

BETZALEL'S CALLING

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

Dear Haverim,

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Shabbat Shalom

I

TA'AMEI HAMIKRA

After the B'nei Yisra'el brought all of the materials to Mosheh for the construction of the Mishkan, he instructed them regarding God's choice of the chief architect, designer and foreman of the construction:

R'u, Kara Hashem b'Shem; Betzalel ben Uri ben Hur l'Mateh Yehudah. - "see, God has called by name; Betzalel son of Uri son of Hur of the tribe of Yehudah." (Sh'mot 35:30).

The first half of this verse is difficult on two counts - but, in order to explain the difficulties, a brief introduction to Biblical punctuation is necessary.

In a proper Sefer Torah, all that you will find are letters and spaces (and, very infrequently, a diacritical marks). Vocalization and punctuation are not indicated in the text and rely on Oral Tradition. The vowels and punctuation marks which we have in our printed T'nakh were not always written down.

The tradition regarding punctuation was systematized by the Ba'alei haM'sorah (Masoretes) from the 6th-10th centuries CE in Tiberias. The system that grew out of that effort is known as Ta'amei haMikra, or, colloquially, "trope". The Ta'amei haMikra indicate how to parse a verse and where the verses end. These marking are secondarily used for cantillation purposes. Parenthetically, the markings have consistent meaning throughout almost all of the books of the T'nakh - with the exception of T'hilim, Mishlei and most of Iyyov, which have their own system (known as Ta'amei

EMeT).

One basic rule about Ta'amei haMikra is that Biblical prose and poetry (like most Ancient Near Eastern writing) is in binary form. In other words, each sentence/verse (of sufficient length) can be broken down into two main ideas, each of which is further broken down into halves etc. until there are "bite-size" phrases (3 words or less) which are the elements of the verse. It is important to point out that these binary divisions are not length-oriented; rather they are "logical halves". The basic breakdown of a verse into two halves is almost a form of call-and- response or provocation-resolution. For example, the first verse in the Torah:

B'resheet Bara Elohim (In the beginning, God had created)

Et haShamayim v'Et ha'Aretz (the heavens and the earth)

is a "provocation-resolution".

In the first half of the verse, we are told that God had created something - but not what. What did He create? The second half resolves this puzzle and tells us: "the heavens and the earth".

As mentioned, the division is not necessarily based on length. See, for instance, Sh'mot 23:23, where the first half of the verse is 10 words long and the second half is 1 word long.

The primary marking is, as can be expected, the end of the verse (called Sof Pasuk - literally "end of the verse") and is a horizontal line underneath the accented syllable of the last word in the verse. Equally significant is the marking at the end of the first half of the verse (called Et'nachta - lit. "rest"). This mark looks like a wishbone and rests underneath the accented syllable of the word which is at the end of the first half of the verse. The reason that this is an equally significant mark is because the Sof Pasuk properly ends only the second half of the verse, just as the Etnachta ends the first half.

For practice, look back to the first verse in the Torah:

Bresheet Bara Elohim (etnachta),

Et haShamayim v'Et ha'Aretz (Sof Pasuk).

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R'U KARA Hashem B'SHEM

Now, let's look at our verse, with the same binary breakdown:

Vayomer Mosheh el B'nei Yisra'el, R'u Kara Hashem b'Shem (etnachta),

Betzalel ben Uri ben Hur l'Mateh Yehudah (sof pasuk).

Now we can raise the two difficulties in this verse.

* The word *b'Shem* (by name) is hard to decipher. If the Torah meant to say that God has called upon Betzalel, the phrasing should have been ...*R'u Kara Hashem (etnachta), b'Shem Betzalel*... Why is *b'Shem* at the end of the phrase? What could this possibly mean?

* Mosheh introduces Betzalel to the B'nei Yisra'el with the imperative *R'u* - see. What are the B'nei Yisra'el supposed to see? Where are they to look?

This verse parallels an earlier verse in the Torah. Keep in mind that our Parashah (as well as the one that follows - P'kudei) is something of a review of T'rumah, Tetzaveh and the first part of Ki Tissa. In those Parshiot, we are told about the commands which Mosheh received regarding the Mishkan, whereas in our Parashiot, the narrative describes how these commands were scrupulously fulfilled.

In God's command to Mosheh, we read: *R'eh Karati b'Shem (etnachta); Betzalel ben Uri ben Hur l'Mateh Yehudah* (sof pasuk) - "See, I have called by name; Betzalel son of Uri son of Hur of the tribe of Yehudah" - (Sh'mot 31:2). The verse with which we began our discussion seems to be a mirror of this one, except for one oddity. God told Mosheh to "see..." and, if Mosheh were properly passing this information on to the B'nei Yisra'el in our Parashah, it should read *Ra'iti* - "I have seen". Why is Mosheh passing the imperative to see (whatever it may mean) on to the B'nei Yisra'el? Where did God tell him to command the B'nei Yisra'el to do this?

III

VA'EDA'AKHA B'SHEM

In between the commands to build the Mishkan (Chapters 25-31) and the description of their fulfillment (Chapters 35-40), the Torah tells us the story about the golden calf - including God's anger and Mosheh's intercession to keep the Divine wrath from destroying the people.

During that narrative, Mosheh is told by God that even though He won't destroy the people - and Mosheh must now lead them to the Land (32:34) - His Presence will not move with them. Mosheh, in

his plea to have God restore His Presence among the people, says: *v'Atah Amarta Y'da'tikha b'Shem* - "You said that you will know me by name" (33:12). This phrase is mirrored in God's response to Mosheh (v. 17) - *va'Eda'akha b'Shem* - "I will know you by name". Again, we are faced with this odd phrase, ending with the seemingly hanging word *b'Shem*.

* By what name? By Mosheh's name? By God's Name?

Within that same narrative, Mosheh asks God to reveal His ways (perhaps His mode of justice?), to which God responds: *v'Karati b'Shem Hashem l'Fanekha* - "I will call by the Name Hashem before you". This phrase shows up, in a slightly different format, when God introduces the thirteen attributes of compassion (34:5).

* Why is God calling out by His own Name? What does this mean?

IV

LIKRO B'SHEM Hashem

In a much earlier passage, we find a phrase which evokes this one: *Az Huchal liKro b'Shem YHVH* - "at that point (during the time of Enosh, Adam's grandson), was the onset of calling out by the Name of God" (B'resheet 4:26). This verse, which should indicate a positive move (prayer?) and is read that way by many Rishonim (e.g. Rashbam, S'forno), is read negatively by the Sifri (Devarim #43) - and, in the Sifri's footsteps, by Rashi (B'resheet 4:26). Rashi reads that at this point in time people began worshipping foreign gods - the beginning of idolatry. (Rambam seems to understand the verse this way - see MT Avodah Zarah 1:1).

* How did this verse become a signal of the onset of idolatry?

V

VAYIKRA B'SHEM Hashem

Strangely enough, this phrase (again, with slight variations) shows up in the description of Avraham's worship of God (as it does with Yitzchak and Ya'akov). Avraham, whose life was dedicated to the eradication of idolatry, "called out by the Name of YHVH" (B'resheet 12:8, 13:4, 21:33; compare with

Yitzchak: 26:25; Ya'akov: 33:20).

* What could this possibly mean?

The Gemara (Sotah 10a-b) quotes Resh Lakish's exegesis of this phrase: "Do not read *Vayikra* (and he called out), rather read *Vayakri* (he caused others to call out), teaching that Avraham caused God's Name to be called out in the mouth of every passerby. How so? After they would eat and drink, they stood up to bless/thank him. He would say to them: Did you eat of my possessions? You have eaten from the possessions of the God of the world - give thanks, praise and bless the One who spoke and caused the world to be."

* In other words, the Midrash understands this verse as alluding to Avraham's "outreach" efforts; but where is that understanding found in the verse?

VI

FUNCTIONAL NAMES AND RELATIONAL NAMES

One major step backwards (in both time and text) will help us begin to clarify all of these issues.

In the second chapter of B'resheet, we read about Adam's loneliness (2:18) - which, parenthetically, is the first thing described by God as "not good" (*lo tov*) - as opposed to the refrain of *to v* throughout the first chapter. God sets out to find a "helpmeet" for Adam. At this point, the casual reader assumes that woman is created - but a simple look at the text shows that not to be the case. In an attempt to find a companion for man, God brings forth all manner of living beings (i.e. animals) - and man proceeds to give them names (2:19-20). Since this seems to be the indication that none of these animals was a proper companion, we can safely assume that the names given were functional - names that reflected how man would use these animals. The names were not relational - they did not demonstrate anything about how man felt connected to them.

Subsequently, God put Adam to sleep and...you know the rest. When he woke, he declared: "This time [is different] - a bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh, this shall be called *Ishah*, for she was taken from an *Ish*". (2:23) The woman is not named for her function, rather for her relationship with the man.

Names can be given in a sterile, scientific manner, categorizing and typing - or they can be given in a passionate manner, obliterating distinctions and speaking of closeness. When man names animals, he acts as a dispassionate supervisor. When he names woman, on the other hand, he acts as an

enraptured creature, finally freed of his terrible loneliness.

There are names which designate - and names which create a bond of identification.

liKro Shem - to give a name - that is designation by function. *liKro b'Shem* - that is to identify with, to call one's own name in conjunction with the other.

THE ROOTS OF IDOLATRY

We can now go back to the generation of Enosh (4:26) - who began to "call out by the Name of YHVH." How did the Sifri and Rashi (and Rambam) understand this to be a reference to the onset of idolatry?

Rambam, in his historical sketch of the development of idolatry (MT Avodah Zarah, Chapter 1), explains that the first steps down that ignorant path focused on elements of nature as God's creations. Since God created these luminaries, went the thinking, paying homage to them was a form of showing honor to God. This type of thinking spiraled down to "pure" idolatry, in which inherent divinity is ascribed to the object of worship.

This is exactly what happened in the generation of Enosh - people began identifying other things with the Name of YHVH. Our thesis is that the Hebrew phrase *liKro b'Shem* (at least in these contexts) does not mean "to call by name" (i.e. functional names), rather "to identify [oneself] with" - a relational name. *Az Huchal liKro b'Shem YHVH* - at that point, people began identifying other things with God - hence, the beginning of idolatry.

VII

THE EVOLUTION OF AVRAHAM

When we revisit this phrase (in its various forms) in the context of Avraham (and Yitzchak and Ya'akov) at an altar, it takes on whole new meaning. The picture that we are given from most Midrashim about Avraham's pre-Eretz Yisra'el life (there is almost nothing in the text itself) depicts him as a philosopher, a seeker of truth or a contemplative soul. The few religious conflicts about which we are told (e.g. Nimrod) are not about Avraham "defending" the truth he has found - just defending himself from those who would disallow it of him.

How and when did this contemplative soul become a God-loyalist, so much so that God declared that He knew that Avraham would continue to promote the ways of God among his household (18:19) and so much so that Avraham became concerned for the ramifications of the impression of Divine injustice (18:23-33)?

This happened as soon as he enters Eretz Yisra'el. When Avraham worshipped God, he "called out by the Name of God". Avraham identified himself with God and was suddenly "related" to Him. He was no longer just a philosophical observer, maintaining the logical truth of monotheism; rather, he was a passionate loyalist, whose very reputation was bound up in the reputation of God. (Note that Avraham is called the "beloved of God" - Yeshaya 41:8).

This explains why the Gemara (mentioned above) interprets Avraham's call as a reference to his missionary activity. His identification with God was what motivated him to share his beliefs and to promote God-awareness among passers-by. It was Avraham's "calling out in the Name of God" - i.e. identification with God - which led him to reach out to the unschooled and to teach them about monotheism.

VIII

ELOHEI AVOTEINU

Before moving on, we can address an ancillary question about Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov - each of whom "identified" with God and saw themselves in relationship with Him. In our T'fillah, we refer to God as *Elohei Avoteinu, Elohei Avraham, Elohei Yitzchak ve'Elohei Ya'akov*. This phrase was not made up by the liturgical composers; it appears a number of times in the Torah (e.g. Sh'mot 3:6). God refers to Himself as "the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak and the God of Ya'akov". Significantly, however, He is never called *Elohei Mosheh*. We know (from Bamidbar 12 and, possibly, from Sh'mot 6) that God had a closer relationship with Mosheh than with any other prophet; why then is He never referred to as the God of Mosheh?

Conversely, in the Torah there is only one individual who is called *Ish ha'Elohim* - a man of God. Mosheh (D'varim 33:1) is referred to this way in the introduction to his farewell blessings. Why isn't Avraham considered a "man of God"?

The difference between them lies in the nature of their relationships with God. In the case of Avraham (and, following him, Yitzchak and Ya'akov), he chose to identify with God and to build that relationship. Avraham "called out in the Name of God", making his own destiny and success

contingent upon the success of God's word in the world. It is, therefore, quite reasonable that God would be called *Elohei Avraham* - for He is truly the God of Avraham, who chose to identify with Him. (This is equally true, if with a bit less force, about Yitzchak and Ya'akov).

Conversely, Mosheh did not choose God - God chose Mosheh (see Sh'mot 3:1- 4:17). As such, it wasn't Mosheh who was identifying with God - rather God identifying Himself (as it were) with Mosheh. Suddenly, the success of God in the world becomes contingent on the success of Mosheh's mission and leadership. This explains why, even though the B'nei Yisra'el constantly complain to Mosheh in the desert, God regards this as defiance towards Him. This also explains God's intervention on behalf of Mosheh when his siblings speak ill of him (Bamidbar 12).

In an almost mirror-phrase of Avraham's *Vayikra b'Shem YHVH*, God says to Mosheh: *va'Eda'akha b'Shem* - "I will know you by name". Following our thesis, this means that God has chosen to identify Himself with Mosheh (as above) - which explains that unique appellation given to Mosheh: *Ish ha'Elohim*.

IX

BETZALEL'S CALLING

We can now move back to our original verse and explain as follows: Just as Mosheh was chosen by God and God identified Himself with Mosheh, so is the case with Betzalel. *Karati b'Shem* - "I have identified Myself with someone" - (who is that someone? "Betzalel ben Uri ben Hur l'Mateh Yehudah").

This also explains the term *R'eh* that God uses when describing Betzalel to Mosheh (and why Mosheh uses the same word when speaking to the B'nei Yisra'el). "See - you can see for yourself that this fellow is especially endowed with wisdom, understanding etc.; that is the surest indication that I have chosen him!". Just as God told Mosheh that by noting Betzalel's special qualities he would be able to discern God's "identification" with him (*k'riah b'shem*), similarly, Mosheh told the B'nei Yisra'el that they would be able to see for themselves that Betzalel was chosen.

This also explains why the Aron (Ark) was the only vessel which Betzalel himself built (as opposed to the others where he oversaw the construction). Since the Aron is the housing for Torah (God's word), it follows that only the person who God has chosen to identify Himself with can construct such a housing.

X

V'KARATI B'SHEM Hashem L'FANEKHA

We can now revisit one other odd phrase: When God is about to demonstrate His attributes of compassion: *v'Karati b'Shem Hashem l'FaneKha*.

Until the sin of the golden calf, the relationship between the B'nei Yisra'el and God was predicated on strict judgment - *v'Eleh haMishpatim* - "These are the laws". Once the trust had been broken and the covenant violated, the only way for God to remain in the proximity of the people was to change the terms of the relationship to Rahamim (compassion). How could this be accomplished?

By identifying Himself with the B'nei Yisra'el and changing the dynamic of the relationship from ruler-subjects to mother-children (or lover-beloved a la Shir haShirim), the driving force in that relationship became compassion (*Rahamim* - from the word *Rehem*, meaning "womb"). Once that was the case, it was impossible for God to relate to us impartially and with the full measure of the law; justice became tempered with compassion and we could continue.

"I will call out by the name of Hashem in front of you":

- God put His own Name which represents compassion (YHVH) in front of us, identifying His own "success" with that of the B'nei Yisra'el.

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