

# The greatness of empathy

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The first thing the Torah tells us about Moshe's personality is "וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לִּבְרֹתָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת צָרָתָם", "he went out to observe his brothers and he saw their suffering". [Rashi](#) explains that he focused on their pain and kept their suffering in his heart. We clearly see Moshe's great humility from his introduction. In [Birchos Hashahar 5](#) Reb Nosson brings a midrash (Vayikra Rabba Ch. 37) that Hashem said, "because you cared about your brothers' suffering, you will merit to be taught the laws of vows".

The obvious question is, what's the connection between the two things? I understand that it's a great reward to be taught any law from God, but why is Moshe's empathy for his people rewarded with being taught the laws of vows? Reb Nosson gives his own answer (ibid).

I was thinking as follows: One of the most interesting type of vows is the [Nazir's](#) vow. A nazir is someone who voluntarily vowed to abstain from all alcohol derived from grapes. (He also can't cut his hair or become ritually impure). When the Torah introduces this idea it says:

“אִם יָדָן אִישׁ א֥וֹ אִשָּׁה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ לַיהוָה נָזִיר וְשָׁקַט אֶת־יָדָיו מִיַּיִן וְשָׁקַט אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ מִלְּבַשׁ חֵטִי וְשָׁקַט אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ מִלְּבַשׁ חֵטִי וְשָׁקַט אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ מִלְּבַשׁ חֵטִי”

**“If a man or woman sets themselves apart by making a nazarite vow”**

The word אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ, to set himself apart, says the [Even Ezra](#) stems from the root נָזַר (wonder). Meaning that he did a wondrous thing by making a vow. Here the whole world is running after their desires and this person is a marvel, in that he sets himself apart and abstains from his desires. The same is true for many vows. If someone vows to give charity or vows to do a mitzvah, this is truly a wonder; something so rare.

I think that this is why Moshe merited to be taught the laws of vows for his compassion. The same way that it's a phenomenon for someone to want to abstain from his desires, when the rest of the world is stuck in the mud of bodily desires, so too it's equally a rarity for someone to care about another person. The same selfishness that entraps people to follow their lusts, hooks them to be narcissistic. The Torah says that אִשָּׁה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ לַיהוָה נָזִיר וְשָׁקַט אֶת־יָדָיו מִיַּיִן וְשָׁקַט אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ מִלְּבַשׁ חֵטִי, *a person's natural tendency is to be preoccupied with himself*. Children only care about themselves and, unfortunately, too many people never grow up. If the first thing the Torah tells us about Moshe was that he was compassionate for others, that means it was an essential value of his. The more selfless you are, the greater you are, because you are more like God himself, who is totally selfless. Sadly, it's not common enough to see true altruism, just like it's not that common to witness people abstain from the desires of this world.

May we merit to truly be selfless and dedicated to the service of Hashem and our fellow people.

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