

PARSHAS VAYIKRA

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Repetition is not always a bad thing. This is especially so since the Talmud says that we tend to forget things after 12 months, if not mentally then certainly emotionally. Some ideas are just worth repeating constantly. In this case I refer to the discussion about the small *Aleph* at the end of the first Hebrew word at the beginning of this week's *parshah*, "*vayikra*." I never cease to be amazed how something so little and seemingly innocuous can indicate so much. It alludes to everything important. Rashi, of course, picked up on this and explained its meaning:

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

Kriah—calling—is an expression of affection . . . To the prophets of the nations of the world, however, He revealed Himself through expressions denoting chance and impurity, as the verse says, "*vayikar—and [God] happened to [meet] Bilaam*" (*Bamidbar 23:4*). (*Rashi, Vayikra 1:1*)

In other words, without the *Aleph*, the word "*vayikra*," which means, "and he called," becomes "*vayikar*," which means to happen upon something. The addition of a single *Aleph* transforms the word "*vayikar*" into its opposite meaning, "*vayikra*," and makes a world of difference. It's not just the letter itself that makes the difference, but what it represents. The letter *Aleph*, aside from representing the number one, and therefore God, is also a composite of three letters, two *Yuds* and a *Vav*. In *gematria*, two *Yuds* equals 20 and the *Vav* is equal to six. Together they total 26, the *gematria* of God's four-letter Ineffable Name, as if to say that it is not just an *Aleph* that is being added to "*vayikar*," but God Himself. This *Aleph* is the topic of discussion in another very important and instructive *parshah*:

The hand is on God's Throne . . . (Shemos 17:16)

The hand of God is raised to swear by His throne to be at war eternally with, and to hate Amalek. Why is ["throne"] written *Chof-Samech* and not *Chof-Samech-Aleph* . . . God swore that His . . . throne will not be whole until the name of Amalek is completely obliterated. (*Rashi*)

Even though the Jewish people were decisively victorious in the war against Amalek at the end of *Parashas Beshallach*, it didn't end there. The battle had ended, but the war continued, if not physically then certainly spiritually, indicated by the missing *Aleph* from "*kisay*," which means "throne." What's the connection? How does the lack of *Aleph* on "*kisay*" indicate the ongoing threat of Amalek in the world? The following completes the circle:

You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear God. (Devarim 25:18-19)

The Hebrew word "*korchech*"—happened upon you—is an expression denoting *mikreh*—chance occurrence (*Sifrei* 25:167). (*Rashi*)

Like Bilaam, who the Zohar says came from the same spiritual root as Amalek, Amalek is associated with the concept of "*mikreh*," the same word as "*vayikar*." They take God out of the picture, reducing *Hashgochah Pratis*—Divine Providence—to random occurrence. They remove the *Aleph*, so-to-speak, from "*kisay*" and "*vayikar*." They are the agnostics and atheists in society, even those, who on some level, claim to believe in and follow God but who, in the end, act as if they do not. In truth, it is not from the world that they take God, because that is not possible. It is from man, whose face is on the throne, that they take God. This is why it is the *Aleph* that is missing from God's holy throne, because it is the *Aleph* that transforms the word "*dahm*," which means "blood" into "*Adam*," which means "man." Why does this make difference? It has to do with what each component represents. Blood represents physical life and the *Aleph* represents the spiritual component of man, his soul, because it also represents God. Together they symbolize the perfect balance between the material and spiritual components of man, at which time he is called an "*Adam Shalaim*," or a "Complete Person," someone living in the image of God in which he was created. The *Aleph* is the spiritual umbilical cord that connects man to God. It represents our five levels of soul—*Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*, that are like five rungs on a spiritual ladder between our physical world and the upper spiritual realms. When a person abandons his belief in God he is left with only the lowest levels (each level of soul has five levels of its own) of his animal soul, his *Nefesh*, which keeps him alive but little else. He can act like an animal with no sense of shame because he is spiritually severed from those parts of the soul that allow recognition of animal behavior. If he believes in God but not in His involvement in the affairs of man, he may have higher levels of *Nefesh* and be a little spiritual, but that's about all. He'll be better than the first person, but not by much. Such people cannot be counted on to behave as morally as God had intended when He made man in His image, which is precisely what Amalek and his allies wish. They don't need a scalpel to make the cut. They only need to create doubt in the minds of men about the existence of God and His involvement in history. The *gematria* of Amalek is "*suffek*," which means "doubt," and this is his most dangerous weapon:

Amalek came and fought with Israel in Refidim. (Shemos 17:8)

[God] juxtaposed this section to this verse, [*"Is God among or us not?"* (Shemos 17:7)] implying: "I am always among you, and always prepared for all your necessities and you say, 'Is God among us or not?' By your life, the dog (i.e., Amalek) will come and bite you, and you will cry out to Me, and [then] you will know where I am." This can be compared to a man who put his son on his shoulders and set out on the road. Whenever his son saw something, he would say, "Father, take that thing and give it

to me," and he would give it to him. They met a man, and the son said to him, "Have you seen my father?" So his father said to him, "You don't know where I am?" He took [his son] off of him, and a dog came and bit him. (*Rashi*)

The *Aleph* alludes to something else as well. Kabbalah explains that prior to the sin of the *Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Ra*—the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—the skin of man was made from light. This is why even the angels became confused when they saw man, thinking that he was God. As a result of the sin man and his entire world descended. Continually moving away from his Source of Divine light he became increasingly more physical, until his spiritual skin of light became the physical skin we now have. This may be the state of existence with which we are most familiar, but it is not the one in which we were created to live. The Hebrew word for light, of course, is "*ohr*," spelled *Aleph-Vav-Raish*. The Hebrew word for "skin" is also "*ohr*," except that it is spelled *Ayin-Vav-Raish*. The transformation of man was from "*ohr*" with an *Aleph* to "*ohr*" with an *Ayin*, the first letter of Amalek's name. This alludes to one of the ways that Amalek works to deaden mankind spiritually. Kabbalah points out that the letter *Aleph*, when written as it sounds, *Aleph-Lamed-Peh*, spells the word "*peleh*," in reverse, which means "wonder." Amalek is anyone who tries to take God out the equation of life by eliminating the wonder of Creation. As Dovid HaMelech wrote:

This is from God, that which is wondrous in our eyes. (Tehillim 118:23)

Isn't everything from God? Yes. What Dovid HaMelech is teaching us is that when a person sees the wonder of life then he can see God behind and in all of it. It is a prerequisite, the Rambam taught, for having a deep relationship with God:

What is the process for coming to love and fear God? When one contemplates His actions and His wondrous and great creations and sees in them His wisdom, that it has no limit and no end, immediately he will love and praise Him, and desire tremendously to know His great Name. (*Yad Chazakah, Yesodei HaTorah, 2:2*)

It is pretty amazing when you think about it. All of life comes down to one letter, an *Aleph*, which only represents the number one. However, when that one happens to represent the "One," that is, God Himself, as it says:

God will be King over the entire land, and on that day God will be One and His Name will be One. (Zechariah 14:9)

then it might as well represent the entire universe. In the *Aleph* is all that truly exists, and all that really matters. It is what turns "*vayikar*" into "*vayikra*," and someone who might have gone to *Gihenom* into someone destined for the World-to-Come. It's a small letter but makes a huge difference.

Text

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