

Vayikra - Rabbi Lerner - March 19, 2012

1:1: *Vayikra el Moshe Vayedabair Hashem Elav Me'Ohel Moed Laymor.* "He called to Moshe and God spoke to him from the tent of meeting saying." It is a very weird pasuk. We are starting the third book with a pronoun - it should start with a noun, which is used in the pasuk anyway; it should have started out And Hashem called out to Moshe and said to him... This would have made more sense - why start it this way? And why start the new book with a vav - *And*? This is a vav hachibur which connects this pasuk with the end of the previous book. It is not a new Torah - there is a connection between the end of the last sefer and this one. You cannot put this new sefer into a proper setting without first going back to the end of the previous one. There is described how Bnei Yisrael achieved their goal of bringing down God's Shechina represented by a spiritual cloud into the Mishkan. Now He is calling to Moshe - even though it is a new book, it is connected to the previous one. These books are not separate; we don't call them Chamisha Sifrei Torah, five separate books - each one of the books is a Chumash - a fifth of the Sefer Torah. By using the pronoun *He*, it ties into the end of the last parsha where there was an outpouring of the nation's generosity and enthusiasm to build the Mishkan that Hashem fulfills His end of the bargain as well. We feel Hashem's love and desire to be with us. There is the metaphor of marriage here, with God wanting to live together with us in the same house.

Why is this a new book? Although there is the connection to the previous one, the overriding theme of Vayikra has nothing to do with the building of the Mishkan which was a means to bring God down to our midst. Vayikra teaches us how to capitalize on God's living close to us. We are now married, living together - this book teaches us how to maintain that relationship, how to show our love. The first part of the sefer is all about korbanos, whose root is the word karov, closeness. Korbanos occupies a major part of the Torah - it is a major instrument in keeping the relationship as close and loving as could be.

Why the little aleph in the word Vayikra? **Rosh** (Rabbeinu Asher): The words mean that Hashem called out to Moshe. We know that whenever Hashem called out to him was the same as the first time - He calls out *Moshe Moshe* - a double term of endearment. That was what Hashem was doing here. **Rashi**: All of the dibros and amiros and tzivuyim of Hashem to Moshe are all preceded by a calling out of *Moshe Moshe*. God never talks to Moshe without first calling out his name, a symbol of incredible love and respect. As proof for this is what the angels do, as we say in Kedusha - the angels call out to each other (*Vekarah Zeh El Zeh Ve'Amar*) before speaking to each other. We learn this out from this pasuk. This is the beginning of the bulk of the mitzvos, with no more stories until Bamidbar. God always first calls out to Moshe by name twice, telling him that He loves him, before beginning any conversation. Rashi quotes this from the Sifra, the Toras Kohanim. Moshe is made to feel how much Hashem loves him, but he is squirming here - he is very uncomfortable because of his humility. When Hashem addresses him by his first name in the Mishkan, in the Kodesh Hakadashim above the Aron from between the two keruvim - every day he enters here completely alone, hearing the voice of God. He is squirming because God is making him feel so unique, but it does not go with Moshe's character trait of anivus, humility. In light of this, we understand why there is a small aleph. Because this lesson so elevates the stature of Moshe in our eyes and teaches us this fundamental model that every time God will contact Moshe He will call out to him by name, it expresses God's love for him. Moshe squirms and does not want to write the word Vayikra. The **Rosh** says that the small aleph was because Moshe was always looking to make himself small; he was not looking to have his name in spotlights; he was the most humble man in the world. The gist of the dialogue must have gone

like this: Moshe said to Hashem, why make my name to open up the book of Vayikra - particularly by noting that You are calling me out by name; why give me such billing at the beginning of this sefer. Hashem replies what do you want me to do? Should I change the opening to Vayikar Elokim El Moshe? This would imply a relationship similar to God's calling out to Bilaam - a stern name of God, a name of justice, and a verb meaning happened upon him. This would be derogatory and embarrassing to Moshe. Do you want me to equate you to the genius, evil prophet Bilaam, who wanted to use his powers of prophecy to curse the Jewish people? I cannot do that. It would imply that they did not plan to meet; God just happened to find him and was not eager to meet with him; it would imply almost an accidental meeting. Moshe is the head of the Jewish people and God cannot belittle him so much. So He cannot use the name Elokim, nor the word Vayikar. It must be Hashem, not Elokim, and the loving term Vayikra and not Vayikar; and He must use Moshe's name as well. So, Moshe answers that the adulation still must be toned down - he begs Hashem to do something for Moshe, to compromise a little bit, so that all of the future generations will know that Moshe is not comfortable with all of this respect and love being showered down upon him with these words. Hashem responds that He will make the aleph small, so that if people aren't looking carefully might think it is vayikar although it really is vayikra. The **Medrash** says that Hashem knew how every letter would look and how much ink would be needed; so if there was a letter that was supposed to be written large is instead written small, then when Moshe is finishing the last lamed of the Torah, there is a little drop of ink left; what happened to that ink? Hashem told Moshe to take the ink and smear it on his face - this was the source for the glowing, beaming face that radiated out and frightened the people so that he had to wear a mask; he radiated the Shechina on his face - he was God-like because of this. Moshe is compared to the sun, Yehoshuah the moon. Just as you cannot look at the sun, you could not look at him; just as one could not look at God. What this is really saying is that Hashem not only loves him by calling out his name, God loves most his awesome humility. Moshe put up such a struggle with this word, Hashem decided to show him off to the Jewish people for all times - how with all of his great accomplishment, his humility trumps all - his greatness did not change him, and Hashem eternalizes his humility with these beams of light that radiate off his face. The Gemorrah says that what Moshe is demonstrating with this quality and this little aleph of what Hashem represents - wherever there is God's greatness, there is always side by side His humility. As an example, the pasuk that calls God Kail Gadol Venorah then follows it by saying what God does with all of this power is take care of the widows, the converts, the lowest of the low, the most stressed out strata of society; God, the greatest of all, is worried about the lowest, the most forsaken. That is how Hashem describes His power with His humility. The Rav: the definition of humility is not that we don't have power or wealth or ability to do things; we never let our power create a divide between you and others - especially others who have nothing. The awesomeness of God walks hand in hand with the humility of God. And this is what we see with Moshe as well; throughout his whole career, when he is not talking with God he is taking care of the problems of every Jew. That is what real humility is; that is what this phrase is trying to impart before going on with the book of Vayikra.

Korbanos: There is a major clash here between the Rambam and Ramban. The **Rambam** says in two different places in his Moreh Nevuchim that it was not a great ideal in Hashem's mind to create korbanos. We human beings should take animals who are blameless and slaughter them and burn them? Is that really the way to serve Hashem? The reason He did it was because we were just coming out of Egypt, a great center of paganism that seeped into the Jewish psyche

- because we say so much idol worship, it was important for God to rectify a wrong. We thought that it was better to offer sacrifices to pagan gods and heavenly bodies; it would be very hard to pull away from it; and we know that idol worship was a major issue that all of the prophets had to deal with; the first Temple was destroyed primarily because we were idol worshipers. It was only after that time that the Anshei Kaneses Hagedolah prayed to Hashem to get rid of the desire to worship idols, and Hashem granted this bakashah. Until then, idol worship was a great hurdle. This was why God created the concept of korbanos. We were very limited in our minds; we could not picture a face of God and it was too difficult for us to envision God; the people needed a tangible way to connect to God. Hashem created this as transference, to channel our improper desires to a more useful and appropriate method of serving Him. We would take the same improper ritual and use it to serve God. And it wasn't only because of the Egyptian influence - the Jews themselves got caught up in it. Most Jews could not pull themselves away and were not taken out of Egypt. So we make a more concrete way of serving God with these korbanos, helping us to feel the real truth of God's existence.

Ramban: it is blasphemous to think that the whole concept of korbanos, with all of its great deal as a major institution of religion, was just to serve as a substitute for idolatry, to wean us away from it. Korbanos are not just a concession because of our weakness - it is an ideal. Even had there been no idolatry in the world beforehand, we still would have had korbanos. It represents the highest form of Avodas Hashem, of service to God. It is the most powerful vehicle we have to get close to God. Korbanos involve all of the different dimensions of human activity. There are thoughts, there is speech, and there are deeds. We slaughter and place on the mizbeach; we say things that accompany the sacrifice, like vidui for sin offerings, and thank you for shlomim when we are thanking God; and then there are thoughts - you must have the right thought to validate the korban; if you have the wrong thoughts of which korban it is or until when you can eat it or where you can eat it or who can eat it with you - it will invalidate the korban and the animal would have to be burned. So korbanos encompass the entire sphere of human activity with thoughts, speech and actions. This cannot just be a concession - korbanos are about our getting our entire being in sync with being an Eved Hashem, and loving and fearing God, and drawing close to Him. This was not something that God was reluctant to do because of idolatry - it is the height of spirituality. It was not a Bedi'eved - it is a Lechatchilah, it is something holy in the eyes of God.

Subsequent authorities ask why is it that we find major prophets later in history railing against korbanos? Yeshiyahu says in the Haftorah of Shabbos Chazon "who needs all of the korbanos before Hashem; it is sacrilegious what you do." This would seem to indicate that the Rambam was correct. Other prophets also say this. **Rav Ovadia Yosef** quotes the **Dugna Magid**'s response: it all depends on what is your attitude when you are bringing the sacrifice. When does God want the sacrifice and look at it with the highest degree of regard and respect? When it represents your using it to draw close to God. In the beginning of Bereishis, after the birth of Kayin and Hevel, it says that Kayin is the farmer, Hevel the shepherd. Kayin brings an offering of grain; Hevel follows this with a korban that is the choicest of his animals, whose sacrifice is accepted by God. We normally explain it that Hevel brought a grade A korban, while Kayin brought a lower quality offering. **Dubna Magid:** Kayin brings the fruit of the ground; Hevel brings a sheep. Why say the words *Gom Hu* - that he also brought an offering. But we would know this without the words. Why does God favor Hevel? It means that Hevel brought himself along with the sheep - *Gom Hu* - he brought himself and also the first of his sheep - what God really wants is you, a Jewish heart, not the offering. Hevel understood that the Korban is

just the form; God really wants you. Kayin didn't get it - he just brought the fruits and gave them to God. **Ovadya Yosef**: this explains the essence of korbanos; we are really offering ourselves to God. The Ramban says that the origin of korbanos is the Akeidas Yitzchak - what Avraham and Yitzchak were willing to do was to have him be a korban to God, to lie down and give his life; that is what we should feel - that God want us to be close to him. That is what korbanos is all about - it is not just diverting us from idolatry.

Why when the bais hamikdash was destroyed did Anshei Kaneses Hagedolah establish in the vacuum of no korbanos to replace it with Tefillah? Because what Tefillah is all about is that God really wants you, not the animal. That is why davening with kavanah is all important; just saying words does not show desire to get close to Hashem; it is the kavanah behind it. When do the neviyim rail against korbanos, saying that who needs the abundance of korbanos and you are just trespassing on God's holy place? When you are coming for the wrong reasons; when you are doing it just pro forma without feeling - that is not what korbanos are supposed to be. God just gets angry when we do that, when we trample his holy house for the wrong reasons. Hashem is offended when our hearts are not in it. We see this clearly halachically. **Rav Schlessinger**: this is the essence of Tefillah - it is not done in a rote way to discharge our obligation. It has to be an intermediary for the elevation of the spiritual; it is our korban. Like the **Baal Shem Tov** said: someone who after davening is the same as before davening, is as if they had not davened. If we are not closer to God and a better Jew, then we did not really daven. That is not what Hashem wants. The heart and mind has to be with our davening. Hashem does not want a robot just saying words. Just as the korban gets burned because of the wrong thoughts, our tefillos are thrown out without meaning. Tefillos are avodah - hard work; mental conditioning. We have to stay focused on drawing closer to God. The focus of the heart and mind are the most difficult, but also the most precious to God.

Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch: the verb in Hebrew for davening is Lehisparallel. It should really be Lefalleil, to express. Helhisparallel means it is being acted upon. Davening is called Lehisparallel because if the act of tefillah does not act on us and change us, then we haven't davened. We just moved our lips but it did nothing to us.