

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

MARCH 23, 2024

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Professor Bierman, Yaakov Dovid ben Nochum Binyamin. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 24

13 ADAR II

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYIKRA

Close to You

And he called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him [...] (1:1).

The word *vayikra*, to call, is the first word in this week's *parsha* and is the name of both the *parsha* and the third *sefer* of the Torah. Generally, it is understood that the name of the *sefer* is an appropriate definition of the message contained therein. What is significant about the word *vayikra* that it should be used to describe what occurs in this third *sefer* of the Torah?

The word *vayikra* is written in the Torah with a small letter *aleph* at the end. The Bal Haturim (ad loc) explains that this is because Moshe, in his modesty, wanted to use the same word that is used when Hashem interacted with Bilaam: "*vayakar* – happened to meet."

Vayakar is *vayikra* without an *aleph*, but Hashem specifically asked Moshe to use the word *vayikra*. To signify Moshe's humility, the *aleph* is written smaller to indicate that it wasn't Moshe's first choice for usage.

The Bal Haturim's interpretation is difficult to understand. This isn't the first time that Hashem has used the word *vayikra* to call to Moshe, we find it used in *Shemos* a few times: "and Hashem called to Moshe" (19:20) and "Hashem called to him" (19:3). Why is it that here the word *vayikra* suddenly bothers Moshe?

Sefer Vayikra introduces the concept of a *korbon* – offering. Until this time, the only word the Torah used was *zevach*, which means to sacrifice. In this *sefer* we have an altogether different concept

of service to Hashem. The root of the word *korbon* is *kiruv* – closeness. Hashem is informing us that the service in the Mishkan isn't simply to pay homage to Hashem; it is to gain a closer relationship with Hashem, which is what He desires.

Under close examination, the first verse of *Sefer Vayikra* begins in a very odd way: "and He called to Moshe [...]" Yet there is no context as to who "He" is referring to. From the end of the verse we can deduce that the word "He" is referring to Hashem. But why should the Torah begin a brand new *sefer* this way? By obscuring who the caller is and immediately identifying Moshe, the verse is clearly making Moshe the subject of the sentence. In other words, Hashem was "calling on" Moshe and the interaction was for Moshe's personal sake (i.e. a relationship with Moshe).

It is for this very reason that *vayikra* is an appropriate definition of the third *sefer* of the Torah. *Vayikra* introduces the idea that Hashem desires a relationship with his subjects and that the *korbonos* are a means of achieving that. *Korbonos* aren't merely a means to serve Hashem; they are how we get close to Him. This also explains why Moshe, in his modesty and humility, is uncomfortable with the word in this context; it denotes Hashem wanting to be close to him personally – a fact that he instinctively wanted to keep private. Hashem, therefore, acquiesced and allowed him to write the *aleph* smaller.



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Fit for a King?

When a ruler has sinned [...] he shall bring his offering a kid of the goats [...] (4:22-23).

Rashi (ad loc) paraphrases a Gemara (*Horayos* 10b): “How fortunate is the generation whose king sets his heart on getting atonement for an inadvertent commission of a transgression and he will certainly regret an overt transgression.” The Gemara continues to explain that if the king behaves thusly, certainly all his subjects will follow suit.

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:15) comments (on the first verse “He called to Moshe”) from here we see that a *talmid chacham* without *daas*, knowledge, is worth less than a dead carcass. We learn this from Moshe who, even though he took the Jews out of Egypt, went up to the heavens to bring down the Torah, and undertook the entire building of the Mishkan, wouldn’t dare enter the Holy of Holies without Hashem calling to him.

What is this Midrash talking about? How do we draw a connection from Moshe to a *talmid chacham* without knowledge, what does one thing have to do with the other?

Adam and Chava were forbidden to eat from the Tree of Knowledge – *Eitz Hadaas*. What happened to Adam and Chava once they ate? They became self-aware. On one hand, they became aware of all they could create, however, they also became painfully aware of their own shortcomings. It was only then that they noticed they were naked and became quite embarrassed.

The Midrash is telling us that a *talmid chacham* must achieve self-awareness. He must never get lost in his own distorted sense of the greatness of himself. Even Moshe, who was on the highest level man could ever achieve, wouldn’t dream of entering the Holy of Holies without an invitation. In other words, he never lost his self-awareness of who he was. A *talmid chacham* who is not self-aware is much worse than a dead carcass; a dead carcass only transmits uncleanness passively to someone who comes in contact with it. An unfit *talmid chacham*, one who is hopelessly lost in his ego and self-importance, **actively** adversely affects everyone he comes into contact with.

This is the same point that Rashi makes by a king who sins. Fortunate is the generation that has a king that has enough honest self-awareness to admit that he erred, even if only inadvertently. While this may seem like a minor achievement, one has only to look at the current political landscape in the United States to see how high a bar this is to achieve. Not only are many of the politicians egomaniacal megalomaniacs, the political parties are so self-righteous in their causes that they forget their original mandate; working for the betterment of the entire country. Their unwillingness to compromise and cross the aisle on important issues, because they value individual victory over compromising for the common good, is contributing to the continued downward spiral of American society.

Chazal recognized thousands of years ago that a generation that had a humble leader was considered very fortunate for, in fact, they raised the level of the entire generation.

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