

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



VAYIKRa

The Call

Welcome to the Book of Vayikra, the volume of KEDUSHA (sanctity) and KORBANOT (offerings). It's not exactly my favorite text (I like stories.), but there are profound lessons to be gleaned from this installment of God's communique to humanity.

Our book begins with the famous 'call' to Moshe Rabbeinu. Basically, every Biblical authority comments on the term VAYIKRA (And HE called). Rashi explains: All oral communications of the Lord to Moshe, whether they are introduced by DABEIR or by AMAR or by TZAV were preceded by a call (to prepare him for the forthcoming address). It is a way of expressing affection...

Chizkuni provides some context by adding: seeing that the Torah had concluded the end of the Book of SH'MOT with the words: 'the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan so that Moshe was unable to enter the Sanctuary', it was necessary to let us know now that He called out to him, i.e. gave him permission to enter the Sanctuary. In order to make this clear to the reader, the Torah, instead of writing: 'the Lord called out to

Moshe', omitted to tell us who it was that called out to him, so that the reader will know that this is not really a new paragraph but a continuation of what had been told us at the end of the Book of Sh'mot.

So, VAYIKRA picks up exactly where SH'MOT left off. As soon as the MISHKAN has been completed, God calls to Moshe with instructions about the offerings which will be brought in this structure.

Those ideas reflect the P'SHAT (literal meaning) of our verse, but there is a beautiful and popular D'RASH (sermonic lesson) on our verse as well: The ALEF of VAYIKRa is written as a small letter because Moshe wanted to write VAYKAR (and it happened), the way it is written regarding Bilaam, which implies God appeared to him only as a chance occurrence. God, however, told him to write the ALEF which indicates His love, but Moshe in humility made it small (Ba'al HaTurim).

Clearly, this idea of God 'calling' to Moshe resonated with our commentaries. The Ohr HaChayim points out that this formulation, God calls to Moshe (VAYIKRA) and then speaks (VAYDABEIR) to him only three times, at the Burning Bush, on Mount Sinai and here. So, why does this occasion (the dedication of the Mishkan) rank up there with those other momentous events?

First, the Ohr HaChayim quotes a number of authorities who claim that this formula of first call then speak actually happened every time God to Moshe, but is not included in the text for brevity. He finally concludes:

The reason that the Torah had to emphasize that God spoke only to Moshe, i.e. that only Moshe heard His voice, was to prevent misunderstandings. While it was understandable that the ordinary people did not hear God's voice, we could have thought that any kohen inside the Mishkan who had business there at the time God wished to address Moshe would be privy to hearing God's voice. The Torah therefore emphasized that only Moshe was privy to this voice.

We had to establish the unique status of Moshe Rabbeinu in the process of communicating the Torah and its Mitzvot. He further explains that this process of Moshe hearing the words of God emanating from the Mishkan firmly established his exclusive role as purveyor of God's Torah.

We can understand from these comments that our verse is setting up the clear understanding that Moshe Rabbeinu is the sole source of God's communications to this world. The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba) lays out a scenario in which Moshe can be compared to the MALACHIM (angels) of God, and claims:

Rabbi Tanchum bar Chanilai began:

"Bless the Lord, His emissaries [MALAKHAV], mighty in strength, who perform His bidding..." (T'hilim 103:20). Regarding whom is the verse speaking? If the verse is speaking of the heavenly beings, but is it not already stated: "Bless the Lord, all His hosts (angels)"? (103:21). It is speaking, rather, of the earthly.

And who is this 'earthly' or human 'MALACH' or 'emissary of God? Moshe Rabbeinu, of course! When do we call a human representative of God a MALACH, instead of the normal term for a representative, SHALI'ACH? The S'fat Emet provides the answer: Every member of Yisrael is sent to fulfill Hashem's will and is thus called a SHALI'ACH (Messenger) or MALACH (Angel). Unlike angels, who have no other mission, people must guard themselves to ensure every action aligns with Hashem's will... When a person ensures that every action is solely for Hashem's will, they can attain the level of a MALACH, focused exclusively on their divine mission.

Cool! Humans can attain this remarkable spiritual level by focusing all their power on God's plans for us, and (at least temporarily) devote their total power and attention to God's Torah and Mitzvot. And who can possibly achieve this goal? Moshe Rabbeinu, of course!

Now we can understand why we

should pay such immense attention to the opening verse of the book of Vayikra. This verse (as understood by the Midrash) describes Moshe's ascent to the level of a Divine Malach in our midst.

I'm not suggesting that we can attain the level of Moshe Rabbeinu, and be a person who 'ensures that every action is solely for Hashem's will'. That unique level of being 'focused exclusively on their divine mission'. Moshe was, of course, unique because he 'was always prepared to receive prophecy, constantly hearing Hashem's voice, guiding his mission. Like an angel, Moshe was entirely focused on Hashem's directives, embodying the role of a dedicated messenger'.

That level of permanent focus on God's mission is a 'bridge too far' for us regular people. However, now that we know that a flesh and blood being has achieved that lofty goal, maybe we can strive for that status periodically. It would be wonderful to scale that height, even for only a short term and even if only once in a while. But thanks to Moshe, Our Rebbe, we can dream about reaching that unreachable star! 🌟