

## **Parshat Vaykira: From Outside to Inside: Invitations to Unity Shabbat Zachor**

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The book of Vayikra opens with a famous call:

And He called to Moshe, and the Lord spoke to him  
from the Tent of Meeting, saying... (Leviticus 1:1)

א וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל  
מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר: (ויקרא א:א)

Before launching into a litany of rules regarding sacrifices, God turns to Moshe with two seemingly distinct utterances. First, "*vayikra*," God calls out to Moshe, amorphously, without specific content. Then, "*vayidaber*," God addresses Moshe with the message that follows at great length. Two verbal offerings are put forth with two different functions, it seems.

Rashi notices this doubling and suggests the initial call was purposefully, consciously contentless, though it was hardly pointless. *Keriah*, or calling, is "*lashon chibah*," the language of affection (Rashi on Lev. 1:1), he writes, and so God was expressing His love for Moshe through this action--the call of his name perhaps, or simply a reminder of His presence. As a new book opens, and with it, a new *Mishkan*-centric chapter in the life of the Jewish people, God reaffirms His unique ardor for Moshe, their leader.

The midrashic tradition does not sit well with this vague proclamation alone. Why was Moshe in need of affection at this juncture and just what did God say or do to communicate it? Let us recall that we just completed the book of Shemot, which ended with Moshe outside of the *Mishkan*.

(34) And the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. (35) Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud rested upon it and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. (Exodus 40:34-35)

לד וַיִּכַס הָעֶנָן אֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּכְבֹּד יְהוָה  
מְלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן: לָהּ וְלֹא־יָכֹל מֹשֶׁה לָּבוֹא  
אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד כִּי־שָׁכַן עָלָיו הָעֶנָן וַיִּכְבֹּד ה'  
מְלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן: (שמות מ:לד-לה)

After working so hard to facilitate the building of the *Mishkan*, after enabling the construction of this sanctuary for God to dwell amidst His people, all in complete accordance with God's wishes, Moshe could not find a way into it! So crowded was it by the glory of God that there seemed to be no place for a human being to enter. Moshe was alienated from the very structure that he brought into being.

Vayikra Rabbah suggests the following analogy:

This is like a king who commands his servant and says to him, "Build me a palace." On every item that the servant built, he would write on it the name of the king. He put up walls and wrote on them the name of the king. He set up columns and wrote on them the

...משל למלך שצוה את עבדו וא"ל בנה לי פלטין  
על כל דבר ודבר שהיה בונה היה כותב עליו שמו  
של מלך והיה בונה כתלים וכותב עליהן שמו של  
מלך, היה מעמיד עמודים וכותב עליהן שמו של  
מלך, היה מקרה בקורות והיה כותב עליהן שמו

name of the king. He established beams and wrote on them the name of the king. Finally, when the king entered the palace and saw that everything he laid his eyes on contained his name, he said, "All this glory my servant made for me, but [alas] I am now inside, but he is outside..." (Vayikra Rabbah 1:7)

של מלך, לימים נכנס המלך לתוך פלטין על כל דבר ודבר שהיה מביט היה מוצא שמו כתוב עליו אמר כל הכבוד הזה עשה לי עבדי ואני מבפנים והוא מבחוץ. . . (ויקרא רבה פרשה א:ז)

The palace was majestic and awe-inspiring, honoring the king in every way. But it was also devoid of people and therefore useless as a vessel for royal service. So the king calls out to his servant and invites him in--"קראו לו שיכנס לפני ולפנים." Don't stay on the outside, he says. Come join me. Be with me in this grand space, and not just on the inside, but "לפני ולפנים," in the inner sanctum. As my beloved servant, that is where you belong.

So God calls to Moshe "*be'lashon chiba*," with the language of affection, as Moshe hovers on the outside of the *Mishkan*--full of fear, perhaps, or humility, or discomfort. Do not step away from the God-space that you created, God indicates, but step into it. It is your place too. It is our place. Even the inner sanctum.

The Torah suggests that this invitation to intimacy came through a quiet voice. The word "*vayikra*" is written with an unusually small *aleph*, known as the "אלף זעירא," "the little a." To help Moshe traverse the difficult distance from מבחוץ to מבפנים, from outside to inside, God whispered a nearly inaudible vowel, lulling Moshe toward Him, inviting him to connection, to a relationship grounded in the ultimate, mysterious unity of God and humanity. The numerical value of *aleph* is one, and so it seems that God's message of love was also a message of oneness. We belong in the inner sanctum together--together with God, together with humanity.

Sometimes all it takes to bring someone on the outside in is a quiet invitation that subtly affirms the little *aleph*, the unity that binds us all.



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