

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

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Covenant & Conversation

The third book of the Torah is known in English as "Leviticus", a word deriving from Greek and Latin, meaning, "pertaining to the Levites". This reflects the fact that in Judaism the priests -- descendants of Aaron -- were from the tribe of Levi, and that the ancient rabbinic name for the book was Torat Cohanim, "the law of the priests". It is an appropriate title. Whereas Shemot and Bamidbar are shot through with narrative, the book between them is largely about sacrifices and the rituals associated, first with the Tabernacle and later with the Temple in Jerusalem. It is, as the name Torat Cohanim implies, about the priests and their function as guardians of the sacred.

By contrast, the traditional name Vayikra, "And

He called", seems merely accidental. Vayikra just happens to be the first word of the book, and there is no connection between it and the subjects with which it deals. The truth, I will argue here, is otherwise. There is a deep connection between the word Vayikra and the underlying message of the book as a whole.

To understand this we must note that there is something unusual about the way the word appears in a sefer Torah. Its last letter, an aleph, is written small -- almost as if it barely existed. The standard-size letters spell out the word vayikar, meaning, "he encountered, he chanced upon." Unlike vayikra, which refers to a call, a summons, a meeting by request, vayikar suggests an accidental meeting, a mere happening.

With their sensitivity to nuance, the sages noted the difference between the call to Moses with which the book begins, and G-d's appearance to the pagan prophet Bilaam. This is how the midrash puts it:

"What is the difference between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the pagan nations of the world?... R. Hama ben Hanina said: The Holy One blessed be He reveals himself to the pagan nations by an incomplete form of address, as it is said, 'And the Lord appeared to Bilaam', whereas to the prophets of Israel He appears in a complete form of address, as it is said, 'And He called to Moses.'"

Rashi is more explicit: "All [G-d's] communications [to Moses], whether they use the words 'speak' or 'say' or 'command' were preceded by a call [keri'ah] which is a term of endearment, used by the angels when they address one another, as it is said 'And one called to the other' [vekara zeh el zeh, Isaiah 6:3]. However, to the prophets of the nations of the world, His appearance is described by an expression signifying a casual encounter and uncleanness, as it says, 'And the Lord appeared to Bilaam.'"

The Baal HaTurim goes one stage further, commenting on the small aleph: "Moses was both great and humble, and wanted only to write Vayikar, signifying 'chance', as if the Holy One blessed be He appeared to him only in a dream, as it says of Bilaam [vayikar, without an aleph] -- suggesting that G-d appeared to him by mere chance. However, G-d told him to write the word with an aleph. Moses then said to Him, because of his extreme humility, that he would only write an aleph that was smaller than the other alephs in the Torah, and he did indeed write it small."

Something of great significance is being hinted at here, but before taking it further, let us turn to the end



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of the book. Just before the end, in the sedra of Bechukotai, there occurs one of the two most terrifying passages in the Torah. It is known as the tokhachah (the other appears in Devarim 28), and it details the terrible fate that will befall the Jewish people if it fails to keep its covenant with G-d: "I will bring such insecurity upon those of you who survive in your enemies' land that the sound of a driven leaf will make them flee from the sword. They will fall with no one chasing them... The land of your enemies will consume you." (26:36-38)

Yet despite the shocking nature of the forewarning, the passage ends with a note of consolation: "I will remember My covenant with Jacob, as well as My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham. I will remember the land... Even when they are in their enemies' land, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking My covenant with them. I am the Lord their G-d. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their G-d, I am the Lord." (26:42,44)

The key-word of the passage is the word *keri*. It appears exactly seven times in the tokhachah -- a sure sign of significance. Here are two of them by way of example: "If in spite of this you still do not listen to Me but continue to be hostile towards Me, then in My anger I will be hostile towards you, and I myself will punish you seven times for your sins." (26: 27-28) What does the word *keri* mean? I have translated it here as "hostile". There are other suggestions. The Targum reads it as "harden yourselves", Rashbam as "refuse", Ibn Ezra as "overconfident", Saadia as "rebellious".

However, Rambam gives it a completely different interpretation, and does so in a halakhic context: "A positive scriptural command prescribes prayer and the sounding of the alarm with trumpets whenever trouble befalls the community. For when Scripture says, 'Against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets' the meaning is: Cry out in prayer and sound an alarm... This is one of the paths to repentance, for when the community cries out in prayer and sounds an alarm when threatened by trouble, everyone realises that evil has come on them as a result of their own wrongdoing... and that repentance will cause the trouble to be removed.

"If, however, the people do not cry out in prayer and do not sound an alarm but merely say that it is the way of the world for such a thing to happen to them, and that their trouble is a matter of pure chance, they have chosen a cruel path which will cause them to continue in their wrongdoing, and thus bring additional troubles on them. For when Scripture says, 'If you continue to be *keri* towards Me, then in My anger I will be *keri* towards you', it means: If, when I bring trouble upon you in order to cause you to repent, you say that the trouble is purely accidental, then I will add to your trouble the anger of being-left-to-chance." (Mishneh Torah, Taaniyot, 1:1-3)

Rambam understands *keri* to be related to the word *mikreh*, meaning "chance". The curses, in his interpretation, are not Divine retribution as such. It will not be G-d who makes Israel suffer: it will be other human beings. What will happen is simply that G-d will withdraw His protection. Israel will have to face the world alone, without the sheltering presence of G-d. This, for Rambam, is simple, inescapable measure-for-measure (*middah kenegged middah*). If Israel believe in Divine providence, they will be blessed by Divine providence. If they see history as mere chance -- what Joseph Heller, author of *Catch-22*, called "a trashbag of random coincidences blown open by the wind" -- then indeed they will be left to chance. Being a small, vulnerable nation, chance will not be kind to them.

We are now in a position to understand the remarkable proposition linking the beginning of Vayikra to the end -- and one of the most profound of all spiritual truths. The difference between *mikra* and *mikreh* -- between history as G-d's call and history as one event after another with no underlying purpose or meaning -- is, in the Hebrew language, almost imperceptible. The words sound the same. The only difference is that the former has an aleph while the latter does not (the significance of the aleph is obvious: the first letter of the alphabet, the first letter of the Ten Commandments, the "I" of G-d).

The letter aleph is almost inaudible. Its appearance in a sefer Torah at the beginning of Vayikra (the "small aleph") is almost invisible. Do not expect -- the Torah is intimating -- that the presence of G-d in history will always be as clear and unambiguous as it was during the exodus from Egypt and the division of the Red Sea. For much of the time it will depend on your own sensitivity. For those who look, it will be visible. For those who listen, it can be heard. But first you have to look and listen. If you choose not to see or hear, then Vayikra will become Vayikar. The call will be inaudible. History will seem mere chance. There is nothing incoherent about such an idea. Those who believe it will have much to justify it. Indeed, says G-d in the tokhachah: if you believe that history is chance, then it will become so. But in truth it is not so. The history of the Jewish people -- as even non-Jews such as Pascal, Rousseau and Tolstoy eloquently stated -- testifies to

the presence of G-d in their midst. Only thus could such a small, vulnerable, relatively powerless people survive, and still say today -- after the Holocaust -- am yisrael chai, the Jewish people lives. And just as Jewish history is not mere chance, so it is no mere coincidence that the first word of the central book of the Torah is Vayikra, "And He called". To be a Jew is to believe that what happens to us as a people is G-d's call to us -- to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."
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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha marks another new beginning in our public reading and personal understanding of the Torah. Whereas the first two books of the Torah are mainly narrative in nature and content, the book of Vayikra is mainly a book of laws and commandments and of the nature of purity and impurity, sacrificial offerings and priestly obligations.

Vayikra not only offers us a change of content, it offers a change of tone. It is less personal than were Bereshith and Shemot and it concentrates on the halachic and detailed aspects of Judaism rather than on the broad scope of Jewish national experience. In this way the Torah teaches us that Judaism is an all-encompassing faith, both public and private in nature and observance, general and particular all at one and the same time.

This becomes a large order for the Jewish people to handle and balance properly. We see throughout the works of the prophets of Israel that the people and the priests themselves unduly emphasized the public nature of the commandments. They also emphasized the sacrificial nature of the service of the Temple at the expense of the private and social commandments of the Torah.

We see the strong condemnation in the prophetic words of Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu, of reliance on the Temple public worship, of the sacrifices and altar-offerings of Israel and the priests, as an assurance of G-dly favor and national salvation. The absence of the private nature of Torah service, without the observance of the detailed personal commandments and the emotional connection to G-d and sensitivity to others that only the private side of Judaism can convey, led to the destruction of the Temples -- no matter how grand and generous the public offerings of the Temples were.

When the Jewish people were forced into their long exile, when public Temple services were no longer possible, much of the contents of the book of Vayikra apparently were no longer particularly relevant to daily Jewish life. Our faith and our national preservation then lay almost exclusively in observance of the private commandments of the Torah and in the study of Torah itself.

Without a land of our own and with no central temporal power base, Jews turned inward to connect with their past and their Creator. The entire nature of defining purity and impurity atrophied in Jewish life and education, and the Temples and their glory became a distant point in a clouded memory of Jewish nationhood.

The public nature of the Book of Vayikra faded into being only historical recall. This was due to the length and bitterness of the millennia-long exile. But the Jewish people in our time has miraculously rebuilt itself and regained a national power and its ancient homeland. The debate over the relevance of the book of Vayikra has returned to the fore.

The Temple has become a living force once more in Jewish life and scholarship -- especially in certain yeshivot devoted to the study of its laws and commandments. This is happening even though practically there is, as of yet, no physical Temple existing on Mount Moriah. Nevertheless, the book of Vayikra now speaks to us in a way that it has not done for many centuries. Let us concentrate on understanding its contents and absorbing its tone into our inner selves. ©2013 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“If the entire congregation of Israel commits an inadvertent violation as a result of (a mistaken legal decision of the Highest Court)....and they thereby violate one of the prohibitory commandments of G-d, they shall incur guilt" (Lev.4:13).

If the Jewish state could be revived virtually from the ashes of destruction after 2,000 years, then why hasn't the Sanhedrin, the great Jewish court of the 1st and 2nd Commonwealths, been revived?

During the centuries of its existence, this august body, comprised of 71 elders and sages who ruled on every aspect of life, brought unity to the land because their decisions were binding on the entire nation.

On the surface, reviving the Sanhedrin seems impossible because its members must be recipients of the classic Jewish ordination that traces itself back to Moses himself, and even to the Almighty, as it were, who ordained Moses, then Moses ordained Joshua, Joshua the elders, the elders the prophets, the prophets the Men of the Great Assembly. But this special ordination came to an end in the 3rd century of the Common Era. And since intrinsic to the idea of the Sanhedrin is a living tradition of ordination, when ordination died out, so, it would seem, did the Sanhedrin, and the possibility of its revival.

But a verse in this week's portion creates alternative possibilities. In his commentary to the Mishna, Maimonides writes, "...if all the Jewish Sages and their disciples would agree on the choice of one person among those who dwell in Israel as their head [but this must be done in the land of Israel], and (that head) establishes a house of learning, he would be considered as having received the original ordination and he could then ordain anyone he desires." Maimonides adds that the Sanhedrin would return to its original function as it is written in Isaiah (1:26), "I will restore thy judges as at first and thy Sages as in the beginning." Such a selection would mean an election, a list of candidates, ballots. And who does the choosing? The sages and their disciples - everyone with a relationship to Torah sages, to Jewish law. In an alternate source, however, Maimonides extends the privilege of voting to all adult residents of Israel! (Commentary to the Mishnah, Chapter 4 of B'Khorot, on the words "one who slaughters a first born animal and shows its blemish...").

This idea reappears in Maimonides' Mishna Torah, Laws of Sanhedrin, Ch. 4, Law, 11, except here he concludes with the phrase: "...this matter requires decision."

In 1563, a significant attempt was made by a leading sage of Safed, Rabbi Yaakov BeRab to revive classic ordination using the Maimonidean formula, and in an election in Safed, Rabbi BeRab was declared officially ordained. He proceeded to ordain his most important student, Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of the Shulchan Aruch, along with several others of his disciples.

In the meantime, the rabbis in Jerusalem, led by Rabbi Levi ibn Habib, strongly opposed the Safed decision. When the question was put before the Ridbaz, Rabbi David Ben Zimra, the chief rabbi of Egypt, he ruled in favor of the Jerusalem rabbis because not only had the election been restricted to one city of Israel, Safed, but also because the closing phrase, "...this matter requires decision" opened up the possibility that Maimonides may have changed his mind, and was in effect leaving the issue un-adjudicated.

Rabbi Yaakov BeRab, on the other hand, understood that the phrase in question, "requires decision," referred to whether one sage was sufficient to ordain others, or three sages were required for ordination. But he was absolutely convinced that Maimonides had no doubt whatsoever about the method and the inevitability of reviving classic ordination.

Three centuries later, the first minister of religion in the new government of the Jewish state, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Maimon, renewed this controversy when he tried to convince the political and religious establishments that along with the creation of the state there should also be a creation of a Sanhedrin.

In his work, *The Renewal of the Sanhedrin in Our Renewed State*, he cites the existence of a copy of Maimonides' commentary to the Mishna published along with emendations and additions written by Maimonides himself after he wrote the Mishna Torah, where he specifically writes that ordination and the Sanhedrin will be renewed before the coming of the Messiah, which implies that it must be achieved through human efforts. A photocopy of these words, in Maimonides' own handwriting, is provided in the book by Rav Maimon.

What is the basis for his most democratic suggestion? I believe it stems from a verse which we find in this week's portion of Vayikra, quoted above, which deals with the issue of the sins of the entire congregation.

Commentators ask how can an "entire congregation" sin, and Rashi identifies the "congregation of Israel" with the Sanhedrin. In other words, when it says "...if the entire congregation of Israel errs..." it really means that if "the Sanhedrin errs."

The Jewish people are a nation defined by commandments, precepts and laws. Therefore the institution that protects and defines the law is at the heart of the nation's existence. In fact, how the Jewish people behave, what they do, can become the law. ("A custom of Israel is Torah.")

Knowing all this, it should not come as a surprise that Maimonides wanted to revive the ordination, and found a method utterly democratic in its design. The "people" equals the Sanhedrin, the "people" can choose one leading Jew who will then have the right to pass on his ordination to others, to re-create the Sanhedrin!

And for Maimonides, it is the population living in the land of Israel which represents the historical congregation of Israel (B.T. Horayot 3b).

And apparently Maimonides is saying that before the next stage of Jewish history unfolds, the nation will have to decide who shall be given the authority to recreate the ordination, as to who will be the commander-in-chief of the rabbis. Will it happen in our lifetime? © 2013 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

There are many karbanos (offerings) described in our Parasha, but only two nouns used to describe the person bringing these offerings. One who brings an animal offering that is not obligatory (or mandated), but brings it out of a desire to do so, is called "uh-dum," a human (Vayikra 1:2). Pronouns are then used until the (non-obligatory) grain offering is described (2:1), where the noun "nefesh" (living, breathing being) is employed. When describing one who brings obligatory offerings (such as the various sin offerings), "nefesh" becomes the only noun used (4:2,

4:27, 5:1, 5:2, 5:4, 5:15, 5:17 and 5:21). It would seem, then, that "nefesh" is the appropriate noun in this context; any other would be out of place. In fact, Rashi tells us (1:2) that the reason the Torah started with the noun "uh-dum" (human) was to equate every person who brings an offering to the first human, "Uh-dum" (Adam). Just as the offerings that Uh-dum brought were not from stolen goods (as there was no one else he could have stolen them from), so too any offering brought by us cannot be from anything that was stolen. After teaching us this lesson, though, only "nefesh" is used.

Despite "nefesh" seeming to be the proper noun (pardon the pun) to refer to one who brings an offering, when the grain offerings are described, Rashi is bothered by the use of the noun "nefesh." He explains that it is normally the poor who bring non-animal offerings, and because it is a greater sacrifice for the poor person to bring any voluntary offering, G-d considers it as if he brought his own nefesh, i.e. himself, as the offering. While Rashi points out that this is the only time "nefesh" is used regarding a voluntary offer, its use here shouldn't need an explanation, as "nefesh" is used extensively by the mandatory offerings. Why is "nefesh" more indicative of G-d considering it an offering of one's self by a voluntary grain offering than it is by the obligatory offerings? Why would using "nefesh" need any explanation at all?

Ralbag, in his explanation of the purpose of bringing karbanos (when Noach brought his offerings after the flood, and in his concluding thoughts to Parashas Tzav), describes how spiritual growth is attained by concentrating on the growth of the intellect while minimizing things of a mundane nature. When we take an animal, which has no human intellect but otherwise has the same mundane aspects as humans, and slaughter it as an offering, we are showing that we do not value the animalistic parts of our nature. Rather, we are attempting to mitigate its effects on us, allowing the human intellect to shine through.

The term "nefesh" is used to describe all living, breathing things, such as animals and humans. We find the term "nefesh" referring specifically to animals during creation (Beraishis 1:20-21 and 1:24) and elsewhere (Vayikra 24:18). When Ralbag describes subjugating our base tendencies, he uses the term "nefesh behamis," the "animal-like nefesh" that is part of every human being. Therefore, when describing the sin-offerings, the Torah uses the term "nefesh," as it was this aspect of the person that led to sin, and it is precisely this aspect that the sinner is trying to subjugate when repenting (including the bringing of the sin-offering). When the offering is not a sin-offering, however, this manifestation of our mundane nature is not evident, and the use of the term "nefesh" seems inappropriate. Rashi therefore points out that we never find the noun "nefesh" by a voluntary offering, with the exception of the grain offering. Usually "nefesh" refers

to the mundane side of a person, but here, where the offering was not being brought as part of the process of minimizing animalistic tendencies, it must signify something else. Rashi, based on Menachos 104b, therefore tells us that the Torah used "nefesh" by voluntary grain offerings in order to show how much value G-d puts on the meager offering of the pauper, considering it as if he or she (see Vayikra Rabbah 3:5) brought him or her self as an offering.

Netziv says that by using the term "nefesh," the Torah indicates that bringing a grain offering, despite it being voluntary (and not a sin-offering), also achieves some sort atonement. He cites several proof texts to show that it was brought as part of the process of improving character flaws (as opposed to atoning for specific sinful actions), and explains the correlation between grain offerings and correcting character flaws. Nevertheless, grain offerings were not only brought by those who were trying to improve their character traits; most people (unfortunately) don't spend much time or effort in this area. The majority of grain offerings were brought by those who didn't have any discretionary funds to spend on offerings (all the items needed for a grain offering are included in the things that field owners must leave for the poor, see Chasam Sofer's Toras Moshe). As Rashi put it, "who usually voluntarily brings a grain offering? A poor person." Therefore, if the term "nefesh" didn't also apply to a poor person's grain offering, it wouldn't have been used. Since the Torah does describe the person who brings a grain offering as "nefesh," and most who did were poor people (who would have brought something else if they weren't limited to taking some of the meager food off their own table in order to bring any offering to G-d), we learn that G-d considers it as if the poor person had offered him or her self to Him. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Book of Leviticus opens with the word Va-yikra, "and He [the Lord] called." (Leviticus 1:1) Rashi points out that va-yikra is a term of endearment. The text tells us that G-d spoke to Moshe (Moses) from the Tent of Meeting. Rashi understands this to mean G-d's calling came from the two cherubs atop the Ark.

The Talmud explains that the cherubs were in the form of children embracing with wings at their sides lifting towards each other, heavenward. (Hagigah 13b) What is the significance of this image and what does it mean in light of the fact that it was the seat of G-d's endearing love?

The Hagaddah, which is read at the seder a few days after reading the portion of Va-yikra, may offer the answer. On that night, we relate to G-d through two different types of love.

On the one hand, there is the love described in the book Shir Ha-Shirim, The Song of Songs, recited by

many after the seder. It is the type of love of a lover for his beloved, reflective of G-d's intense love for the Jewish people. There is no love more powerful, there is no love more deep.

But even that intense love has its limits. Spousal relationships are humanly made and can also be terminated. In fact the Torah tells us that if a woman divorces and marries another, she can never return to her first husband. What would happen when the Jewish people rebel against G-d for other beliefs? If reconciliation is not possible, how can they reunite with the Lord?

Thus, in the Haggadah, another form of G-d's love emerges. It is the love of a parent to a child. This is the love accentuated at the outset of the seder through the presentation of the four children, the four questions and the telling of the Exodus story. Perhaps this love is not as passionate as spousal love, but it contains a quality that spousal love does not have, the element of eternity. It lasts forever. A parent-child relationship can never terminate. The love of parent to child expressed at the seder is a reflection of G-d interacting with his people as the parent par excellence.

This then can be the meaning of the cherubs, of the little children embracing. It is symbolic of two loves, the spousal love of embrace and the parent-child unbreakable love. Together, these two types of love lift one heavenward, much like the wings of the cherubs pointing to the sky.

The seder actually balances these two loves. Before the meal we emphasize parental love, which moves us to remember our past, as father and mother share the Passover story. After the meal we emphasize spousal love, the love of Shir Ha-Shirim, with all its trappings of bride and groom under the chupah with a dream of a beautiful future. We will be praying for the time when we hear G-d's voice in the spirit of the cherubs, of va-yikra, the language of true, authentic endearment. © 2013 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

The very first Passuk (verse) in Sefer Vayikra (Leviticus) describes G-d calling Moshe to tell him about all the different offerings that needed to be brought, and how they should be performed. The last letter in the word "Vayikra" (which means "called") was written smaller than the rest (the Alef). Why is this letter shrunk? Furthermore, why is the whole book called Vayikra, "And He called"?

Most commentaries explain that Moshe didn't want to make a big deal of the fact that G-d called him and no one else, and therefore wanted to use the same word without the last letter, which would still have the same meaning, but wouldn't be as affectionate a

greeting (it would mean "and G-d happened upon..."). This shows us the great sensitivity and humility that Moshe had. Rabeinu Yonah offers us an insight into humility and human nature by explaining that some people who feel that they are lacking in a quality or in knowledge sometimes compensate for it by lowering others, thereby making themselves seem like they're better by comparison. Moshe was the greatest prophet, but he was also the humblest because he was confident in himself and in his abilities, and didn't need to lower others, even indirectly.

But there's an even more powerful message Moshe could be teaching us: The one letter he chose to shrink was the Alef, which is the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet... The very first step we have to glean is that even though Moshe was a great person, he sought to downplay it by shrinking that letter. But there's yet another hidden hint for us in this word: The letter that's shrunk, Alef, actually has a meaning as a word: It means "to teach". The message being taught to us is clear... The first and most important lesson in life is to recognize our egos, and work on not letting it control us (whenever we get angry, it's because our ego is telling us that we deserve something.) The second lesson is that instead of lowering others to make us LOOK better, we should raise our own standards, and BECOME better. And finally, the last lesson is to take these lessons and teach and share them with someone else. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Drasha

Our parasha begins with the words, "Vayikra el Moshe vayidaber Hashem eilav ma'ohel mo'ed leimor, and He called to Moshe and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of the Meeting saying." There are several questions that should arise immediately upon reading this pasuk. First of all, there are three words used for speaking in this pasuk, i.e., vayikra, vayidaber, and leimor. Why are all three necessary and what is added to our understanding based on the three? Secondly, the name of the speaker does not occur until the second form of speech, vayidaber. Why is the name Hashem not used with the first form of speech in which case it would have been clear who the original speaker was? Thirdly, why is there a small aleph at the end of the word vayikra? Does this change the meaning in any way? And finally, we have a similar beginning of a pasuk in Parashat Balak, "vayikar Elo'kim el Bil'am, and Elo'kim (vayikar) to Bil'am." (You may notice that I did not translate the word vayikar here because of a machlokes as to its meaning in this pasuk.) Are these two p'sukim related and does that draw a connection between Bil'am and Moshe?

If we look at the terms of speech mentioned here we find that the three terms are different in their

nature. Vayikra is a "calling". Our Rabbis tell us that this calling was not initiated by Moshe and therefore soliciting a response from Hashem. Instead this calling was at Hashem's initiative. Moshe was somewhat surprised when he received this calling even though he had expected that this would happen. Since Hashem spoke to Moshe from between the k'ruvim, the two angels on the lid of the aron kodesh, Moshe waited for Hashem's call before entering and speaking with Hashem. Our Rabbis tell us that this occurred each time that Hashem spoke to Moshe. Hashem called out "Moshe, Moshe" and Moshe answered "Hineini, I am here." Moshe would not enter the Tent unless Hashem called to him.

The two terms daled, bet, resh and aleph, mem, resh (vayidaber, leimor) seem very similar in our speech today but they are different in the Torah. The word daled, bet, resh is used here in a form which is in the binyan piel. This form is often characterized by a dagesh (point) in the middle letter of the root (here the bet instead of vet). Words in this binyan are more intense and harsher than words of the same root found in binyan pael. (e.g., shavar [pael] means he broke but shebar [piel] means he shattered). The word vayidaber then would clearly be more intense and stronger than the word vayomer or leimor. Since Hashem normally spoke to Moshe when instructing him on particular laws, the term used was vayidaber. However that same power and strength needed to be softened when speaking to the people. Hashem therefore instructed Moshe to soften his method of teaching over the laws when speaking to the people (leimor).

As we see then all three forms of speech were each different and necessary. Hashem first called out to Moshe to enter the tent. He then firmly and precisely taught Moshe the halacha. And finally He instructed Moshe to soften his method of teaching the halacha to the people. This is also an instruction to the many teachers of Torah to both speak firmly and precisely in their teaching of Torah but maintain the softness and pleasantness of the Torah itself. Often teachers remember the first instruction but forget the necessity of the second one.

Our second question was already dealt with during our first answer. Why is Hashem's name not mentioned with the first verb, vayikra? As we remarked earlier, the term vayikra delineated an entire method of Hashem first calling Moshe and then Moshe's answer. This explanation does not help us with our third question (the small aleph at the end of the word). Our Rabbis give both practical and mystical reasons for this small aleph. Luzzato says that the small aleph is a result of a shared letter with the first letter of the next word (el) when the Torah was written with no separation between words. When the two words were separated at a later time, the first aleph was made smaller to indicate this original coupling of the words. The Maharam brings a medrash which says that Moshe did not want to demonstrate his

uniqueness in the way in which Hashem called him alone and preferred to write vayikar, but Hashem insisted that he write vayikra. Moshe still downplayed his uniqueness by minimizing the final letter.

This last explanation is somewhat based on the different term, vayikar, that was used by Bil'am and constituted our fourth question. When Hashem called to Moshe it was not the same as when he spoke with other prophets whether they were Jews or non-Jews. The Rabbis argue as to the root of the word vayikar. Some say that it is from the root kuf, resh, aleph, and some wish to say that it is from the root kuf, resh, heh. The first is the same root as vayikra, but the second is from the word karah which would mean happened. This second form implies that Hashem only appeared to Bil'am because Bil'am beckoned Him. Only with Moshe did Hashem initiate the conversation by calling him. Partly this was because He would speak to Moshe in the Tent of Meeting which Moshe was reluctant to enter without being summoned. But partly this was due to the uniqueness of Moshe's relationship with Hashem. Hashem only appears to others when beckoned by them. He does not call to them. When Hashem wishes to give another prophet an instruction He simply speaks to them without calling them out first.

Hashem speaks with us regularly through our Torah study. When we sit down to learn from the Torah Shebichsav and the Torah She'b'al Peh we initiate a conversation with Hashem. And just as with the prophets, when we beckon Hashem He will be there to guide us to find the answers that we seek. This is not a connection with Hashem that is limited only to the gedolim or those special Jews who appear in each generation. It is possible for all to experience. May we each seek out that special relationship with Hashem that He has made available to every all. © 2013 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

Each letter in a sefer Torah teaches us countless lessons. The letter alef of the word "Vayikra" teaches us the significance of humility. According to tradition, this letter is written smaller than other letters in a sefer Torah. Chazal explain that this is because Moshe was humble and would have preferred that the word have been "vayikar" rather than "Vayikra". What is the difference of meaning between these two words, and how does this distinction symbolize the trait of humility that characterized Moshe?

In contrast to Moshe, there was another navi who the word vayikar is used to describe Hashem speaking to him; Vayikar is how Hashem addresses Bilam. The word vayikar is related to the word mikra -- an event that "happens" to take place. Hashem does not speak to Bilam with regularity. Rather, whenever the need arises Bilam receives a prophecy. In contrast,

Moshe is spoken to by Hashem all the time. Moshe even initiates conversation with Hashem several times when he needs guidance from Hashem about a particular halacha such as Pesach Sheini and the claim of benos Tzafchad.

Although Moshe and Bilam were both nevi'im, they related to their nevuah in radically different ways. Bilam constantly boasts of his role as a navi. He describes himself in glorious terms as one who hears the word of Hashem and who has knowledge of the Divine. He only eventually admits to Balak that "Oo'ly yikrah Hashem likrosi -- maybe Hashem will appear to me." Balak is elated when called upon to prophesize and he uses this gift to amass great personal wealth. In contrast, from the first time Hashem speaks to Moshe at the sneh he shies away from the nevu'ah. He sees himself as a kvad peh -- one who has difficulty speaking and not worthy of being a navi. Even when finally accepting his role as a navi, Moshe would rather be referred to as vayikar -- as one who is on a lower level of nevuah not meriting the constant word of Hashem.

It is precisely this difference between Moshe and Bilam that resulted in the very different culminations of their roles as nevi'im. Bilam, who constantly sought glory for his gift of nevu'ah, is ultimately humiliated; the nevu'ah that is granted to him blessing the Jewish People are the final words he speaks in the name of Hashem. Moshe, on the other hand, who was the humblest man ever to live, became the greatest of all nevi'im and merited the highest level of nevu'ah, i.e. conversing with Hashem "peh el peh". Bilam, who prided himself on his ability to see, eventually saw less than his donkey. Moshe became the one to see b'aspaklaria ha'me'irah, i.e. the clearest vision given to man.

The reason this fundamental lesson of humility is taught to us specifically at the beginning of sefer Vayikra which focuses on korbanos is that the offering of a korban is an expression of humility, since many korbanos are brought as a kapara for a cheit. The teshuva process which culminates with the offering of a korban is predicated on the ability to humble oneself before Hashem, in contrast to the arrogant individual who cannot admit he made a mistake. The korbanos that are brought as an expression of thanks also require a sense of humility. How so? One who views his success as a result of his own accomplishments will not acknowledge that it is Hashem who really has bestowed upon him these gifts; he will feel no need to offer thanks. A korban of thanks to Hashem, by contrast, is the ultimate expression of the realization that we are humbled by the goodness He performs for us.

Bilam, who was the antithesis of humility, also offers korbanos. Throughout Parshas Balak he draws attention to these korbanos and prides himself on bringing them. He uses them as a way to demand that Hashem grant him nevu'ah. Rather than internalizing the lesson of humility signified by korbanos, he uses

them to advance his arrogance as he attempts to further his personal status and wealth.

As we begin Sefer Vayikra, the very first word teaches us about the proper spirit that must accompany a korban. We look to Moshe as a role model of humility to guide us in how to use korbanos as a vehicle for teshuva and as an acknowledgement of our complete dependence on Hashem for the gifts He bestows upon us. © 2013 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky and The TorahWeb Foundation

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

One of the mitzvot of this week's parashah is (2:13), "On all your sacrifices you shall sprinkle salt." The Gemara (Menachot 21) says: "I might think that you should fill it with understanding; therefore the Torah says 'You shall sprinkle'." Rashi explains: I might think that a sacrifice should be saturated with salt, just as a person is saturated with wisdom and understanding. To prevent this error, the Torah says, "You shall merely sprinkle the salt on it."

R' Yitzchak Blazer z"l (died 1907) notes that this Gemara demonstrates how different we are from our ancestors in Talmudic times. When trying to explain something that is not readily apparent, one ordinarily chooses a metaphor whose meaning is obvious. How strange it is that when choosing a metaphor for something that is "saturated" or "dripping" with salt, the Gemara describes a person who is overflowing with wisdom. We can only assume that this description fit the typical person of that period, such that the Gemara's metaphor would have been readily understood. In contrast, notes R' Itzele (as R' Blazer was known), common idioms today describe something that makes no sense as "lacking salt" or "lacking taste" (in Hebrew: "chasar ta'am"), rather than saying that something that has no salt is lacking sense. It seems that in our generation, salt is more readily available than wisdom, unlike in Talmudic times, when wisdom was the more common of the two.

A similar change in human nature is seen in the Mishnah (Avot ch.2): "One who borrows from man is [bound to pay] just as if he had borrowed from G-d." This suggests that, while people of Mishnaic times were sometimes lax in paying their earthly debts, they all recognized clearly their debts to Heaven. Therefore, the Tanna (sage of the Mishnah) teaches us that our obligation to man is no less than our obligation to G-d. How different it is in our times, for we much sooner forget to repay our debts to G-d than we do our debts to our banks and our neighbors. (Kochvei Ohr: chapter 50, Ma'amar "Mah Bein Dorot HaRishonim L'Acharonim") © 2013 S. Katz and torah.org

