

FROM THE BURNING BUSH TO THE OHEL MO'ED

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayikra

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Volume 25, No. 24

Our parashah (and the Book of Vayikra) opens: "He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Mo'ed / Tent of Meeting, saying." R' Avraham Saba z"l (1440-1508) writes: After the Mishkan was completed, Moshe could not enter (see Shmot 40:35), so Hashem had to call him and give him permission to enter. This was important because the ultimate purpose of the Mishkan was to be the place where Hashem would speak to Moshe, as it is written (Shmot 25:22), "It is there that I will set My meetings with you, and I shall speak with you . . ."

R' Saba adds: The call in our parashah is of higher distinction than all previous calls. Here it says, "He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Mo'ed," indicating that the location is more suitable than any other location where Hashem had called to Moshe. The sneh / "Burning Bush" was not inherently suited to Divine revelation; therefore, Hashem did not speak to Moshe until Moshe took some initiative, as it is written (Shmot 3:4), "Hashem saw that he turned aside to see; and [then] G-d called out to him . . ." Har Sinai also was not inherently suited to Divine revelation; there, too, therefore, Hashem did not speak to Moshe until Moshe took some initiative, as it is written (Shmot 19:3), "Moshe ascended to G-d, and [then] Hashem called to him from the mountain." Here, in contrast, there is no mention of initiative on Moshe's part.

Nevertheless, R' Saba continues, the call here also was deficient, as indicated by the fact that the word "Vayikra" is written with a smaller letter aleph. The Zohar explains, R' Saba writes, that this is because Hashem had to, so-to-speak, leave His home in Eretz Yisrael in order to "meet" with Moshe in the desert. (Tzror Ha'mor)

"Vayikra / He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying." (1:1)

Commenting on the opening verse of our parashah, Rashi asks: Why is the Torah broken by hafsakot / breaks, i.e., why is it broken into subsections? He answers: To give Moshe an interval for reflection between one section and another and between one subject and another--something which is all the more necessary for an ordinary man receiving instruction from an ordinary man.

R' Menachem Mendel Taub shlita (the Kaliver Rebbe in Rishon Le'tzion, Israel) observes that in a non-leap year [unlike this year] Vayikra is read the week that most yeshivot begin their Pesach breaks. What purpose do these hafsakot serve? he asks. They are times to review, reflect upon, and digest what one has learned in the preceding five or six months. If Moshe needed such opportunities to reflect, surely we do. (Kol Menachem)

Why doesn't the verse say, "Hashem called . . ." R' Moshe Soloveitchik z"l (rosh yeshiva in Switzerland) answers that Hashem sometimes calls to a person without identifying Himself. Only if one listens carefully will he realize that he is being called.

He adds: We read regarding Moshe and the "Burning Bush" (Shmot 3:3-4), "Moshe thought, 'I will turn aside now and look at this great sight -- why will the bush not be burned?' Hashem saw that he turned aside to see; and G-d called out to him from amid the bush and said, 'Moshe, Moshe'. . ." Says R' Soloveitchik: This teaches us that a person has moments of great opportunity, but they are lost if he does not seize them. Only because Moshe turned to examine the bush that miraculously was not consumed did he merit that Hashem spoke to him. (Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

"When a man brings an offering from among you to Hashem -- from animals -- from the cattle or from the flock you shall bring your offering." (1:2)

R' Avigdor Miller z"l (1908-2001) writes: As a people, we have lost the ability to relate to sacrificial offerings. At one time, however, bringing a sacrifice represented an act of devotion to Hashem. This is alluded to in our verse, which says, "When a man brings an offering from among you," i.e., it is as if you have brought a part of yourself.

Even so, R' Miller observes, an even greater act is to accept G-d's authority and to obey Him. Thus the prophet Shmuel said to King Shaul (Shmuel I 15:22), "'Does Hashem take delight in olot / burnt offerings and zevachim / feast-offerings as in obedience to the voice of Hashem? Behold! Obedience is better than a choice offering, attentiveness [better] than the fat of rams.'" This does not mean that Hashem does not desire offerings, only that He desires obedience and attentiveness even more.

This too, continues R' Miller, is lost in our culture. Obedience is not a widely accepted concept, and even the word is almost taboo. This, R' Miller asserts, is the source of every evil in our society. Our task, however, is to ignore public opinion and ignore what popular literature and newspapers are

telling us, and to live with the principles that the Torah teaches: "Obedience is better than a choice offering, attentiveness [better] than the fat of rams." (Torat Avigdor IV p.186)

"If one's offering is an olah from the cattle, . . . the sons of Aharon, the Kohanim, shall . . . throw the blood on the Altar . . ." (1:3,5)

An olah may be brought from four-legged animals or from fowl. Likewise, a chatat / sin offering can be brought from four-legged animals or from fowl. The Mishnah (Kinim 1:1) teaches that the blood of a bird-chatat and an animal-olah are placed on the lower half of the altar's wall, while the blood of an animal-chatat and a bird-olah are placed on the top half of the altar. Why?

R' Amram Zvi Gruenwald z"l (dayan in Oyber-Visheve, Hungary and rabbi in the Fernwald D.P. camp) observes that a four-legged animal usually is brought by a wealthy person, while a bird usually is brought by a poor person. A chatat is brought to repent for a sin; although a poor person's repentance also is desired by Hashem, the repentance of a wealthy person who humbles himself is more beloved. Therefore, in the case of a chatat, the blood of the rich man's offering is brought to the top of the altar and the blood of the poor man's offering is placed lower down.

In contrast, an olah is a voluntary gift offering. Whose gift is more beloved by Hashem - the rich man's or the poor man's? Obviously, the poor man's, as it entails a greater sacrifice. Therefore its blood is placed at the top of the altar, and the blood of the rich man's olah is placed below. (Zichron Amram Zvi)

"If a person will sin and commit a treachery against Hashem by lying to his comrade regarding a pledge or a loan or a robbery; or by defrauding his comrade." (5:21)

R' Dr. Leo Adler z"l (1915-1978; rabbi of Basel, Switzerland) writes: The Tosefta [a collection of teachings that post-dates the Mishnah but pre-dates the Gemara] relates:

Rabbi Reuven met a philosopher in Teveryah, who asked him, "Who makes himself hateful in this world?"

Rabbi Reuven answered, "He who denies his Creator."

"How does that make him hateful to men?" the philosopher wondered.

Rabbi Reuven replied, "Honor your father and mother; do not murder; do not steal; do not bear false witness--No man breaks these laws without first denying G-d."

What is the basis for Rabbi Reuven's assertion? R' Adler explains that it is our verse. If one man lies to another about a financial matter, it is a treachery against Hashem. Why? Because emunah means not only *faith,* but *faithfulness* to G d's command. Thus, the level of one's emunah and his fear of G d are as much tests of a person's character as are his sense of justice and charity. (The Biblical View of Man p.59)

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (25:6-7), "Do not glorify yourself in the presence of the king, and do not stand in the place of the great, for it is better that it should be said to you, 'Come up here,' than that you be demoted before the prince, as your eyes have seen [happen to others]." Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (Spain; died 1263) explains: King Shlomo has already said many times in this book (Mishlei) that haughtiness is an abomination and humility is desirable (see, for example, 6:16-17, 15:33, 16:5, 16:18, 22:4). Here, King Shlomo conveys a more subtle message. Many people rationalize, "I am not haughty; I seek only the honor that I actually deserve." Therefore, King Shlomo advises: Do not be so quick to glorify yourself. Are you so sure that you are worthy of praise that you would praise yourself in front of a king? Would you stand in the place of great people? R' Yonah notes: These verses are not speaking to fools, but to intelligent people who are nevertheless blinded by the desire for honor. Such people need to reflect on their places vis-a-vis those they consider great.

Humility is so important that Moshe Rabbeinu, the most accomplished of all men, is praised specifically as "the most humble of all men." How was Moshe able to be so humble? Conversely, why does man desire honor? R' Yonah explains: The soul comes from a lofty place, and it feels a void when its host (man) does not achieve perfection. Some people fill this void by attempting to perfect themselves, while other people try to fool their souls by fantasizing that they are perfect. The latter individuals need to chase honor. In contrast, Moshe Rabbeinu was as perfect as a human can be. His soul felt no void; therefore he was the most humble of all men. He fulfilled the verse, "Do not glorify yourself in the presence of the king (in this case, the 'King'), and do not stand in the place of the great," by hiding his face at the "Burning Bush." Therefore, he was called to enter the Mishkan, as the first verse of our parashah relates. (Derashot Rabbeinu Yonah Al Ha'Torah)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](https://torah.org/torah-portion/hamaayan) page.

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