end, try to pause. Challenge your own assumptions and confirmation bias. Be consistent and careful with your words. Ask yourself, "How can I support my partner instead of becoming a stumbling block?"



About The Shalom Bayit Journal

The Shalom Bayit Journal explores the intersection of Torah, psychology, relationships, and the human experience. Through thoughtful essays and practical reflection, the Journal seeks to make timeless wisdom meaningful and accessible for everyday life.

