

“If a man takes a vow to Hashem... to prohibit a prohibition upon himself, he shall not profane his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do.” (30:3)

Chochmas HaMitzpon draws a penetrating analogy from the laws of Nedarim, vows, and the Torah's admonition to keep one's word to the regular prohibitions of the Torah. It is well-known that if one is ill with a serious disease, he will seek out a specialist in that field. Even specialists have various levels of experience. Commensurate with the gravity of the illness, one will make every effort to see the most qualified practitioner. There seems to be a parallel between the physician's level of expertise and the seriousness of the disease. The more qualified the physician one seeks, the more serious is the nature of the illness.

The same idea applies to sin and punishment. When an individual prohibits himself from doing or partaking in something, the Torah demands that he keep his word. While there are ways to “get out of it” by consulting with a Torah scholar or bais din, court, comprised of three lay people who permit his vow, Chazal still maintain that an individual who breaks his word incurs upon himself terrible punishments. Indeed, this is why on Erev Rosh Hashanah one goes through the ritual of HaTaras Nedarim, Annulment of Vows, to make sure that he does not transgress a self-imposed prohibition.

We can now begin to imagine the gravity of transgressing a Biblical prohibition, one that all of the Torah scholars in the world could never annul. This may be compared to an illness for which there is no cure, a sickness that no physician can heal. If this applies to a “simple” aveirah, sin, can we even fathom the seriousness of transgressing a prohibition that is punished with Heavenly excision or a prohibition that is punishable by death? We now have a glimpse of what lies in store for he who violates Torah law and does not repent his sin.