

THE SMALL QUIET ALEPH

by Rabbi Berel Wein

It is well known that the last letter in the Hebrew word "vayikra" - the aleph, that begins this week's parsha, is written in miniature. The small aleph is a matter of note and discussion amongst biblical commentators throughout the ages. It was always seen as a symbol of the intense modesty of Moshe. It also represented the fact that God's voice, so to speak, was only heard by Moshe within the confines of the mishkan/Tabernacle and not outside of it. God is able, so to speak, to "contain" His presence in the universe in order to allow room for nature and humans to operate. This power of tzimtzum - containment, withdrawal - is the basis of kabalistic thought and its view of life and the world. But there is another explanation of the small aleph that I wish to concentrate upon.

God, so to speak, is to be seen and heard in the small things in life and not only in the large, great events. The Lord tells the prophet Eliyahu that He is not to be found in the wind, the noise of a quake, the brightness of a burning fire but rather in the still, small voice, in the sound of a whisper and not of a shout. The first luchot - the tablets of stone that Moshe brought down from Sinai were given with great noise - thunder, lightning, volcanic explosions - and they ended up being smashed to bits. The second luchot, given quietly and privately to Moshe, and from him to all of Israel, endured and were the centerpiece of the mishkan and the Temple. The still, small voice is most representative of God and his omnipotence. Science has shown us in our time that our physical appearance, if not even our longevity and health, lie in small almost invisible strands that make up our DNA. God calls out with a small aleph to his creatures - to see Him in every aspect of life, no matter how small and insignificant it may appear on its surface.

The believing Jew feels God in every step that one takes, in every smile and tear, in all of the events of life. There are many who wait to see God only in great events, in wars and diplomacy, in natural disasters and mighty natural wonders. There is no doubt that God is to be found there but His true abode is in the still, small voice that is with us at all times and in all places. People often attempt to improve themselves, physically and spiritually, in gigantic leaps and with superhuman efforts. The surer way is to take small steps and to deal with one's self with increments of improvement and commitment. The small and modest way in life leads to the great achievement. The book of Vayikra that we begin to read this week contains hundreds of mitzvot and details of halacha. It concentrates on "small" things in order to raise us to the level of great things and Jewish eternity. May we hear the small aleph in our lives, loud and clear.

Shabat shalom.

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