

RICH AND HUMBLE

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Parshas Vayikra begins with Vayikra, "And He called [Moshe]," written with a miniature alef at the end. Rashi notes that the idea of Hashem calling Moshe before speaking to him indicates Hashem's esteem for Moshe. A king doesn't walk into a room unannounced; so too Hashem's conversations with Moshe were so significant that they required a preamble.

While we find a similar expression with regard to the gentile prophet Bila'am, "*Vayakar el Bila'am* (Bamidbar/Numbers 23:4)," the lack of an alef at the end of vayakar changes the meaning of the word from "calling" to "coincidence." It's as if to say, "It happens to be that Hashem spoke to Bila'am."

Ba'al HaTurim explains that Moshe, in his exceptional humility, felt compelled to ascribe to his prophecy the second meaning of Vayikr(a) - happenstance. It was not because of any inherent qualities that Hashem spoke to him, he felt, but because circumstance (the need for a leader) required someone do the job. He was just in the right place (Midiyan) at the right time (when Hashem wanted to take the Jews out of Egypt). Moshe would have been tempted to write, Vayakar, "And it happened to be that Hashem spoke to him," except that, obviously, he couldn't deviate from Hashem's wish. Hashem dictated Vayikra, so he wrote Vayikra. Still, in recognition of his humbleness, Hashem told him to write Vayikra with a small alef at the end.

From our perspective, we read the verse and are awed by Moshe's extreme self-deprecation; having taken the Jews out of Egypt and delivered them the Torah, he saw himself as no more worthy than the distasteful Bila'am, who attempted to destroy that very same nation. Moshe, one imagines, probably read the verse and said, "You see, Hashem really wanted me to write Vayakar - He just felt bad for me."

Parshas Vayikra is not the first time we find the expression, Vayikra el Moshe in the Torah. A very similar phrase is found in Shemos/Exodus 19:6, and the identical phrase is found in Shemos 24:16. Why is the small alef, signifying Moshe's humility, not found there? Normally, unless there is a specific reason to defer, the Torah notes something at the first instance of multiple occurrences.

The Gemara (Nedarim 38a) says that Hashem does not allow the Shechina (Divine presence) to dwell on a person unless he is strong, rich, wise and humble. While the need for the recipient to be wise and humble is obvious, R' Chaim of Velozhin asks, of what significance is it that he is also strong and rich? (Indeed, the Rambam (Shemona Perakim) understands the Gemara to refer not to material wealth and physical strength, but rather to the riches and strength referred to by the Mishna (Avos

4:1), "Who is rich? One who rejoices with his lot. Who is strong? One who controls his impulses.")

The absolute prerequisite, R' Chaim explains, for achieving "Presence of Shechina" is humility. "*I dwell,*" Hashem says, "*with the downtrodden*" (Yeshayahu 57:15). One who is weak and poor and humble, we cannot be sure that, were he to suddenly become rich and famous, he would remain humble.

The only way we can ascertain if a man is truly humble is when he enjoys all the luxuries and power life has to offer, yet remains simple and unassuming. This is why, he explains, the Shechina cannot rest with the humble, unless they are also wealthy, strong and wise.

At face value, this is questionable. As things stand, the man is humble. True, it's possible that if the tables were turned, he too might change, and the previously humble pauper would turn into an arrogant, self-centered magnate. That's something we can't know until it happens. But Hashem knows the truth. If the person is presently a humble person, and Hashem knows his humility is real and not just a product of his situation, why should his lack of wealth and power prevent the Shechina from resting upon him?

Perhaps the idea is not that humility amid wealth and power is a proven humility, but rather that one who has achieved wealth and power, yet remained humble, has achieved a higher level of humility.

One may have the physique and genetics to bench-press 400 lbs., or to run a marathon in under four hours, with training. Maybe he can scientifically prove his disposition. Probably even now, before training, he's stronger or faster than most people. But if he never trains, his 'greatness' will forever remain in a state of untapped potentiality; he will never have achieved the strength and stamina of a champion performer.

Remaining humble amid wealth and power doesn't just happen. Power corrupts. Wealth blinds. The righteous person can overcome the pitfalls of wealth and power, to be sure, but only through toil and extreme character refinement.

Given the chance, the humble pauper may indeed have the potential to withstand the temptations of wealth and power, remaining every bit as unassuming as he was before fortune struck. That doesn't change the fact this his humility is the humility of a pauper.

Apparently, the Talmud reveals that there is a level of Shechina which demands a more nuanced form of humility. A humility that has withstood the corruption of wealth and power; a humility in the light of which the humility of the simpleton pales.

Moshe, Chazal say, became wealthy from the shavings of the Tablets upon which the 10 Commandments were carved (Nedarim 38a). Until then, he was ostensibly poorer (materially) than everyone else, because while the Jews were busy gathering the wealth of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, Moshe was busy tending to Yosef's coffin.

The first instances of Vayikra el Moshe are written before Moshe carved the Second Tablets, from which he became rich. He was certainly an anav (humble) then as later. But the Torah withholds the allusion to Moshe's humility until now, after he was independently wealthy. He was the "same old Moshe," yet not at all the same old Moshe. His humility now is more noteworthy, and far more substantial. Have a good Shabbos. [See R' David Volkin, MiShulchan Gavoha] Text Copyright © 2008 by [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and **Torah.org**