

LITTLE ALEPH TEACHES BIG LESSON

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayikra

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #762, Standing During Davening. Good Shabbos!

The Baal HaTurim writes that the opening word of the book of Vayikra, from which the Sefer gets its name, is written with a small Aleph because (in his modesty) when writing about himself, Moshe wanted to use the same word used to describe the Almighty's appearance to Bilaam -- namely Vayiker [implying a casual, less intimate form of communication]. However, since the Almighty insisted that Moshe write Vaykira rather than Vayiker, Moshe at least wrote it with a small Aleph, to minimize as much as possible the difference between that verb and the verb used to describe G-d's appearance to Bilaam.

Rav Schach asks -- on the presumption that more laws could be derived from a larger Aleph than from a small Aleph -- why would Moshe want to deprive us of learning out the maximum number of laws we might be able to learn from the letters of the Torah by minimizing them in any way whatsoever? Rav Shach answers that Moshe felt it would be worthwhile to forgo those extra homiletic expositions we might learn from the bigger letter to teach us an important lesson -- the lesson of modesty. This lesson of how a person should not look for the headlines, should not be boastful, should not try to point out the differences between him and someone else -- that in and of itself is a lesson that is worthwhile for Klal Yisrael to know.

The question then becomes, if this is in fact such an important lesson, why didn't Hashem let Moshe write the word Vayiker, just as he originally wanted to write it -- exactly as it is written by Bilaam. The answer is that there is an even more important lesson than the lesson of humility. The more important lesson is about how the Ribono shel Olam relates to the Jewish people and how that differs from how He relates to the nations of the world.

The fact that G-d related to Bilaam, the greatest prophet of the nations of the world, with the term "Vayiker" (connoting happenstance) and He related to Moshe Rabbeinu, the primary prophet of the

Jewish nation with the term "Vayikra" (a term of endearment) teaches a fundamental lesson: With the Jewish people, there is no such thing as "Vayiker" (happenstance). In our relationship with the Almighty, "coincidence" does not exist. "Vaykra" -- indicating G-d's calling out to us -- represents a crucial tenet of our religion -- the idea of Hashgocha Pratis [Personal Divine Providence] guiding our lives and guiding our fortunes.

This is the idea verbalized by a famous Ramba"n at the end of Parshas Bo: "A person has no portion in the Torah of Moshe our teacher until he believes that all things that happen to us are entirely miraculous and are not governed by nature or the "customary ways of the world." We believe that everything happens for a reason. The Almighty knows us and is aware of us. If things happen to us, it is because He willed it. The nations of the world may also claim such a relationship. They may say "there are no coincidences." This however is not something that happens to everyone. It is a level that one needs to merit.

We determine our relationship with the Ribono shel Olam through our actions. The works of the Chassidic masters expound on the pasuk "Hashem is your shadow, by your right hand." [Tehillim 121:5] Hashem relates to us like a shadow relates to the person who casts it. When a person raises his hand, his shadow will raise its hand and so to with all of his actions. Our relationship with the Almighty is the same. If we make Him an integral part of our lives then He will reciprocate and become actively involved in our lives as well. If we do not allow Him to become a major factor in our lives, then indeed His Divine Providence will not be a major factor in our lives either.

This difference between Vayiker and Vayikra (chance calling and having an intimate relationship) is so important of a lesson that it trumped the lesson of modesty. Therefore, Hashem overruled Moshe and insisted that he write the word Vayiker with an Aleph at the end, making it into Vayikra.

There is no doubt that each of us have heard dozens and dozens of stories which illustrate -- sometimes in very powerful and moving ways -- examples of personal Divine Providence.

A woman recently wrote a letter to me that a shadchan [matrimonial match-maker] proposed a marriage for her daughter. For whatever reason, the family turned down the suggestion. Someone else suggested the same young man, and again the family rejected the advice. Not long after this, the family had planned a trip to Eretz Yisrael. They were in Newark airport and who should be standing directly in front of them in a slow moving line going through airport security -- this very young man who had twice been proposed as a good match for their daughter. They had an opportunity to observe him over a long period of time in a real life somewhat stressful situation and they were very impressed. The mother thought to herself "This must be happening for some reason." They proceeded to arrange for the appropriate introductions... and the young couple lives happily ever after.

There is a famous story with Rav Mordechai Pogromansky, who was a great Torah Scholar in prewar Europe. Rav Pogromansky was once travelling on the train and happened to be sitting next to

another Jew who was a Shochet and a Mohel. They began talking and got involved in their discussion and became so engrossed in the topic that they missed their stop. The train continued on to another city. It was Erev Shabbos and they had no other choice but to get off the train in a strange location. The town was in the middle of nowhere and was not a Jewish village. They made inquiries and found that there was one Jew in the town. They located his house and knocked on his door Friday afternoon shortly before Shabbos. The homeowner had not seen a Jew in a long time. When he saw the two gentlemen who described their situation to him, he started crying and said he could not believe what had happened.

The previous Shabbos, his wife had given birth to a baby boy. He was not able to leave town and he did not know a Mohel would want to come to his town for Shabbos. He did not know how he would be able to arrange for his son to be circumcised on the eighth day. Then Hashem sent him not only a Mohel but also Rav Mordechai Pogransky -- one of the great rabbinic personalities of the time -- to be the sandek!

There are stories and stories and stories like this. The point of all the stories is that the Ribono shel Olam runs the world. He takes care of us and His relationship with us is different than it is with the rest of the world. This is in fact what retelling the story of the Exodus (Sippur Yetzias Mitzraim) is all about. The purpose of the Seder night is to strengthen our belief in G-d's intimate relationship with the Jewish people and with the principle of Hashgocha Pratis.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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