

G-D "CALLED," BUT IT'S OUR "CALLING"

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d called Moshe, and spoke to him from the Appointed Tent, saying ... (Vayikra 1:1)

This verse sets the tone for all of Sefer Vayikra, on a pshat level and on the level of sod (esoteric).

On a pshat level, the Torah is introducing us to life with the Mishkan, the forerunner of the Temple. We will be taught about what it means to be holy as a people, in order to be fitting for the service of G-d, in and outside the Temple. Sefer Vayikra is a spiritual lens to help focus the light of the Jewish people so that we can fulfill our mandate of being a "light unto nations."

That is on the level of pshat; on the level of sod, we have the following:

Ya'akov wanted to establish the Mystery of Unity below, and composed the twenty-four letters of, "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever." He didn't make it twenty-five letters since the Mishkan (Tabernacle) had yet to be built. Once the Mishkan was built, the first word was completed ... With regard to this it says, "G-d spoke to him from the Appointed Tent, saying ..." (Vayikrah 1:1), which has twenty-five letters. (Zohar 2:139b)

Obviously, this requires an explanation, but on, unfortunately, that is longer than can be provided here. Therefore, in short, the words "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever" follow the verse of the Shema that we say twice a day. Traditionally, there are two sources for this statement. One source was the angels Moshe heard when he entered Heaven to receive Torah. The other source, according to the Talmud, was Ya'akov Avinu just prior to his death:

"Perhaps, [Ya'akov said,] G-d forbid, there is something unfit from my bed (i.e., a spiritually unworthy child), just as Yishmael was born to Avraham, and Eisav to my father Yitzchak?" His sons answered, "Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad-Just as in your heart only [G-d is] One, so too in our hearts, there is only One." At that moment, Ya'akov said, "Boruch Shem kevod Malchuso l'olam va-ed-Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever!" (Pesachim 56a)

According to the Zohar, Ya'akov wasn't simply commenting on the spiritual status of his sons; he was using a spiritual "formula" to draw down a very high source of godly light, one that has the power to unify. This would make sense given that his own sons had suffered terribly from a lack of unity,

which is what caused problems from which we are still suffering. Apparently Ya'akov had the ability to draw down a light powerful enough to create an extremely sublime reality, one that would have been comparable to that of the Mishkan.

However, Ya'akov sensed that the time was not quite right, and stopped short. This is indicated by the fact that the verse he composed only consisted of twenty-four letters, and not twenty-five letters. For, twenty-five is the number that symbolizes the Supernal Light of creation, referred to as the "Hidden Light," which G-d used to make creation on the first day, and then hid for the righteous in the Time-to-Come.

Why twenty-five? Because, the verse says:

G-d said, "Let there be (yehi) light!" And there was light! (Bereishis 1:3)

The word "yehi" is spelled yud-heh-yud, which, in gematria is equal to the number twenty-five ($10+5+10$). Thus, the verse can also be read as:

yehi = light

Or, rather, twenty-five equals light, or, is at least representative of this light. This is why the Shema--the ultimate statement of unity--has twenty-five letters itself!

Hence, combined, the Shema and "Blessed" would have resulted in fifty letters, the ultimate number of unity, a unity, apparently, that was reserved for the Mishkan:

You shall make 50 loops on the end of the one curtain that is the outermost in the joining, and 50 loops on the edge of the curtain that joins to the second. You shall make 50 catches of copper, and put the catches into the loops, and join the tent together, that it may be one. (Shemos 26:11)

Therefore, once the Mishkan was constructed, the "mysterious" and powerful unity of the World Above was achieved down below, accomplishing what was intended by the verse, "Blessed ..." which Ya'akov composed. The last twenty-five letters of the first verse of Vayikra, according to the Zohar, indicate that a "vehicle" to draw down the Supernal, Original Light of creation now existed and was functioning.

According to the Zohar, once the Mishkan was completed, the spiritual "root" of the light to which "Blessed be ..." alludes was able to emanate its light and draw down the Divine unity that Ya'akov intended to cause. This is why the Mishkan was completed on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev. Furthermore, says the Zohar, this is why thirteen materials were used for the Mishkan, and twelve stones were put into the Ephod-to make a total of twenty-five, alluding to the sublime unity that was to be achieved.

Serving in the Mishkan, which is the topic of Sefer Vayikra, is all about making use of this awesome and godly light, to bring unity between man-and-G-d, and, as we will see in later parshios, between man-and-man as well. This, says the Zohar, is implied by the first verse of this week's parshah.

Shabbos Day:

... Tell the Children of Israel that when any of them offer a animal to G-d, it should be either from cattle, sheep, or goats. (Vayikra 1:1)

It is not the first time that we have come across the concept of animal sacrifices in the Torah. Hevel offered up an animal sacrifice in Parashas Bereishis, Avraham did the same in Parashas Lech-Lecha, and at Har Sinai it was also part of the procedure when Torah was given. However, Sefer Vayikra begins to discuss sacrifices in earnest, and since our prayer service today replaces this part of the Temple service, it is always worthwhile to discuss insights into both.

The Mei HaShaloach wants to know: How does bringing a sacrifice affect atonement for sinning and acting contrary to the will of G-d?

He answers by reminding us that, before Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he did not eat meat--at least not from an animal on earth (the Talmud says that angels brought him roasted meat from Heaven; Sanhedrin 59b). This was because, the Mei HaShaloach explains, a certain unity was lacking among all the various beings in creation at that time, and they weren't interdependent.

However, as a result of Adam's sin, the entire creation was spiritually lowered, which meant that mankind's rectification has to also include all the species within creation as well. Man's teshuvah has to elevate not just himself, the sinner, but all of the animal world as well.

Furthermore, when a person brings an animal sacrifice to atone for his sin, he is bringing something that is of a common reality with his more base side. It is not the godly element of man--the upper levels of soul--that cause man to pursue false desires. It is his Nefesh, which is in the blood, that allows man to sin, and it is this level of soul that we have in common with the animal world.

As well, when the priest performs the sacrificial service, and he prays that what he has done will be acceptable before G-d, the animal returns back to its spiritual source in the Merkava. If it was a bird, a calf, a cow, or an ox that was offered up to G-d, then the spiritual aspect of these animals returns back to its source in the Merkava.

Ma'aseh Merkava (literally, the "Discipline of the Chariot") is one of the most Kabbalistic concepts. Yechezkel described it as part of the prophecy he had at the time the Jewish people were headed off into the first exile after the destruction of the First Temple. It is extremely allegorical, but it refers to a vision of how G-d made creation.

On this "Chariot," Yechezkel saw four different beings, two of which are the face of an ox, and that of an eagle. The ox is said to be the spiritual source of all similar species in creation, and the eagle,

of all birds. Eventually, they will all be unified in these single species, a rectification that is helped along as a result of sacrifices.

Thus, the Ramban's explanation, that sacrifices are a matter of Kabbalah, is confirmed. According to the Ramban, this is why G-d's holiest Name--the Tetragrammaton Name--is used exclusively in reference to all sacrifices. Though many peoples have performed animal sacrifices in the past, only the Jewish version involved Kabbalistic rectifications to creation.

And if our prayer service comes to replace the sacrifices that we would have otherwise brought before G-d, then it means that our siddurim, as simple and as repetitive as they may appear to be, are far from being so. For example, take the simple mitzvah of saying the Shema. The Zohar (2:139b) says that all of Torah can be found in the two verses, "Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One," and, "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever," which we say at least twice a day. In a sense, when one says these two verses daily, they are saying all of Torah!

And, if you look in the siddurim of the Kabbalists, they have notations at different points describing what are called, "Yechudim," different points in the prayer service when specific sefiros in the heavens "line up," and create remarkable spiritual opportunities. This is why the siddur of the Rashash--a great Sephardic Kabbalist--was very long and involved. Just the blessing over the washing of hands was two pages long!

It is true. The average prayer service these days runs too fast to think about such high-level spiritual opportunities. Besides, how many people know what they are and how to access them? One could take the time to learn all about what is going on in the spiritual world, and how it pertains to prayer, but that could take years, and who knows if it wouldn't lead to more damage than good?

Therefore, the least we can do is take dovening seriously, very seriously. Is it not futile, and even dangerous to send arrows off in all directions without concern and with eyes closed? So why force G-d to collect our "arrows" (to which prayers are compared) from all over the place? Taking prayer seriously, and then understanding what parts are supposed to accomplish what in creation, is the first stage in understanding how to "shoot" straight in prayer.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

The descendants of Aharon, the priests, must put fire on the altar and arrange the wood on the fire. The priests, the descendants of Aharon must place the pieces, the head, and the fat, on top of the wood on the fire upon the altar ... to be burned on the altar by the priest as a Burnt-Offering, a fire-offering, a pleasing fragrance to G-d. (Vayikra 1:7-9)

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin adds another element to the whole discussion of sacrifices that makes the concept apply to every day life. He writes:

"... The matter of sacrifices is like this as well, because, as a result of the fire on the altar above, the evil is burned up, leaving behind a completely good portion, for the owner [who brought it], to enjoy. Likewise, the manna that fell from Heaven was completely good--since nothing evil can come from Heaven--therefore no part was considered "waste" and all of it was absorbed by the limbs. The same was true of the meat from sacrifices--all of it was absorbed by the limbs, and nothing became waste ...

"Likewise one who eats and learns Torah--and his eating is for the right reasons--the good part adds holiness to his soul, and the 'bad' part is burned up by the Torah, whose nature is like fire ...

"When one eats for the true reason, to sustain his body and soul in order to serve G-d, May His Name Be Blessed, and makes the appropriate blessing, and learns Torah while he eats--the true purpose of his eating--he is literally like one who has offered a sacrifice ... The opposite is true as well of one who eats just to satisfy his hunger; not only does he not bring about a physical rectification, but he even damages himself spiritually as well, causing evil elements to enter him ..." (Nefesh HaChaim, Likutei Ma'amarim 33)

As I sit here eating my coffee and cake, I take minor consolation in the fact that, at least I'm learning/writing Torah at the same time. (Was there any nutritional value in what I just ate?) And when I think about the way I eat, and how many times I do so quite unconsciously, I wonder what kind of sacrifices I have brought in the past!

Furthermore, when I look at the way society approaches the whole topic of eating (indicative most, perhaps, from the entire concept of "fast food"), I wonder how much potential atonement is going out the window unused. And, I am reminded of the following as well:

Rebi Yochanan and Reish Lakish said: When the Temple stood, the altar atoned for a person. Now the table of a person atones for him (Rashi: when he feeds guests; Chagigah 27a)

Hence, though the actual bringing of animal sacrifices ceased with the destruction of the Second Temple, the process and atonement that they caused can live on to our benefit--in a Torah lifestyle for the person with a disposition for challenge and growth. Through such an approach to life, one's own eating habits can count as "a pleasing fragrance to G-d."

Melave Malkah:

The priest will atone for the person who sinned, and he will be forgiven. (Vayikra 4:35)

We don't know what we lost. We don't know what it means to be able to bring a sacrifice and atone for sins we have committed before G-d, and how much we lack in life because we can't. However, even before the Temple was built, it had been a concern of Avraham Avinu's:

It is written, "He [Avraham] said, 'G-d, how can I know that I will inherit [Eretz Yisroel]?' " (Bereishis 15:8) ... Avraham said to The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the Universe! Perhaps Israel will sin before You, G-d forbid, and You will do them as You did to the Generations of the Flood and the Dispersion?"

He told him, "I won't."

He said before Him, "But Master of the Universe, how can I know?"

He answered him, "Bring Me a three-year old calf ... (15:9)" (That is, they will offer sacrifices to atone for their sins, and avoid Divine wrath.) He said before Him, "Master of the Universe, that is fine during Temple times [when they can bring sacrifices], but what about when the Temple is not standing ... [-- how will they atone for their sins then]? He told him, "I have already established the order of sacrifices, and just reading them will count as if they offered them before Me, and I will forgive their sins!" (Megillah 31b)

If you look in the average traditional siddur, you will find a section before the "Introductory Psalms" (Pesukei D'Zimra) that includes many passages from the Torah and the Mishnah dealing with the sacrifices and other Temple services. In case you were wondering what they were doing there, now you know. If case you were wondering whether or not it is worthwhile to come to shul a bit early and say them, the above quote from the Talmud should make it easier to decide.

"But," you may ask, "the Temple service was very involved. Bringing an actual animal sacrifice and offering it up was far from being as easy as opening a siddur and uttering a few paragraphs! How can our words compare to their actions?"

It is a good question. Fortunately, there is an even better answer, and it is a good lead-in to Pesach.

In the book, "Redemption to Redemption," the importance of speech is a central topic, and explained in detail. In short, we have the following two quotes:

G-d formed man from dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils a living soul, and the man became a living spirit. (Bereishis 2:7)

A living spirit: A speaking spirit. (Onkeles)

According to Targum Onkeles, the main impact of the soul that G-d gave to man, which made him different from all other living beings within creation, was speech. Indeed, speech is not merely another tool to help mankind function in the physical world, like walking, or like the use of our thumbs. Speech itself is indicative of our whole *raison d'être*, as the Talmud makes clear:

R' Elazar said: Every man was created to toil, as it says, "Because man was made to toil ..." (Iyov 5:7). Now, I do not know if that means to toil through speech, or in actual labor; however, once it says, "A toiling soul toils for him, for his mouth compels him." (Mishlei 16:26), I know that a person was created to toil with his mouth. I do not know, though, if this means to toil in Torah or just in regular

conversation. However, once it says, "This Torah should not leave your mouth ..." (Yehoshua 1: 8), I know that man was created to toil in Torah [through speech]. (Sanhedrin 99b)

Hence, the name of the holiday "Pesach," which, on one hand comes from the Hebrew word that means to "pass over," but, on a deeper level, says the Maharal, can mean: peh sach--the "mouth spoke." This is why the chief antagonist in the story was Paroah, whose name can be written: peh ra'ah--evil mouth, and why the chief protagonist was Moshe, whose "strength was in his mouth." This is also why Paroah enslaved the Jewish people with labor that the Torah refers to as b'pharach, but which the Talmud interprets to mean: peh rach--with a soft mouth!

That is just the beginning of the story and the hints. However, it serves to remind us that the gift of speech is precisely that--a tremendous gift! As we learn from the episode of the manna (also in "Redemption to Redemption,"), and when Moshe brought forth water from the rock by hitting it as opposed to speaking to it, speech represents our ability to transform the physical reality through a spiritual means.

Hence, if one merely says the sacrifices as he would read any book, it is true--the effect is limited. But if one repeats the words with the sense of the Talmud quoted about, and with the Targum's interpretation in mind, then one can well appreciate how doing so can count as if the act was actually performed, and atonement was actually achieved.

Have a great Shabbos,

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