

PARSHAS VAYIKRA

by Gedalia Litke

Each sefer in Chumash has its own name or title. We would expect that the name of each sefer be an appropriate reflection of its major topic or theme. Thus, for example, we can readily understand that the first sefer in Chumash is called B'reishis - loosely translated as "in the beginning" - as this sefer describes Hashem's creation of the world and the first recognition of Him as creator. Similarly, the second sefer is called Shmos inasmuch as it deals with the formation of the Jewish nation - Klal Yisroel - and how they forge for themselves a shem, a presence and identity, or, literally, a "name".

The last two seforim in Chumash also have readily understandable titles. Bamidbar - meaning "in the desert" - tells of the events and opportunities Klal Yisroel were challenged with in their years in the Sinai Desert. Finally, the last sefer is called Devorim, "words", as it is comprised of a series of four speeches made by Moshe to Klal Yisroel at the end of his life.

How, then, might we understand the name of the third sefer, Vayikro, which means "and He called". The major topic of this sefer is clearly korbanos (sacrifices) and laws pertaining to kohanim, and Chazal's term for this sefer is "Toras Kohanim", an obvious choice meaning the laws of the kohanim. Korbanos are the best way we can relate to HKB'H, they are a direct line between us and Him. But why or how is "and He called" reflective of this theme? It almost seems like there couldn't be a less relevant title.

HaShem created humans and imbued them with His own spirit, nishmas chaim. Our nishmas chaim presents itself through our ability to speak (see Targum on Breishis 2:7). It is a manifestation of having Hashem's spirit within us, of our being of one piece with Him, that we have our power of speech. In other words Hashem made us G-dly ourselves by giving us the ability to speak. This also means that we can sense the G-dliness of all people through their speech.

There is an important distinction between speaking to someone (vayedaber/vayomer) with articulate, verbal communication (what we refer to as dibur) and simply calling to someone (vayikro) with the more basic communication of voice only (what we refer to as kol).

Dibur is words - articulate speech - through which specific thoughts and ideas are communicated. There is limitation in dibur, as the words and style of the communication itself become very specific messages and understandings. What is conveyed is limited to these specifics, while there continues to exist other communications which remain, private and unspoken, with the speaker. There is a distance and separateness between speaker and listener which is inherent in dibur.

On the other hand, Kol is the essential voice or sound that the listener hears (rather than the specific words that the caller may be utilizing). One example of Kol is someone calling my name. I don't know what the specific message (dibur) is going to be, but when I'm called to, I honor the caller by responding. In responding I am reacting to the caller as a person, not to the words being spoken. Kol is primal. In utilizing kol I am making all of myself available to the other person. Another example of kol might be a certain kind of whisper. The whisper itself can express a depth of relationship more profoundly than the words chosen for articulation. The shofar is a kol - it is all sound and no words.

Kol is unfettered by the specifics of the message. It is a degree of expression that requires no words because it is the projection of the essence of the caller. The message is the person, pure nishmas chayim/G-dliness without filtering or manipulation. Dibur conveys the thoughts of the person's mind, but kol projects the very person himself.

Vayikro means the caller is utilizing kol and projecting all of his selfhood, his most essential and G-dly part, onto the listener. As a result the kol itself creates a communion between the caller and the listener.

The essence of korbanos is direct communication with Hashem on a primal level, unfettered and unmanipulated; with korbanos we give all of ourselves to HKB'H. For this reason the Sefer which contains the mitzvos of korbanos, signifying the relationship between HKB'H and Klal Yisroel at its most essential, kol, aspect, is appropriately named Vayikro.