

THE REAL ALEPH-BAIT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

And He called Moshe, and G-d said to him ... (Vayikra 1:1)

It is always amazing how, sometimes, big things can end up meaning so little, and small things can end up meaning so much. An example of the latter is the small Aleph at the beginning of this week's parshah and at the end of the first word, "vayikra". It's Rashi's first comment on this sefer of the Torah, but it is in fact the theme of the entire book. In fact, it is the theme of life itself, at least for a Jew. It is the Aleph that we are after, the sum total of all of efforts throughout the course of our life, or many lives for that matter. When we come before the Heavenly Tribunal on our final day of judgment, it is our Aleph that we will present to make the case for ourselves. The size of it will be the measure of our success as people.

Hence, it is the Aleph that Amalek attacks, as we saw back in Parashat Beshallah:

He has said, "Because the hand is upon the Throne (Chof-Samech) of God (Yud-Heh); it is a war for God with Amalek in each generation." (Shemot 17:16)

Why is "Throne" written Chof-Samech and not Chof-Samech-ALEPH? And why is God's Name divided in half (Yud-Heh)? The Holy One, Blessed is He, swears that neither His Name nor His Throne will be whole until the name of Amalek is completely eradicated. (Rashi)

In a sense, we are the ones who bring the missing Aleph back to the Heavenly Throne. When we act in a way that unifies the Name of G-d and makes it one in the minds of men, then we re-build the Aleph from the Kisei HaKavod — Throne of Glory — as well. It is one and the same process, just as fighting against and defeating Amalek is. This is the mitzvah to sanctify the Name of God, which basically means to do that which draws the light of G-d into the world.

When we are born, we start off on the level of "vayikar". Any G-dly experience children have is "by chance", meaning that they are unaware of it and certainly didn't plan it. They go through life with little thought of connecting to the Creator of the world, and spiritual growth is not their main pursuit. They live their lives, for the most part, oblivious to the watchful eye of their Creator.

The main point of chinuch — Torah education — believe it or not, is to help them move to a higher realm of consciousness. The goal of teaching children all that Torah and halachah is to help them to become better vessels for the light of G-d, holier containers for the holiness of Hashem. It is, in

effect, to teach them about the Aleph, to help them get started on building it, and to encourage them to continue the process long after they leave formal learning, so that they can leave this world on the level of "vayikra" — in constant communication with G-d — and not only the level of "vayikar" as so many do — occasional contact with G-d.

This, of course, is the same Aleph from the word "adam", for when a person achieves the level of "vayikra", they simultaneously achieve the level of "adam", the level of personal shlainut — perfection. It's as if each of the words, "kisei", "vayikra", and "adam" all branch off from the same Aleph, having overlapping conceptual realities. For the Kisei, it is the reunification of G-d's Name in the minds of men, which means being real with the idea of constant and personalized Divine Providence. For vayikra, it is achieving the same thing, but going one step further and "dialoguing" with G-d. Becoming an "adam" is about "geulah" — redemption — which has the same gematria, and that is about becoming shalaim — complete.

SHABBAT DAY:

G-d made man in His image ... (Bereishit 1:26)

Technically-speaking, becoming "complete" in this respect means having received the three levels of one's soul, Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah, and rectifying all three levels, ideally in one lifetime, if necessary, after many. Different mitzvot are designed to help us perfect each particular level.

For example, "action-mitzvot" help perfect the level of Nefesh, which acts as the spiritual motor for our physical bodies. These are mitzvot that can only be fulfilled through actions, such as doing chesed for other people, or putting on Tefillin. Or, if it is a mitzvah that involved more than just action, like prayer for example, which requires us to say something and to have intention for the mitzvah, the action part of the mitzvah works on the Nefesh of a person.

Mitzvot that are speech-oriented rectify the level of Ruach, and the part of mitzvot that are thinking-mitzvot work on the level of Neshamah. The Arizal taught it like this:

A man who only performs (Positive) Mitzvot merits the Nefesh called "Asiyah" — Action. However, he is similar to a woman whose husband has gone overseas and has left her without clothing, food, or drink. He is like the Shechinah that sits in exile and darkness while Her House lays in ruin. That is what a Nefesh of a person is like without a Ruach, which is its "husband", so-to-speak: without light and intelligence for understanding. If this person then tries to learn Torah, constantly learning it and teaching Oral Law for altruistic reasons, then he will merit Ruach from Yetzirah. He will be like the woman whose husband has arrived to live with her forever in her house: clothing her, feeding her, giving her to drink, and bringing her to a higher level. Such is a person to whom Ruach comes and dwells within his Nefesh, filling it with the spirit of wisdom, and elevating the Nefesh from Asiyah to Yetzirah. If a person then endeavors to learn the "Hidden Wisdom" — the secrets of Torah, then he will merit to receive a Neshamah from Beriyah, and it will give off light from within the Ruach, and cause even more elevation. Then he is called "Adam Shalaim" — Complete Man — to which the

posuk refers when it says, "G-d made man in His image" (Bereishit 1:26). The sod is as follows: when a person only possesses Nefesh, then he is only affected by the Name [of G-d], Aleph- Dalet-Nun-Yud. When he learns Torah altruistically, then he merits Ruach which comes from the Name spelled Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh. When he learns the mysteries of Torah, then he merits Neshamah, and he will draw down strength and blessing from the Name, Aleph-Heh-Yud-Heh. When all three Names come together in the person, they total the gematria of "yabok" — Yud- Bait-Kuf. With respect to him it says, "G-d save! May the King answer us on the day we call!" (Tehillim 20:10), [the last three Hebrew words of which] have the roshei teivot which spell "yabok". (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 18)

However, the Zohar adds something very fascinating to this discussion: If you see a person who has all these levels, but it is uncertain if they are truly his or not, and one wishes to know whether it is safe to join with him or better to avoid him, it is possible to clarify this through his anger. If he protects his Neshamah during times of anger, not uprooting it from its place, causing it to be replaced by a "foreign god", then he is a fitting person, a servant of his Master, an "Adam Shalaim" — a complete person. (Zohar, Tetzaveh 182b)

This means, as the Talmud explains, not that a person does not get angry at all, but that if he is made angry he will not let unfitting words slip from his mouth, or perform some external act that shows he is angry, like throwing something or tearing clothing, etc. (Shabbat 105b). This, the Talmud says, is comparable to worshipping idols, "foreign gods" in the words of the Holy Zohar, since the Sitra Achra moves into the void left behind by the Neshamah that was uprooted by the anger. This is the sod behind the statement of the Talmud.

For some, there is nothing that revealing about this statement. We have already seen in many places just how negative anger and losing one's temper actually is. The Talmud warns that losing one's temper can result in a loss of Torah knowledge (Pesachim 66b), and the Rambam teaches that even though most bad traits have their moment for good, anger is the only exception to the rule. Yet, how many words have passed through our lips in anger? How many times have we exhibited anger in some physical form? How many times have we sent our "Aleph" packing?

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

Be not quick to anger, for anger lodges in the hearts of fools! (Kohelet 7:9)

So, today we have things like "Anger Management", designed to help people to learn how to keep themselves in check in frustrating situations, or at the very least, to avoid becoming abusive when they occur. Some people are fortunate: they seem to have been born with pleasant natures, or at least to have grown up in good home environments that rarely saw an angry moment. Some children, now adults, speak of how they never saw their parents argue, not even once.

As I began to work on this week's parshah sheet in my office off our living room, I heard my father, who is visiting us, ask my eight-year old son, who at that time was in one of his angelic states, why he even gets angry at all, something that is bound to happen at least once on Shabbat. Without

hesitation, and with the innocence and sincerity of an eight-year old, his answer was, "I have a bad temper".

A more Kabbalistic answer might have been, "Well, what do you want from me? I only have my Nefesh, and I'm in the middle of working on it. Why don't you ask my father about why he gets angry. At his age, he is supposed to have all three levels of soul, Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah, and have perfected at least two of them!"

It did not dawn on me until the next morning (the perfect time for dawn) that I have been working on his temper, and mine for that matter the wrong way. Like with respect to myself, I am trying to impress upon him all the bad results of a temper, hoping that somehow, the next time he gets angry, during his moment of anger, he will remember them and keep his cool instead. Well, that's reasonable. After all, it does not work that way for me, so why shouldn't it work that way for my eight-year old.

The Torah's version of Anger Management is the development of a person's Aleph. Unfortunately, in the natural world, like tends to attract like, which may be fine when the first "like" is positive. However, when it's negative, then it tends to draw out negative, in this case anger, from the other side, in this case the parent. Thus the vicious cycle begins that repeats itself throughout the life of a person, and in the worst-case scenarios turns into abuse.

If I was really on the ball, upon seeing anger in my child, I would see past it and instead ask myself the question, "How can I help him complete his Nefesh, so that at age 13 he can get his Ruach?" Because, if he gets his Ruach, there is a good chance that he will get his Neshamah, but more importantly, the more he is able to achieve in this direction, the more his anger will take care of itself, not matter what his intrinsic nature may be.

Ironically, the section from Zohar quoted above I happened to stumble on last week. I stumbled on it because I happened to find a bookmark I had previously placed on that specific page some time ago, though I have no recollection at all of the words of the Zohar, a curious thing. I was actually aiming for Ki Tisa when I opened the sefer, until the bookmark caught my eye. I immediately read the section, and was floored to see these words since I just happened to be starting Chapter Two of my latest book, "A Matter of Soul" which deals with the idea of levels of soul, tikun, and gilgulim. It is the perfection beginning for the chapter. More importantly, it was important mussar for me, for as obvious as it may be that anger is a sign of mismanagement on the soul level, I had never seen it as the measure of my personal progress in that area of development. It was hard not to take the Hashgochah Pratit — the Divine Providence — personally.

MELAVE MALKAH:

My spirit will not enter into their councils; my honor, do not be identified in their assemblies. For in their anger they murdered men, and of their own free will they maimed an ox. (Bereishit 49:6) If we wanted to, we could blame our tempers on Adam HaRishon. Had he not eaten from the Tree of

Knowledge of Good and Evil prematurely, we would never lose our tempers. Because he did, he blemished the world on four levels: mineral, vegetation, animals, and, of course, man himself. Rectifying these four levels is tantamount to rectifying our Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah, and never getting angry again.

The sacrifices found throughout this sefer were about doing precisely this. The salt used in the sacrifice was meant to rectify the mineral world, and the wood used to make the fire to consume the sacrifice rectified the vegetation world. The animal that was sacrificed caused a tikun to that world, and man, who both carried out the sacrifice and partook of it was rectified in this way.

The net effect of the sacrifice to G-d was closeness to Him, the fulfillment of the Aleph. "Adam" became more shalaim, further completing the Aleph, which allowed the Aleph to become part of "Kisei" once again, completing the Throne of G-d. The result of all of that: Amalek, on his own, disappeared.

Indeed, Amalek and anger are quite related, more than most of us would care to know. For, losing one's temper is purely the result of the doubt that Amalek himself creates in us, in one way or another. Whatever the reason for getting angry, whatever the justification we feel at the time, you can be sure of one thing: at that moment, we have forgotten about G-d, we have lost track of where He is in our lives.

For, with the exception of the rare time that a person is completely zealous for G-d, like in the case of Pinchas in the Torah, our anger is personal, like that of Shimon and Levi when they took revenge in Shechem. And, wherever there is personal anger there is a lack of Shechinah, proportional, perhaps, to the extent to which the anger is personal. Anger is the most accurate way to assess how distant a person is from the objective "big picture", and how embedded they are in their subjective "small picture".

We know from many sources that the heart of a Jew is compared to the altar on which sacrifices were offered to G-d, and that the fire that drives us and makes us passionate about things is compared to the fire that burned on the altar. Fire is a very fascinating thing, because on one hand it lacks a sense of physical reality, inasmuch as you can run your hand right through it, and yet when it is allowed to do its thing, it can cause endless destruction.

It is amazing how easily a person can become instigated, how easily he can be brought to a state of anger. Even the smallest thing, at the wrong time, can set a person off and wreak havoc, even destroying homes faster than real fire can do it. What hasn't gone wrong in history because of anger.

The fire on the altar consisted of fire that came down from Heaven, to which man added his own part. However, the original part was the Heavenly fire, and it symbolizes the solution to anger itself: the fire burning in the heart of a person must be a Heavenly one, at least in part. We do that when we work on our Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah, acquiring them. We see our access by how pure we can remain in times of frustration. We are rewarded for our successes with a "small Aleph" that

means everything in terms of personal and world tikun.

Have a great Shabbat,

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Text

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