

STAYING "ON-LINE"

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

And He called (Vayikra) to Moshe . . . (Vayikra 1:1)

AND HE CALLED TO MOSHE: A "calling" preceded all sayings and commands. It is an expression of love, an expression that the Ministering Angels use, as it said, "One called to the other" (Yeshayahu 6:3). However, to the gentile prophets He revealed Himself with an expression of happenstance and uncleanness, as it said, "G-d happened upon Bilaam" (Bamidbar 23:4, 16). (Rashi)

All of this because of a reduced "aleph."

If you look into a Sefer Torah at the very first word of this week's parshah and into the Book of Vayikra, you will see the word "An He called" spelled: vav-yud-kuf-raish-aleph, as it ought to be. However, what is unique here is that the aleph at the end of the word is written smaller as a matter of tradition, making the first four letters - vav-yud-kuf-raish - stand out on their own almost as an independent word, vayikar, with an independent meaning: He happened upon.

Thus, Rashi's incredible explanation, and I say "incredible" because from a SMALL aleph we are being taught a BIG difference between the relationship the Jewish people are supposed to have with G-d, and that of the other nations of the world. The Jewish people are supposed to have an ongoing, continuously open relationship with G-d, whereas the relationship of the gentile nations to G-d is more of an on-and-off type.

We saw this all the way back at the beginning of Parashas Vayaira. It was just after Avraham Avinu performed Bris Milah and was at home recovering, at which time G-d came to visit him. However, in the midst of the prophecy three strangers showed up, and Avraham dutifully provided them with hospitality, not so much as asking G-d His permission or even stopping to say "Good-bye for now!"

Even more bizarre is that after Avraham finished taking care of his guests' needs and returned to his conversation with G-d, he was able to pick up just where he left off, as if G-d had been waiting for him the entire time. Indeed, it was as if the conversation never broke off even for a moment, even while Avraham Avinu focussed his attention on more mundane matters.

Which, of course, it didn't, since everything Avraham did in this world was always part of his service to G-d and was never for selfish reasons. His life was one ongoing dialogue with the Creator. Though

the mode of communication may have changed from prophecy to chesed, everything else regarding Avraham's relationship to G-d remained the same.

Pardon the analogy, but it is like using cable for Internet versus a regular modem.

When a person uses a modem to connect to the Internet, he has to dial up the server, "get in," and wait until all the inter-computer protocol has finished before being able to access everything from e-mail to websites. This takes time, is not always successful the first or second time, and can build Internet costs on a momentary basis.

However, the beauty of cable is that you are always connected. The connection is continuous and therefore "getting in" is quick as is using the "Net." Furthermore, you usually pay a flat monthly rate for the use of it, regardless of how often you actually access it.

This is how it is supposed to be with the Jewish people, at least spiritually-speaking. When it comes to our relationship to G-d, we are supposed to be "on-line" all the time. Indeed, there is never a moment that we are supposed to think that we are "off-line" from G-d, which is why halachah dictates levels of conduct and modesty even in the most private of places and moments.

This is not just a crucial and very beautiful Torah thought, as we shall now discuss, G-d willing. It is a description of the essence of the Jewish people and ultimately, the reason for all the suffering of the Jewish nation throughout the ages, and especially today in Eretz Yisroel.

Shabbos Day:

And G-d spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying . . . (Vayikra 1:1)

This is the reason why this drash appears here. Another name for Sefer Vayikra is "Toras Kohanim" - "Torah of the Priests" - because a large part of it is about Temple sacrifices and the priestly service. Given that the Jewish people are called a "Kingdom of Priests," in a general sense, it is not a book just about kohanim, but about the service of G-d for all Jews.

Animal sacrifice is also a lesson about human sacrifice. An important part of the message is that taking one of G-d's creations and taking its life so that it can be offered "back" to G-d, is a parable for human life as well. In fact, in some extreme cases where one is commanded to allow himself to be killed to sanctify G-d's Name, he is considered to have been offered up to G-d upon the altar of life.

However, more important than dying for G-d is living for G-d, something our step-brothers-of-old have yet to understand, at our expense. This is because it is far easier for a human being to die for G-d - a one-time event - than to live for G-d, an ongoing concern that some find incredibly taxing, and that only a handful find to be a labor of love.

After all, keeping the lines of communication constantly open between two computers takes very little effort on our part. However, just maintaining an ongoing, upbeat and loving relationship with another human being requires a tremendous and continuous act of will; how much more so with G-d!

This is because relationships have prerequisites; the holier the relationship, the holier the prerequisites will be. Sefer Vayikra is also the "Book of Holiness," the climax of which is Parashas Kedoshim which begins by addressing all Jews with the words, "You shall be holy for I, G-d your G-d am holy" (Vayikra 19:2). However, this is just another way of saying, "You shall keep the lines of communication and relationship between You and I open ALL the time."

This sheds new light on an old idea ("old," since I have used it several times before). The Talmud says regarding Ya'akov's failed death-bed attempt to prophesize the End-Of-Days:

"Perhaps, 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" (Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One): 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)

However, comments the Holy Zohar:

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, And G-d spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying . . . (Vayikra 1:1), which has twenty-five letters. (Zohar 2:139b)

Thus, like the Shema, the Creed of the Jewish people, the last part of the first posuk of our parshah has six words. Like the Shema, the Mission Statement of the Jewish people, our posuk has twenty-five letters which, according to the Zohar, allude to the oneness of Heaven and Earth - the continuous and ongoing relationship between G-d and the Jewish people that was facilitated by the Tent of Meeting from which G-d spoke to Moshe Rabbeinu whose prophecy was just that: continuous and ongoing.

Hence, this is the essential intention behind the words of the Shema that we say twice daily, and the flip side of one of the key six daily reminders of the Jew, with which we will now continue, b'ezras Hashem Yisborach.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way, as you departed from Egypt. When they chanced upon you (korchehah) you en route . . . (Devarim 25:17-18)

WHEN THEY CHANCED UPON YOU (KORCHEHAH) EN ROUTE: This connotes a chance occurrence. (Rashi)

However, nothing happens by chance in G-d's world, and Rashi provides the following analogy back at the time of the actual encounter:

AND AMALEK CAME: The Torah juxtaposes this section and the previous verse in order to convey: "I (G-d) am always amongst you and ready to fulfill your needs, and yet you say, 'Is G-d among us or not?' (I swear) by your lives that the dog (Amalek) will come and bite you and you will cry out to Me and then you will know where I am." This is comparable to a man who placed his son on his shoulders and went on a journey. Whenever the son saw a desirable object, he would say, "Father, take that object and give it to me," and he would give it to him. This happened a second and a third time. Eventually, they met a certain person whereupon the son said to him, "Have you seen my father?" His father said to him, "Do you not know where I am?!" Whereupon he threw him off himself and the dog came and bit him." (Rashi, Shemos 17:8)

According to the Rashi, vulnerability to Amalek only comes from going "off-line" with G-d, whenever we sever our high-level connection to G-d and forget that our lives are on-going dialogues with the Al-mighty. Thus, what Amalek PHYSICALLY does to us is only a reflection of what we have already done to ourselves SPIRITUALLY, which Rashi reveals at the end of the parshah:

THE HAND IS ON G-D'S (YUD-HEH) THRONE (KUF-SAMECH): The hand of G-d is (raised) to swear by His Throne to have eternal war and hatred against Amalek. Why is it written "kuf-samech" and not "kuf-samech-aleph," and also why is the Name cut in half (missing the Vav-Heh)? G-d swore that His Name will not be whole nor will His throne be whole until the name of Amalek is completely obliterated . . . (Rashi, Shemos 17:16)

As we have said on many occasions, the "Vav-Heh" of G-d's Name represents Divine Providence, or G-d's involvement in the everyday affairs of man, and specifically, the Jewish people. From the first word of this week's parshah and Rashi's comment, we understand that the "aleph" represents the exact same idea.

Thus, Amalek is that poisonous and destructive bacteria that festers and grows every time the Jewish people go "off-line" with G-d, when we sever the connection between the Yud-Heh of G-d's Name - the Source of light that gives us life - and the Vav-Heh of G-d's Name - the spiritual channel through which that light becomes accessible to us.

When we deal with G-d through "chance" meetings, then Amalek chances upon us.

Later on, Rashi explains how this cycle that we initiate results in a self-perpetuation of spiritual self-destruction that only we can halt:

WHEN THEY CHANCED UPON YOU (KORCHEHAH) EN ROUTE: Another interpretation: The meaning is "cold" (kor) as opposed to heat. They cooled you, warming you down from boiling heat. For, all the nations were afraid of waging war against you until they began preparing the way for others. This is compared with a boiling bath into which no creature could enter. Came one rebellious person who leaped into it, and although he was scalded, he cooled it for others. (Rashi, Devarim 25:18)

Amalek: willing to hurt themselves in order to hurt the Jews, to cool them down. The greater the hurt, the greater the cooling down. The more illogical and painful the damage inflicted against the Jewish people, the more chance-like life appears to the Jew, and the more distant he feels from his Creator. We create the gap, but it is Amalek who widens it.

Therefore, there is no greater veil over the Face of G-d than Amalek. Amalek is both the result of "hester panim" and the cause of it, as the Talmud, perhaps, alludes:

Rebi Elazar began the discussion with, "Through laziness the rafter (hamkareh) sinks (yimach), and with idleness of hands the house leaks" (Koheles 10:18). Because they were lazy regarding the study of Torah, the enemy of The Holy One, Blessed is He, made him "mach," and "mach" always means impoverished, as it says, "If he is poor (mach) to pay the valuation" (Vayikra 27:8). "Rafter" (mikareh) refers to The Holy One, Blessed is He, as it says, "Who roofs (hamkareh) His upper chambers with water" (Tehillim 104:3). (Megillah 11a)

The word "mikreh," which means "chance encounter," and "mikareh" which means "roof," are spelled with the exact same letters: mem-kuf-raish-heh, and it is the latter that is a symbol of the former, "naturalizing" the Divine Providence of G-d. It is our willingness to go off-line with G-d, that is, to live parts of our lives as if He just isn't there or just doesn't care about what we do, and how we do it is what creates the barrier before Heaven and Earth, referred to here as a "roof."

The ferociousness of the attacks against the Jews and their increased frequency is not only going back on-line with G-d, but remaining on-line permanently, as we shall see, G-d willing.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Therefore, say to the house of Israel: So says the L-rd G-d: Not for your sake do I do this, O house of Israel, but for My Holy Name, which you have profaned among the nations to which they have come. And I will sanctify My great Name, which was profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations will know that I am the L-rd . . . (Yechezkel 36:22-23)

These words are from the special Haftarah that we just read for Parashas Parah on Shabbos

Parashas Ki Sisa. This year they had a very, very profound impact on me, and not just because the person reading them stumbled on the word "profaned" creating an unconscious emphasis, but because I had still been smarting from such a profanation as he read the words.

Without going into detail, though I did not cause the "Chillul Hashem" (Profanation of G-d's Name) myself (to my knowledge), I was a witness to it and even identified with it by the non-Jew who angrily and seethingly walked passed me saying, "YOU PEOPLE ARE NOT MORE SPECIAL THAN ANYONE ELSE. DON'T ACT AS IF YOU ARE!"

What he really meant was, "If you people think you're so special then why don't you act that way, beginning with not doing the rude and extremely common thing you just did!"

Automatically, I tried to speak with him to mitigate the damage, but he would have nothing of it. Being so close to Shabbos, I could only be on my way to get ready for Shabbos and feel lousy that G-d's Holy Name had been profaned, and that I had to be a part of it. It was a brutal reminder of just how easy it is to profane G-d's Name while living among the gentiles, something I seemed to have been more sensitive to coming from Eretz Yisroel.

In fact, one of the arguments put forth in the past for why living in Eretz Yisroel was spiritually dangerous, was that sins count more here than they do outside the Holy Land. Perhaps, but profaning G-d's Name is much easier outside the land, as Yechezkel testifies above, and it is the only sin for which death is the only atonement (Yoma 86a). Thus, "Kibbutz Golios" (Ingathering of the Exiles) is defined as being precipitated by such terrible profanations of G-d's Name.

If you think about, Chillul Hashem is a function of going off-line with G-d. Kiddush Hashem, the exact opposite, is the result of a continuous G-d-consciousness, one that pervades every aspect of one's daily life. Like two people in love, one who loves G-d cannot stop thinking about Him or ever allow himself to be in a position to damage His Name in the eyes of others.

When a person loves someone, he anticipates what will make that person happy and what will make that person sad, performing the former while avoiding the latter. In short, to love someone means to go on-line with that person, emotionally-speaking, and to remain on-line to the point that everything they do together or apart from each other always comes down to their relationship with each other.

This is implied by the aleph that is attached to the first word of this week's parshah, and by the one that is missing at the end of Parashas Beshallah. Kiddush Hashem draws out and reveals the aleph that transforms chance meetings with G-d into obvious, willed, and on-going encounters with the Almighty. It completes the Holy Throne of G-d.

Chillul Hashem, on the other hand, does just the opposite, and it brings on Amalek and his willingness to hurt himself to hurt us, increasing the suffering and the Chillul Hashem. The more we resist this idea and the less frequently we remain on-line with Him, the greater the frequency and intensity of the message from Heaven will be.

The attacks only used to happen once in a few weeks. Then, dutifully, we would gather together and go "on-line" with G-d, reciting Tehillim and other prayers, perhaps even giving a little extra charity to soften the decree and end the suffering. Then, upon finishing the "session," "dutifully," we would go "off-line" until the next time we would need to repeat the process.

Now, years later, they are happening all the time. No sooner do we finish or even just start another "session" on-line with G-d, that another reason to go on-line occurs, G-d should have mercy upon us. Seemingly, we are no longer given a chance to go off-line like we used to be able to, like we wish we could.

Physically, there is no pressing need to swap your old computer modem for DSL cable. However, spiritually there is no time not to develop a "cable-like" relationship with G-d in order to remain on-line all the time. It's what the Jewish people are all about, and always have been, and the only way to avert the cycle of violence from consuming us anymore.

It is always decided on the previous Yom Kippur who is going to die that year and how, as we say in the "Usaneh Tokef" prayer. This is not something we can understand, especially when you enter rectification for previous reincarnations into the equation. Nevertheless, all Divine calculations aside, we can have an impact on the outcome of events and the history of the Jewish people, and working on a continuous and deep relationship with G-d is the only way we can.

Let there only be good news,
Good Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston