

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

Vayikra

He (G-d) called to Moshe... (1:1).

The first word in Sefer Vayikra ends with a small letter ALEF: Vayikra - G-d called to Moshe. Without that small ALEF the word would read VAYIKAR, He met in a casual way. This latter word comes from MIKREH, meaning casually, by chance. It is used to describe the manner in which G-d met Bil'am (Bamidbar 23:16). This implies that while G-d had a reason to speak to Bil'am, He did so out of necessity, not out of love. The Baal Haturim suggests that in his humility, Moshe wished to describe G-d's call to him with the same understated work used for Balaam. G-d, however, instructed him to include the ALEF as an expression of His love for him. As Moshe was too humble to do so with a full heart, he used a small ALEF.

In addition, the small ALEF may resemble the thinking of Moshe Rabbeinu, which, like in the previous explanation was fundamentally ANIVUT, humility (c.f. Bamidbar 12:3). But it was more than just that; it was a child-like ANIVUT. A child facing a new situation enters into it with simplicity, without any pre-conceived ideas, taking the experience as it

comes as something new, something to be enjoyed and experienced on its own terms. For the child, all experiences are like new experiences, and are enjoyed with a sense of discovery, of finding something new and exciting. Similarly, Moshe Rabbeinu. When G-d called to him from the Ohel Moed, Moshe's mindset was that of a child; happy to learn from G-d Himself in the spirit of adventure, and accept and teach to Am Yisrael what G-d taught him. Hence the small ALEF, for the mindset of the small child that inquires and is eager to find out.

The beauty of this mindset emerges at the Pesach Seder, which every year falls during the period of the year in which we read the Book of Vayikra. The Seder as we observe it focuses on the children. The KARPAS designed for their voicing curiosity, the Ma Nishtana, the Four Children, the custom of hide and seek with the afikoman, the customary and much loved songs at the end, and so on. The traditional explanation for these practices are so that the children should not sleep through the Seder. But, as Rav J. B. Soloveichik points out, it is often the children who themselves make the Seder what it is. As adults, we've probably seen it all, year after year; we know what's coming, and without new insights and

explanations we can merely find the Seder as a ritual that repeats itself, year after year. But with the children it's all new. It's novel, it's fun, they typically rise to the occasion, they ask simple yet penetrating questions, they bring refreshing observations, and without the children it's just not the same thing for the grown ups, for the parents, and for the grandparents. It's all these things that the children bring to the Seder that make the Seder what it is, for everybody. And so it goes on, generation after generation, it is the Spring of childhood that gives life to the Spring season of Pesach.

And it was with newness of Spring and the innocence of youth ready to learn that Moshe Rabbeinu went into the Ohel Moed. And it was no doubt that with the vigor of youth (c.f. D'varim 34:7) that he would inspire Am Yisrael with the teachings of the Torah. 🌿📖