

Of Torah Study and Relationships Rabbi Daniel Fridman

The third and central book of the Torah, Sefer VaYikra, opens with a seemingly extraneous clause: ויקרא אל משה, the Almighty called to Moshe. If one continues to read the rest of the verse, וידבר ה' אליו מאהל מועד לאמר, that the Almighty spoke to Moshe from the Tent of Meeting, one instantly realizes that the first clause requires some clarification. The Torah, so famed for its terseness, could have simply written, וידבר ה' אל משה מאהל מועד לאמר. What, then, the need for the קריאה beforehand?

R. Chanina, cited in the Talmud¹, interprets this verse to be instructive of proper etiquette. That is, prior to communicating a message of substance to someone, it is best to first call them directly. R. Baruch Ha-Levi Epstein² takes this in a pragmatic vein, interpreting the Talmudic interpretation of the clause in question as of a fundamentally practical nature. Simply put, one wishes to give one's listener a chance to orient himself, and establish proper focus to receive the message which is about to come.

Rashi, however, opts for a far more ambitious, and to my mind, more poignant interpretation of this opening clause, ויקרא אל משה. Prior to communicating any substance to Moshe of a halakhic nature, the Almighty first reached out with a personal touch, as a sign of affection, חבה³. Apparently, this קריאה was not merely to focus Moshe's mind, but to communicate something far deeper: that the optimal context in which Torah must be taught is one of affection, where both the transmitter and the recipient are bonded in an intimate, personal relationship. Conceptually speaking, learning Torah is not the aggregate of millions or billions of pieces of information which is communicated via some form of impersonal transmission, be in a text book, podcast, or tape recorder. Rather, the discipline of Torah study is, has been, and always will be, an intimate and personal experience, one which existentially bonds those who engage in it together to one another, at one plane, and, simultaneously, to the Almighty Himself.

It is the קריאה, the personal calling, at the very outset of this process which sets the tone for this kind of deep and intimate act. From that point forward, Torah study itself does the rest of the work, for even as those engaged in study wage 'war' on one another, challenging every assumption and rigorously assessing each layer of analysis,

¹ תלמוד בבלי מסכת יומא דף ד':

² תורה תמימה, ויקרא, פרק א, הערה א, "וטעם הדבר כדי שיכין עצמו השומע לשמוע".

³ רש"י ויקרא א:א, ד"ה "ויקרא אל משה".

the process itself catalyzes a far greater intimacy⁴ and mutual love than that which existed at the outset of the learning itself.

⁴ תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף ל עמוד ב: לבסוף נעשו אוהבים זה בזה.