

# KNOWING ONE'S CALLING

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

Every man, it has been said, has a calling. Parshas Vayikra begins with Moshe Rabbeinu's calling, "And He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying... (1:1)" The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 1:15) notes that until Hashem called out to him, Moshe would not enter the inner sanctuary of the Mishkan (Tabernacle); he waited to be called upon. "From here our Sages derive," comments the Midrash, "that a Torah scholar who has no sense is worse than a dead carcass. For Moshe, who took the Jews out of Egypt, and split the Yam Suf, and ascended to the Heavens, and erected the Mishkan, still would not enter the holy sanctuary until called upon by Hashem..." What is so important about "waiting to be called upon"?

In a village not far from the town of Vorki lived two Vorki chassidim (disciples of the Holy tzaddik R' Yitzchak mi-Vorki zt"l) who were both melamdim (Torah teachers). Both were accomplished Torah scholars in their own right, and proficient teachers, and were regarded by their peers as equals.

One chilly winter day, a number of disciples of the famed Rebbe of Vorki set out on a journey to visit their holy rebbe. All day it rained and blew as they trudged onward through swampy sideroads and country villages. With a few hours left before reaching Vorki, and the last light of day fading quickly over the horizon, the group realized they would have to stay somewhere for the night, and conclude their journey the next morning. After a short discussion, they decided to lead their wagon into the nearby village in which the two melamdim lived.

As soon as they entered the village, they inquired regarding the addresses of their friends. Since the one named R' David lived closer, they decided to approach him with a request for lodgings. Knocking on the door for quite some time, it was eventually opened for them. "Shalom aleichem, R' David!" the guests called out joyously. "We got stranded in the stormy weather on our way to the rebbe - could you perhaps put up a few sorry souls for the night?"

"No way," he answered abruptly. "Don't get me wrong - I'd love to do a mitzvah and everything, but I'm a melamed, and a good night's rest is just critical for me. I need to be alert for my students tomorrow. If I'm going to get busy with you fellows now... who knows when I'll get to bed. Sorry."

The weary travellers couldn't believe their ears. "What do you mean? Is that a reason to act so coldly, and leave your friends to sleep outside, hungry and shivering in the pouring rain?"

Learned man that he was, R' David was quick to respond. "That's not an issue. One who is occupied performing one mitzvah is exempt from doing other mitzvos. I am fully occupied with the mitzvah of

teaching Torah, and so I have no time to take care of your needs. Even my sleep is a mitzvah! Sorry."

With that, he shut the door on them. Seeing that R' David meant what he said, they turned back and went to find the house of R' Shalom, the other melamed. With great apprehension, half-expecting yet another rebuttal, they timidly knocked on the door. Here, however, the door immediately opened wide, and the group was greeted by the smiling face of R' Shalom, who called them straight in, and extended his hand with a warm "Shalom aleichem!" "What a surprise!" he exclaimed. "Welcome, welcome to my humble abode! I never dreamed of meriting so great a privilege on such a cold night!"

R' Shalom immediately put his entire family to work, preparing a warm meal for his guests, and assembling linens for their bedding. Only after the weary group had eaten and were sound asleep did R' Shalom and his family start preparing themselves for bed.

The next day, they thanked R' Shalom deeply for his warm hospitality, and set off to Vorki. When the chassidim finally arrived, and entered their rebbe's private chamber to receive his blessings, he asked them about their journey, noting that they had arrived particularly early in the morning. They told him how they had been forced to spend the evening in the nearby village, and how R' Shalom the melamed had so warmly welcomed them into his home. From their praise of R' Shalom, the rebbe sensed that they had beforehand been put off by someone else. It didn't take much for him to surmise the part of the story the group had left out - R' David's blunt refusal to take them in. "So that's how it was?" the rebbe murmured to himself. "That's how a chassid greets a weary guest?..." The tzaddik sighed heavily.

The following evening, R' David, who indeed tried to retire early every night, was already dozing off when he was suddenly awakened by a knock at his front door. He peered through the shutters, and could see the wrapped-up form of a man huddled at his doorstep. "What do you want?" he asked curtly.

"Lodgings," came the short reply.

"Sorry, I can't help you. I'm a melamed, I'm busy teaching Torah. I must sleep well to be alert for my students tomorrow. I'm exempt from hachnosas orchim (the mitzvah of welcoming a guest)."

As the disappointed man turned away, he called out over his shoulder, "It was I, Yitzchak - be well!"

There was no mistaking it - that was the voice of his holy rebbe. R' David flung open the door, but the tzaddik had already climbed back into his coach, which promptly sped off. "Rebbe, please forgive me!" R' David shouted, but his trembling voice was all but swallowed up by the horses' steps.

The next morning, the small village was brimming with excitement. "The tzaddik of Vorki has arrived for an unexpected visit - and he's staying in the home of R' Shalom, his disciple!" Dozens of townsfolk streamed to R' Shalom's house, hoping to catch a glimpse of the holy rebbe, and perhaps even receive his blessings.

"I would like to test the students of the two melamdim - R' David and R' Shalom," the tzaddik suddenly remarked to his assistant. The news spread quickly, and the students were soon assembled in the house of R' Shalom. R' David, of course, accompanied his students, although he was still deeply ashamed by the previous night's events.

The students of the host, R' Shalom, were tested first. They answered the tzaddik's questions with clarity and precision. Their teacher, R' Shalom, glowed with pride.

When the rebbe began to test the students of R' David, however, no answers were forthcoming. Ultimately R' David was forced to come to their assistance, and prod them with all kinds of hints and suggestions. Even then, their answers were unclear and stilted. R' David turned pale.

Everyone present was asked to leave the room except R' David. "Let me tell you, R' David," the tzaddik began, "that the main reason we study - and teach - Torah, is in order to know and perform its mitzvos. A teacher who teaches in order to observe the mitzvos will find that the Torah he teaches is preserved and blessed - his students will find success in their studies. But a melamed who teaches in order to exempt himself from other mitzvos will not see success and blessing in his students. You have now seen this for yourself.

"Of course a melamed must get a good night's sleep - indeed the holy Rambam stresses the point. But to use your position as an excuse for any other mitzvah which comes your way, and allow your friends to remain in the cold, is no way to teach Torah!"

When a Jew is presented with a choice between clear-cut good and evil, the decision, at least philosophically, is a simple one. But when conflicting mitzvos present themselves, it's much harder to decide what Hashem truly wants. Moshe Rabbeinu knew that Hashem ordered the building of the Mishkan in order to communicate through it to His nation; yet he still didn't trust himself to enter until he was called. "Perhaps I'm going in because I want to go in - because my honour and respect will somehow be increased by being the 'chosen one,'" he thought. "Perhaps I'm using the mitzvah of entering the holy Mishkan as a vehicle for self-aggrandizement? Is this 'mitzvah' one of my own doing?" He would not enter until called by Hashem.

While we can't always wait for a clear communicate from the Almighty, it's important that we continually inspect our "mitzvos" to make sure we're not manipulating the Torah for our own good.

Have a good Shabbos.

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