

Vayikra el Moshe, vayedaber hashem elav meohel mo'ed lemor. And He called on Moshe and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Mo'ed saying: speak to Bne Yisrael and tell them: anyone, ('adam'), who wants to bring a sacrifice... and the rest of the parasha, which constitutes a vast number of halachot regarding sacrifices.

What is the significance of the Torah using the verb 'vayikra' and why using it dafka here? It is not the first time Hashem calls to someone. The first time in history God paged someone was right after Adam and Chava ate fruit from the Ets Hada'at. And I quote: "And they heard Hashem's voice traveling in the wind, that blew through Gan Eden and Adam and his wife hid from Hashem in the trees. And Hashem called to Adam and asked him 'Ayeka?' Where are you?" A second time occurred when Avraham was about to sacrifice his son Yitschak: an angel of God called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham! Abraham!" And he said, "Hineni, here I am." In Torah, God's calling Moshe is recorded three times: First Hashem calls Moshe from within the burning bush: "Moshe, Moshe? Vayomer 'hineni'! Here I am!" A second time He calls him to the top of Har Sinai right before giving the Aseret Hadibrot; and today's vayikra is the third time.

Rashi comments on Vayikra of today's parasha that, similar to the first time at the burning bush, Hashem always followed the same protocol with Moshe as He was about to discuss a new sugia, new set of rules or a new conversation. God would call 'Moshe, Moshe!', and Moshe would say 'hineni'. Rashi remarks that the language of kriya or 'calling' specifically denotes loving kindness (chibah). This is somewhat peculiar, since earlier at the Akeda, Rashi relates the language of Chiba to Hashem repeating the name ("Avraham, Avraham"), and not to the use to the verb 'vayikra'.

The Aleph in Vayikra is notably small. According to the midrash Moshe initially didn't want to write the aleph, out of humility, yet Hashem insisted. So, as to compromise, he wrote the letter in small font. Vayikra means being singled out and called upon on purpose whereas Vayikar, without aleph, is like 'mikreh' or happenstance. According to this explanation, Moshe wanted to appear as if he just happened to hear Hashem's call, wishing to down-play his spiritual greatness. Rather, it should seem pure coincidence. Some meforshim go even further and derive Vayikar, without aleph, from the root 'Keri' or a state of impurity, spiritual shortcoming, pointing to the same term 'vayikar' that was used when God spoke to Bilam. They seem to be suggesting that Moshe would have feared, that he was somehow lacking merit or create a spiritual deficit by maintaining this exalted position with Hashem, being singled out and purposefully addressed.

I must confess I have difficulties with these explanations. Moshe had already tried to play this humility card early on at the burning bush (I have a speaking impedence, let my brother be your agent etc.) with very little success and even invoking Hashem's anger. Hashem had let him

know: you have the best skills to do this job; not to acknowledge this is not a sign of humility.

But even if it were the case that Moshe indeed felt so uncomfortable being singled out and being specifically addressed by Hashem, then why did he not write 'vayikra' with that small aleph earlier when Hashem called him at the burning bush or before giving the Aseret Hadibrot? At this point in time many conversations had already taken place with Hashem and it was very clear that Hashem's calls to Moshe were not coincidental or happenstance. Even less likely would be the idea that these conversations were somehow rooted in impurity or get him into overdraft on his bank account in Shamayim.

Taking a closer look at the pasuk I noticed some kind of hiccup in the flow. Was the kriya to Moshe also from minhamishkan - within the Mishkan? If so, why then is this place, where Hashem's voice seemed to be coming from, not written right up front? If it is the protocol, as Rashi indicates, showing chiba or love, why then is only half of it recorded? In short: Why doesn't it say: "Vayikra Hashem min hamishkan, vayomer: Moshe, Moshe?"

You can actually read it as two psukim: 'vayikra el Moshe', something called Moshe; and 'vayedaber Hashem elav meohel mo'ed lemor'. Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Mo'ed. However, the object of 'vayikra' then seems to be missing: who or what was actually calling Moshe?

I would like to suggest two ways to answer that question, that may complement each other. Right before our parasha, in the very end of sefer Shemot, the Mishkan is finished, totally complete. As earlier stated in Vayakhel (ch 36, vs 13): "Vajehi hamishkan echad..." and the Mishkan was one, complete. Am echad, belev echad, with the mishkan echad, all forming a unity. Then Hashem fills the building with a cloud - a soul - if you will. No one can enter, not even Moshe. There is a pregnant silence, just like after a birth. Then follows a kriya, a cry, a call.

The suggestion here is the voice was coming from a unified nation with its Mishkan. As no one could enter the Mishkan, the people were wondering what's next? The nation calls out to Moshe: tell us! how can WE get close to Hashem, like you? And Hashem answered and spoke to Moshe: please, come into my dwelling place and anyone, 'adam', just like Adam HaRishon, who wanted to be close to Me, this is what he or she should do... and Hashem related the laws pertaining to korbanot, pointing out the same shresh that is shared between lehakriv, to sacrifice, and lehitkarev, to come close. Nowadays, without a mikdash we do this work here, in shul or in our community.

Al pi pshat, 'vayikra' was Hashem calling to Moshe, inviting him to come close... a call, this time, not from Heaven, or from a burning bush, not from a mountain top or in a wind that blew through the encampment. The voice came from within the Mishkan itself. Hashem showed

Moshe that with the Torah being given and the Mishkan finished, the reality had changed. No longer would Hashem speak from exotic places such as burning bushes or mountain tops. From now on He will use the tools He has given us: the Torah, the Mishkan. Also, as Rashi indicates, communication with Hashem was now no longer dependent on the spiritual level of Moshe alone, but of all clal Yisrael, the entire community.

Falling short, as we see later with the meraglim, would result in an inability to hear or perhaps recognize Hashem's call, for 38 years. On the other hand, anyone can now ascent to a level at which he or she can recognize Hashem's calling. The call is a personal one and comes 'Min hamishkan' from within our community.

How do we react when getting a call from within our community (think Super Sunday or a request to come to minyan)?

We can ignore the call and go hide. Hashem will then ask 'ayeka'? Why do you think you should ignore me? Ignore the community?

We can react as 'vayikar' – I am not important, I am just called upon by happenstance, coincidence. It doesn't really matter what I do, or give. My contributions make no difference. Or we can do the work and realize that what we do, makes a difference. We can include the aleph and realize that everyone of us matters. We all form an important part of the fabric that constitutes a community.

A mind boggling thing of this world is our free will. Even at Moshe's level there was free will. Moshe had to work hard on himself to be able to say 'hineni' and not to ignore God's call or to regard His bidding as happenstance. Even Moshe had difficulty writing that aleph; an internal struggle that is pointed out to us by its small size. A struggle I can very much identify with. But Moshe was taught by Hashem that he didn't have to do this work alone – we don't have to do this work alone. That is the beauty of being part of a community. Together we built a building, a Mikdash Me'at, together we make minyanim, and provide funding to keep the community going. Vayikra - If we know we're able to respond to the call, let's answer: hineni!

Shabbat shalom.