

For Men's Club Shabbat – Saturday, April 1, 2017

VaYikra - And He CalledCan You Hear Me Now?

Jerome Seid

"VaYikra el Moshe" - "and He called **to** Moshe" opens the 3rd book of the Torah. The location of Leviticus is in the middle, and like a sandwich, it contains the 'meat' - the goodies that make up the filling. Up to now we have been hearing mostly about people and events. Now we are about to learn how we are supposed to live, how to honor Hashem and all his creations. VaYikra starts us with the instructions for sacrifice.

Note that the verse says that "He called **to** Moshe," ? It could have simply stated, "He called Moshe!" From the inclusion of a small additional word, "to", commentators have suggested an additional point. The voice of God is an incredibly powerful voice, yet it seems that His voice reached **only** Moshe. It suggests that the rest of Bnai Yisrael did not hear a thing. No one else heard the call? It is possible that this is not a matter of hearing, but a matter of responding to the call. So, literally and figuratively, Moshe had a calling and he responded affirmatively at every opportunity.

The phrase 'VaYikra el Moshe' conjures up for me the Verizon Wireless TV commercial showing a man trying to talk on his cell phone and getting poor reception, resorting to walking to various locations to get a better signal. The numerous passages in Sh'mot, described the afflictions and messages God delivered to the Egyptians on behalf of the Jewish people. Yet each successive plague could not achieve the

connection or outcome God desired, until the last. I could imagine after each one, the voice of God (through Moshe of course!) asking Pharaoh " **Can you hear me now?**" Was God's cell service spotty or his carrier inadequate? Moshe clearly provided the best carrier service at that time, so it couldn't have been that.

But, how about us here in the 21st century? Are we doing any better than the Egyptians? Are our hearts hardened like Pharaoh? Are we hearing God's call and actually listening and adhering to those **spoken** laws and commandments the **transcription** of which we are about to read? Mitzvot of which we have been instructed and with which we are entrusted? Are we respectful enough of our sacred covenant with God? Or, is there too much static on our lines that we can't hear the voice? Are we missing out on our calling?

Just maybe, we are using our innate "caller ID" to filter out those "unwanted" calls from those who might place uncomfortable demands on us. Yes, you know we all do that from time to time when we don't want to be engaged or bothered. We get so concerned about God responding and answering **our** prayers that we sometimes forget that God has some important things to say to and ask of us. We come equipped with GPS, something I only recently learned about. This GPS (God Positioning System), rather than giving us a map with directions, actually tugs and pulls **at** us, attempting to navigate us to fulfillment and happiness.

What has been your calling in life if you have one? How did you find out? For some of us it is easier to identify and arrives earlier as well. But, there are jobs that may seem mundane to others yet still worthy of being callings. So often in our society we are tempted to minimize and disparage those who do not share more lofty aspirations, as lacking a calling. That may be because we so often equate the term 'calling' with employment or work, which certainly provides purpose, fulfillment and

derives from a deeper sense of self. Passion is the word often used to describe this concept. However positively one hears such a description, I think the use of the word passion can seem dismissive of and hurtful to those who may not possess or recognize a passion - for their employment.

But, that is not what I think VaYikra is intended to teach us. Yes, it pertains to the concept of animal sacrifice, a practice the Jews were accustomed to, having lived among pagan cultures for so many years. However, after the destruction of the second temple, there was no place to conduct animal sacrifice. The phrase *korbanot* is used in this parashah to denote sacrifice, from the root word *“karov”* — to approach, come near — since through bringing a sacrifice, one comes closer to God. So what can we infer from the inclusion of such detailed description of sacrifice in this parashah?

Korbanot are offered to God as a fulfillment of the 613 mitzvot. If we can no longer use animals to show our gratitude to God, or to ask forgiveness for sins both intended and unintended, how can we get close? We can use prayer as our vehicle, but words without action are merely words. Giving self to others - that is what God intended for us to sacrifice.

These actions, representing our adherence to the laws God gave us, **are** our true calling which we all possess, equally. So even the poorest and most disadvantaged among us can be freed of a societal inequality and confidently say that he or she is following their calling, by obeying the laws and commandments which are set down before us, as equals. Hence the inclusion of animals of various types and sizes in the parashah - it indicates that even the poorest among us has something to give to God which is acceptable as sacrifice to him, to bring himself or herself closer. That is a calling if you ask me, and there should be no doubt it is also steeped in passion.

It allows us and in fact begs us to see others in their myriad differences as also obeying their own internal voices, seeds of which were planted by God himself. It is up to us to listen to our own internal voices and using our intellect, capacity for judgement and reason allow that voice to gain a spirit and a body and heart to carry it forward to actions worthy of God.

In preceding chapters in the Torah, B'nai Yisrael has 'heard' from God, but clearly has not always heard God. How many of us are in the habit of 'tuning out'? We commonly joke about how we employ 'selective hearing' when it comes to our spouses or our children or our superiors at our jobs. How about the tuning out when it comes to the plight of the homeless, the poor, the ill, the elderly, immigrants and those in danger? We must ask ourselves, what is it in our being, our hearts and souls that allows us to deny and ignore the cries of others in distress? Whether physical suffering, or emotional pain, it need not nor should not require dire circumstances nor only loud voices to stir us to respond and act. With VaYikra, we begin to map directions to our destination, to oneness with God starting with the sacrifices, the Korbanot.

So, do we need to adjust our process of hearing **and** listening? Can we recalibrate our individual and collective God Positioning System? Can each of us go into our 'settings app' and select "allow notifications"? What will be the catalyst for such a change within each of us that will allow us to find our individual and common calling?

The truth is that God calls out constantly to us. The Mishna, in Avot states that Rabi Yehoshua Ben Levi declared: "Each and every day a heavenly voice announces, 'Woe to the creations from the disgrace of the Torah' ." The disgrace of not heeding the call of God.

It's up to us if we want to listen... Can you hear me now?

Shabbat Shalom.