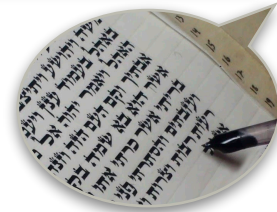




# The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Vayikra

Parshat Vayikra

Nisan 5783 / March 2023

## Bet on the Aleph for Sacrifices

By David Fogel

This week's parsha continues precisely where the book of *Shemot* left off — the earthly manifestation of *Hashem's* presence, His *Kavod*, descends and immediately takes up residence in the *Mishkan* while *Moshe*, unable to enter, stands at a distance. The *parsha* begins with the word *vayikra* to inform us that *Hashem* called to *Moshe* and gave him permission to enter.

The last letter of the word *vayikra*, an *aleph*, is written in a distinctively smaller font. This is odd and the unusual writing style prompts us to wonder how the call to *Moshe* occurred, and it forces us to ponder the connection between the small *aleph* at the end of the word that launches a book of instructions on *korbanot* and the sacrifices themselves.

Many commentators discuss the small *aleph* and the classic explanation is that it symbolizes *Moshe's* humility. *Moshe*, commentators suggest, would have preferred the text to say that *Hashem* called him using the word *vayikar*, meaning by chance, a more modest reading.

*Moshe* didn't want to appear arrogant by recording that *Hashem* called on him directly to write the Torah. *Moshe*, of course, obeys *Hashem's* command to include the *aleph* but does so humbly and uses a small *aleph*.

The last letter of the word *vayikra*, an *aleph*, is written in a distinctively smaller font. This is odd and the unusual writing style prompts us to wonder how the call to *Moshe* occurred, and it forces us to ponder the connection between the small *aleph* at the end of the word that launches a book of instructions on *korbanot* and the sacrifices themselves.

So how did this calling occur? *Rashi* teaches that all oral communications between *Hashem* and *Moshe* were preceded by a call and whenever *Hashem* called for *Moshe's* attention, his instructions are prefaced with a loving summons. This is referenced in *Torat Kohanim*, based upon a *Midrash*: "Every time we read *Hashem* communicated with *Moshe* 'And He spoke,' or 'and He said,' or 'and He commanded,' it was always preceded by *Hashem* calling to *Moshe* twice by name as an expression of affection." The

*Midrash* notes this corresponds to our *Kedusha* in the *Shemona Esrei* davening, referring to the expression employed by the ministering angels *v'karah' zeh el zeh v'amar*, as they call to one another and say with respect and humility and then together call *Hashem's* name. (Isaiah 6:3)

So, what does this reference to humility tell us about *korbanot*? And what does it mean for us as we search for the relevance of sacrifices to our own lives?

*R Simcha Menachem Ben-Tzion Rabinowicz*, in his book on the *parshiot*, *Mevaser Tov*, writes that *Moshe* was drawn close to *Hashem* to receive the full depth of the Torah's wisdom and he emphasizes that the first and foremost condition necessary to stand in *Hashem's* presence is to be humble in one's own estimation.

R Rabinowicz cites the *Iggeres Harambam* that states that developing this trait of humility was the purpose of the sacrifices offered in the *Beit Hamikdash*.

A person's deeds can be defined by three elements: thought, speech, and action. Similarly, *Hashem* commanded that when a person offers a sacrifice it should involve three corresponding elements: leaning his weight on the animal; confessing his sins; and burning organs correlated to man's imagination and desire. The sinner contemplates how he sinned against *Hashem* and understands that he deserves to be punished as well — it is through this process that one obtains a spiritual rectification.

To the extent we recognize our failings and are willing to improve, we draw close to *Hashem* just as if we had offered an actual sacrifice.

The *Gemara* in *Masechet Sotah* (5b), teaches, “come and see how precious are the humble in the eyes of Hashem. While the *Beit Hamkidash* stood a man could offer an *olah* and be credited with an *olah*, a *mincha* and be credited with a *mincha*, but he whose heart is humble is credited with all the sacrifices together as it is written, וְזָבַחְתִּי אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ נִשְׁפָּרָה לִב־נִשְׁפָּר וְנִדְבָה, *true sacrifice to Hashem is accomplished through a humble and contrite spirit.* (*Tehilim* 51:19)

The *Malbim*, a 19th-century commentator, understands this *pasuk* from *Tehilim* to mean that the central point of the sacrifices is that *Hashem* wants man's internal spirit — that which colors his heart and governs his actions — to be humble.

R Rabinowicz considers arrogance as a disease of the soul. Sacrifices would not aid a person who imagined himself to be in perfect spiritual health with no need for improvement.

*Hence, Hashem's loving summons to Moshe precedes the discussion of sacrifices because the intended purpose of the sacrifices is to draw us close to Hashem with a depth of emotional bonding and with a prerequisite of humility.*

Hence, *Hashem's* loving summons to *Moshe* precedes the discussion of sacrifices because the intended purpose of the sacrifices is to draw us close to *Hashem* with a depth of emotional bonding and with a prerequisite of humility.

Everyone can merit a warm wonderful sense of closeness to *Hashem* to the degree he makes himself into the small *aleph*, by humbly recognizing faults and striving to improve themselves.

**David** and Sharon have lived in the community with their daughters Jill and Amanda since the millennium. By the way, Dave believes that referencing yada yada yada in a dvar Torah may be appropriate provided that the *nusach* is correct.

This dvar Torah is dedicated to the memory of Dave's father, Aharon ben Yosef Mordechai.

*Reserve a favorite parsha • Celebrate a family simcha • Honor a legacy • Sign-up [HERE](#)*

**The Collective Conversation** is a project of the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale and the YIS Living Torah Fund

*Learning and Growing Together as a Community • Learning as Legacy*

[Click here](#) to see past issues of The Collective Conversation