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פרשת ויקרא
Parshat Vayikra

Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

BE BIG... BE REALLY BIG

RABBI RAPHAEL STOHL

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CALEB BERMAN ('23)

BATSHEVA SHEKHTER ('20)

NAOMI REICHENBERG ('22)

SHOSHANA STADLAN ('22)

Stuck up at home and bugging out??? Fat chance! Not me. Not you. Not us.

Vayikra — "And He called" — Hashem is calling on each and every one of us. The א of ויקרא is written in the Torah in a small font because Hashem is talking to every "one" — every person, every *alef*. We each have our calling. We can each be HUGE. Don't let the world tell you that you can't do it. Vayikra says we can, and we will.

When I was a teenager in YULA (the "KYHS of Los Angeles", but without our awesome soccer team), I decided at one point that I could become big. I decided that Hashem had given me talents and that I wanted to use them. I realized that Hashem had given us a Torah and told me that I could learn it…that each and every one of us could master it, follow each and every halachah, embody God's greatness…become HUGE.

Commentators write that the small *alef* of Vayikra hints to the fact that every child (every *alef*) can learn Sefer Vayikra and embody its *kedusha*. Really? Embody the *kedusha* of Sefer Vayikra?! Me? Yes!! You! The Torah is telling you that you can be HUGE! God said so. Vayikra said so.

Of course, doing so requires humility and hard work. The small *alef* of Vayikra reminds us that we begin small -- and thank God for that! We have so much room for growth!! Vayikra tells us to keep our eye on our "calling", work hard, and make our *alef* HUGE! Don't settle for being a small *alef*. Dream, learn, grow…the Torah is ours for the taking… we can, and we will, become HUGE.

We sometimes tell ourselves that religious greatness

is for others, not for us. Me? Nah, I don't have those abilities. There is no way that God was talking to ME. I'm not inspired. I'm not knowledgeable. I have other plans. It's just not me.

Nonsense! Vayikra is calling YOU! Yes you, little *alef*. You… and you… and you… we can, and will, become HUGE. We are all in this game of life together. I plan to continue to work on myself, and I plan to try my hardest to bring all my teammates with me. So please, as my teammates, join me in trying to become HUGE. After all, Vayikra's *alef* awaits. It's waiting anxiously to grow. It's waiting to be big… REALLY BIG.

Being stuffed up at home won't stop us from growing. Not even pandemics will stop us. "Bugging out" or "giving up" aren't even in our language! … Well, I guess if someone wants to remain a "small itsy bitsy *alef* forever", he can bug out… But not me! Not you! We are HUGE. Stay HUGE! And grow bigger and bigger constantly. THINK BIG. BE BIG. Always.

Pandemic or no pandemic. Huge people do huge things. It's the only thing we know how to do… to GET BIGGER and BIGGER by the day. Watch that *alef* grow, baby!!

SMALL PIECE TO THE PUZZLE

CALEB BERMAN ('23)

Parshat Vayikra starts off with the pasuk,

וַיִּקְרָא, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה; וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו,
מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר

"And He called to Moshe and God spoke to him from the Ohel Moed" (Vayikra 1:1).

Famously, the letter *alef* in the word וַיִּקְרָא is smaller than the other letters in the word. The Ba'al HaTurim writes that Moshe made the letter *alef* smaller as an act of humility. If read without the *alef*, the word is *vayikar*, and God "happened" upon Moshe. Moshe lessens his importance by making it seem as if Hashem hadn't singled him out from all of B'nei Yisrael. How does a small *alef* show Moshe's humility?

In Sefer Bereishit, we are introduced to Adam, the first man to be created. The Torah writes Adam's name with an oversized *alef*. From this oversized *alef*, we learn that Adam thought himself important, the first man ever created. Adam's confident ego was inflated like a big *alef*. This confidence led to his making the mistake of eating from the tree of knowledge. When one focuses on his inner thoughts and feelings, he begins to realize the greatness and vastness of Hashem's world, making him feel like a tiny being (like a tiny *alef*) in Hashem's universe. Moshe realized, of course, that he was special, because he had been chosen to lead the Jews out of Egypt and was the only person to speak to Hashem face to face. Despite his achievements, Moshe remained humble, and even considered himself less important than others. Moshe used to tell himself, "All that I have is a gift from God. If God had given these opportunities to someone else, he surely would have been much better than me." That is the reason why there is a small *alef* in Moshe's name.

Rashi tells us that Hashem called to Moshe because Hashem loved him. Why? Because Moshe was humble. Hashem loves and protects humble people, which is why He had special feelings for Moshe. This Shabbat, may we be aware of our thoughts, feelings, and sensations, and realize that we are but a tiny piece in Hashem's vast plan, yet He cares so much about us. Let this knowledge and the story of Moshe Rabbeinu help us remember our humble part in Hashem's world. Good Shabbos.

TIME TO CONNECT

BATSHEVA SHEKHTER ('20)

After a period of dealing with the instructions and actual building of the Mishkan, Parshat Vayikra begins the process of describing the various *korbanot* that were offered in the Mishkan. The majority of Sefer Vayikra details the *korbanot*, the obligations of the Kohanim and Leviim in the Mishkan, and the specific mitzvot incumbent on residents of Eretz Yisrael.

The dilemma that many people face is finding meaning or guidance in this sefer of Chumash. We do not offer *korbanot* or have a functioning Mishkan. Many of us do not live in Eretz Yisrael and therefore cannot perform some of Vayikra's specific mitzvot.

However, this is not an ideal scenario. In fact, what we learn about throughout Sefer Vayikra is the ideal situation in which we should live. Living in a society with a Mishkan, working Kohanim and Leviim, and a constant awareness of Hashem's presence should be the experience of a Jew. Everyone would be charged with the purpose to serve Hashem and live a Torah-observant life.

We learn from this the value of prioritizing Hashem in our lives and spending time focusing on His gifts to us. The Rambam and the Ramban debate the reason for offering *korbanot*, but in fact share similar advice. The Rambam explains that *korbanot* were given because that was the way non-Jewish nations interacted with their gods at the time. Therefore, by offering *korbanot* and now davening, we are able to remove evil inclinations and focus on creating a relationship with Hashem. On the other hand, the Ramban suggests that *korbanot* help us bond with Hashem and be comfortable to ask Him for blessings.

The *korbanot* teach us to strengthen our relationship with Hashem, which will lead to limited pressure by our *yetzer hara* and opportunities to thank Him for our gifts. May we all merit to be able to prioritize our connection to Hashem and focus on the importance of tefillah.

SEE THE BRACHA

NAOMI REICHENBERG ('22)

Parshat Vayikra begins with Hashem commanding Bnei Yisrael to do the mitzvah of *korbanot*, sacrifices. The pasuk says,

וַיִּקְרָא, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה; וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו, מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר
דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם, אָדָם כִּי-יַקְרִיב
מִכֶּם קָרְבָּן, לַה'--מִן-הַבְּהֵמָה, מִן-הַבָּקָר וּמִן-הַצֹּאן,
תַּקְרִיבוּ, אֶת-קָרְבַּנְכֶם

"Hashem called to Moshe and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying. Speak to the Israelite people, and say to them: When any of you presents an offering of cattle to Hashem, he shall choose his offering from the herd or from the flock" (Vayikra 1:1-2).

As a people who have been in *galut* for over 2,000 years, concepts like *korbanot* seem so foreign to us. We have a hard time connecting to them and finding the meaning in the mitzvah. Frankly, in our generation, we do not fully understand what true sacrifice is, let alone the concept of *korbanot*. Even in this time of the COVID19 pandemic, many are complaining and seem to think that we are sacrificing so much when in reality we, *Baruch Hashem*, have everything we need and more. We live lives filled with luxuries that our ancestors could not even begin to imagine. We fail to recognize all of the many *brachot* that Hashem blesses us with in our everyday lives. Simple things such as warm showers and cozy beds are things we fail to see as *brachot* and we tend to take these things for granted. This parsha could not have fallen out on a better week. As we have received the *bracha*-in-disguise of all of this free time we should, *b'ezrat Hashem*, be able to see how many things we are NOT sacrificing and how many *brachot* Hashem places around us constantly. This Shabbat especially we should have *hakarat hatov* for all of the little and simple things in our lives. Although in this difficult time it may feel like we are sacrificing so much, really this is just a time to self reflect and appreciate the things we would not normally see as a *bracha*. Shabbat Shalom.

MERCIFUL MASTER

SHOSHANA STADLAN ('22)

In Parshat Vayikra, Moshe begins to tell the Jewish nation about the laws of the *korbanot* in the Mishkan.

דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם, אָדָם כִּי-יַקְרִיב
מִכֶּם קָרְבָּן, לַה', מִן הַבְּהֵמָה, מִן-הַבָּקָר וּמִן-הַצֹּאן,
תַּקְרִיבוּ, אֶת-קָרְבַּנְכֶם

"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When a man from [among] you brings a sacrifice to the Lord; from animals, from cattle or from the

flock you shall bring your sacrifice" (Vayikra 1:2).

He then goes on to describe the different kinds of *korbanot* for the different circumstances occurring. But since God is an all-powerful being, why does He need physical gifts from us. Why does He want us to sacrifice animals when we have sinned?

The Rambam comments that the sacrificed animals are not for the joy of Hashem, but for the Jewish people themselves. The non-Jewish nations that the Jewish people lived amongst worshipped cattle as gods. The Jewish people fell into these ways and adopted this practice as their own. Therefore by slaughtering animals for Hashem, the Jewish people will realize that these animals are not deities and are not spiritual beings. The *korbanot* helped rid B'nei Yisrael of their idolatry.

The Ramban completely disagrees with the Rambam about the fact that Noach sacrificed animals to Hashem after the *mabul*, long before B'nei Yisrael entered Egypt where they worshipped cattle and flocks as gods. The Ramban writes that instead of weaning us off of idolatry, the *korbanot* represents the process of sinning. In a sin a person utilizes three processes: thought, speech, and action. Therefore Hashem decreed that the atonement for the sin would encompass these three things that were used in a sin. When giving *korbanot*, a person first must place their hands on the animal, corresponding to the action of atonement. Second, a person confesses verbally, corresponding to the speech used in the sin. Lastly, the innards of the animal are burned, corresponding to the person's thoughts and desires that led to the sin. The culmination of these three actions shows us that though we don't deserve to be forgiven, Hashem in His mercy is taking the animal in place of ourselves.

In both interpretations, Hashem decreed the *korbanot* not for Himself, but for us. He created these laws for our best interests. He is willing to take a substitute for our transgressions, even if we do not actually deserve to be forgiven. We should not take His mercy for granted but instead let it guide our ways to be merciful to others.

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