

## Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

### PARSHAS VAYIKRA

#### A Smaller Aleph for Smaller Students

**And He called to Moshe (Lev. 1:1).** The letter נ in the word “and He called” (וִיקָרָה) is written smaller than usual. The Gerrer Rebbe (*Sfas Emes, Vayikra* 1901) explains that Moshe received the entire Torah when he spent forty days and forty nights in the Heavens. If so, her wonders, why are these passages concerning the sacrifices said to have been told to him at the Tent of the Meeting? Rather, it must be that the Jewish People were not yet on the level for Moshe to reveal everything taught to him in the Heavens, so instead he was supplied with lower-level teaching at the Tent of the Meeting, which is what he relayed to the Jewish People. This is alluded to in the smaller נ, as the name of the letter *aleph* also means “teaching”, and here Moshe relayed to the Jewish People a “smaller” teaching that he himself received. The problem with this explanation is that implies that there are two different Torahs, the one revealed to Moshe Rabbenu in the Heavens, and the one revealed to him at the Tent of the Meeting. How can this be? The Talmud (*Megillah* 31a) related that Rav Yochanan said that wherever one finds a revelation of Hashem’s might, one also finds a revelation His humility. This raises an obvious question, why would Hashem have to act with humility, isn’t He the most powerful being that exists? In fact, we find elsewhere that Rabbenu Bachaya (to Lev. 6:3) and *Iggeres HaRamban* write that the problem with being too proud is that one is misappropriating “pride” which only belongs to Hashem. He explains that Ps. 93:1 describes Hashem as “dressing” Himself in pride, such that anyone else who assumes that trait is disgracing the King by using His “clothes”! Rather, we must answer that when Hashem reveals any aspect of Himself—even His might—this in itself is considered humble, because the fact that we were able to see this aspect of His might shows that He constricted His might, for otherwise the exhibition of His might would be so powerful that man would not comprehend what he has beholden. The same is true concerning the revelation of Torah. Certain lofty ideas by definition have to be “watered down” or “minimized” such that mere mortals can grasp those ideas. Thus, any time that a person sees the greatness of Hashem, he is in fact seeing His humility, for only due to Hashem’s willingness to be humble can we even have the ability to glimpse the tiniest bit of His

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greatness. Because of this, Moshe taught the Jewish People that which Hashem revealed to him in the Tent of the Meeting, so that their ears could hear the ideas expressed, and he did not teach them the more lofty ideas concerning these passages that he received in the Heavens. All of this is alluded to in the letter **א**, which no matter if its written big or small is still the same letter and represents the same idea somehow, but due to our limited ability to understand it fully, it is expressed in a simple way for us, represented by a small *aleph*.

#### The Crown from his mother

**And He called to Moshe (Lev. 1:1).** The *Baal HaTurim* notes that the first letters in the opening words of this book spell out the word “his mother” (ויקרא אל משה = אמו). He then ties this to the verse, *With the crown that his mother adorned for him on his wedding day and on the day of his heart’s happiness...* (Shir Hashirim 3:11), but does not further explain the connection. It seems that the *Baal HaTurim* means to allude to the Talmud’s exegesis (*Taanis* 32a): “on his wedding day” is the day the Torah was given and “on the day of his heart’s happiness” is the day that the Tabernacle was inaugurated. Elsewhere, the Talmud (*Sotah* 12b) says that Moshe merited to become a Levite who functioned in the Tabernacle because of the heroic deeds of his mother, the Jewish midwife Yocheved/Shifrah who defied the Pharaoh’s decree in not killing the Jewish babies. In other words, Moshe owes his role in the ritual worship at the Tabernacle to his mother. This is alluded to in the “crown that his mother adorned for him...” See also what Rabbi Avraham Schorr writes about this in *HaLekach VeHaLibuv* (Vayikra, 5764).

#### Leadership Qualities

**And He called to Moshe (Lev. 1:1).** The *Yalkut Shimoni* says that Moshe had ten names, and of those names, the name “Moshe” was the one given to by Bisya, daughter of the Pharaoh. The Midrash says that of all the different names that Moshe had, Hashem specifically spoke to him with the name Moshe. Why, of all of Moshe’s names, did He chose

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to refer to Moshe by the name given to him by the Pharaoh's daughter? The *Ksav Sofer*<sup>1</sup> explains that squarely because that name alludes to Moshe growing up in the Pharaoh's house, Hashem used that name, because even though he was essentially raised as royalty, he still felt a connection to his Jewish brethren and went out to inquire after their welfare. This is similar to an explanation proffered by Maharsha. The Talmud (*Nedarim* 32a) lists various qualities which are prerequisites for Hashem to rest His presence upon somebody. One of those prerequisites is being rich. The Maharsha asks why being rich is considered a prerequisite for receiving the Divine Presence, if being rich seems to contradict being humble—another one of the prerequisites. To resolve this, Maharsha explains that wealth is not an inherent prerequisite to receiving the Divine Presence, rather being rich serves to accentuate one's humility. If one is poor and acts humbly, this does not prove that he has truly mastered the trait of humility, but if a rich man does so, this demonstrates that he is truly humble. In a similar vein, the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu grew up as royalty and still retained his humility showed that he was indeed a worthy leader for Hashem's prophecies. So the name which conjure him growing up in the Pharaoh's palace is the most appropriate name to refer to him.

See Ibn Ezra (to beginning of Ex.) who explains that Nabatean and Greek sources attest to the fact that really Moshe's Egyptian name was Monius and the Torah translated that name into Hebrew as Moshe. Alternatively he suggests that the Pharaoh's daughter learned Hebrew or asked a Hebrew speaker to give him a name that is a conjugation of the verb "to draw". Ibn Ezra then notes that one should not wonder why his name was not Mashui (משוי, literally, "he who was drawn"), but was rather Moshe (משה, literally, "he who draws") because the grammatical rules of conjugating verbs do not apply to proper names. Sferno and *Chizkuni* (there) take a different approach. They explain that Moshe's name means "he who draws" as opposed to "he who was drawn" because Moshe himself was only saved

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<sup>1</sup> See also the Ksav Sofer's student, R. Feivel Schlessinger's *Toras Bar Nash* to Vayikra where he mentions the Ksav Sofer and offers two others answers as well.

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from the waters in order to be the savior of others. Accordingly, it seems that Hashem chose the name Moshe by which to refer to him in order to teach the lesson that because he himself was saved, he was expected to devote his life to saving others.

With this idea in mind, we can explain an otherwise difficult juxtaposition of two sentences in the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*. At the beginning of the *Maggid* section, we say, “This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the Land of Egypt” and then in the next sentence, we say: “Anyone who is hungry may come and eat”. What is the connection between the bread of affliction and inviting the hungry to feast with us? The Torah elsewhere says, “You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt”. The fact that we were strangers in Egypt and survived obligates us to love other strangers and ensure their survival. Jews are to identify with the underdog. The same is true about the bread of affliction. The fact that we suffered through the enslavement and freedom symbolized by the bread of affliction binds us to helping others in unfortunate situations, so we mention the bread of affliction as the reason behind why we invite the less fortunate to the Passover feast with us. We are not meant to speak of our affliction gratuitously. It is not a sign of virtue to simply be a victim. Rather, mention of the fact that we have suffered must always be immediately followed by “now who out there is suffering and needs *our* help.” Even if it is an impractical time to invite people, as it is during the middle of the seder, nevertheless one must always realize that his personal misfortunes and challenges are made meaningful by remembering that it is our job to help others due to our sensitivity in having needed help ourselves.

### Saying His name in vain

***Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: when a man from your midst offers a sacrifice to Hashem from animals, [then] from cattle and from the sheep shall you bring your sacrifice (Lev. 1:2).*** The Talmud (*Nedarim* 10b) and *Toras Kobanim* record: Rabbi Shimon said: How do you know that a person should not consecrate an animal by saying “For Hashem, [it should be] a burnt-offering”... because it says “a sacrifice to Hashem” not “to Hashem a sacrifice”. This leads to a logical argument: If the Torah put the word for the

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sacrifice before the word for Hashem in order to avoid a situation whereby one might unnecessarily say Hashem's name, then surely an individual person should also be careful about such a thing. This passage is somewhat difficult to understand, because elsewhere (*Temurah* 4a) the Talmud derives from the verse, "You shall fear Hashem you God" that it is forbidden to mention Hashem's name for no reason, so why then does the above passage present this idea as though it is learned from a *fiorti* argument? Rabbi Yosef of Trani (*Shaalos Uteshuvos Maharit*, vol. 1 148), known as Maharit, explains that the prohibition of uttering the name of Hashem that is derived from "You shall fear Hashem you God" only applies to uttering His name as it is written. With this principle in mind, Maharit explains an open contradiction concerning the prohibition of a non-Kohen performing the Blessing of the Kohanim: In one place, the Tosafist known as the *Ri* writes (*Shabbos* 118b) that he is unaware of any specific prohibition which bars a non-Kohen from giving the priestly blessings, yet the Talmud elsewhere (*Kesuvos* 24b) clearly says that there is such a prohibition. To resolve this contradiction, Maharit proposes that *Ri* understood that the prohibition referred to in *Kesuvos* is the prohibition of pronouncing the name of Hashem as it is written. Accordingly, when the Temple stood and the Kohanim used to bless the nation by uttering Hashem's name as it is written, there was a prohibition for a non-Kohen to join them, because he would illegally utter Hashem's as it is written. However, once the Temple was destroyed and anyways the Kohanim were not blessing the nation with Hashem's name as it is written, then there is no such prohibition, leading *Ri* to write that he is unaware of a prohibition for a non-Kohen to give the priestly blessings. Based on the Maharit's understanding, Rabbi Avraham Garbuz (in *Minchas Avraham* to *Toras Kohanim*, p. 18) explains that because "You shall fear Hashem you God" only applies to uttering His name as it is written, Rabbi Shimon needed to proffer a logical argument to prove that the prohibition of saying Hashem's applies in all cases—even when one does not pronounce His name as it is written.

**...a sacrifice to Hashem... (Lev. 1:2).** The Mishnah (*Nedarim* 1:1) mentions a concept known as *kinuyei nedarim* ("slang"), and the Talmud (*Nedarim* 10a) cites a dispute about the

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A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

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origins of those colloquial terms which could be used to make a *neder* commitment. Rabbi Yochanan said that they are derived from foreign languages, while Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish says that they were instituted by the rabbis. The point of this rabbinic enactment was to ensure that people would not end up saying “to Hashem a sacrifice” instead of “a sacrifice to Hashem”, because if they said the former, then they might just end up saying “to Hashem” and not finish their thought—thereby uttering His name for naught. Others explain that the concern is that the person will die midsentence and thus have uttered Hashem's name in vain. In Megilas Rus, it says that Boaz greeted the harvesters by saying “Hashem be with you”, to which they responded, “Be blessed from Hashem”. In this exchange, Boaz opened his greeting by saying Hashem as the first word, instead of saying “with you is Hashem”. Why was Boaz not careful to say the name of Hashem second in this phrase, such that if he is interrupt or cannot finish his sentence, then he would not end up saying Hashem’s name in vain? The *Yeshuos Yaakov (Yoreh Deab 148)* explains (citing the *Nezer Hakodesh*) that the reason to refrain from uttering statements with Hashem’s name appearing first is that we suspect that a person might begin his statement with Hashem’s name and then die before he has a chance to complete his thought, and then he will end up having said Hashem’s name for no purpose. Furthermore, the Yerushalmi (see also *Shelah* and Chida’s *Nachal Kedumim* to Gen. 1:1) says that he who is first to greet his friends is granted a longer life. Based on all of this, he explains that because when Boaz greeted those harvesting in his field, he was the first to greet his those fellow, he knew he would be granted an especially long life (in Seder Hadoros, it says that Boaz lived to be 400 years old!) so he was allowed to greet them by first saying Hashem’s name. The harvesters themselves, on the other hand, were the first to greet their fellow, they were simply responding to Boaz’s greetings, so they did not have this guarantee of a long life. Therefore, they did not answer back “Hashem shall bless you”, rather they said: “You shall be blessed from Hashem” in order to avoid saying Hashem’s name first, lest they die before finishing their sentence. He goes further and explains that this is also the basis for the accepted custom of one greeting his friend to say *Shalom Aleichem* (“Peace upon you”), while his friend responds: *Aleichem Shalom* (“Upon you peace”). The

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reason why the first man says *Shalom* first, and the second man says *Shalom* second is because *Shalom* is also a name of Hashem (*Shabbos* 10b), (and in fact what one is saying when he says Shalom Aleichem is "May the Divine Presence be upon you") and thus, one who says hello to his friend first has a special assurance that he will have a long life, he should have no problem opening a sentence with that word, for he will certainly not die within the time that he is uttering that very sentence.

#### Man's Best Friend

...**when a man from your midst offers a sacrifice to Hashem from animals...** (Lev. 1:2). The Mishnah (*Avos* 1:3) says that the world stands on three things: on Torah, on *Avodah* ("worship"), and on *Gemilus Chasadim* ("lovingkindness"). Rabbi Elchanan Chafetz of Posna writes in his work *Kiryas Chonah* (to *Avos* 1:3) that *Avodah* refers to the concept of sacrifices. He explains that "man" and "animal" (אדם בהמה = 97) equals "carcass" (נבילה = 97) in *gematria*. This means that when a person offers up his animalistic self as a sacrifice, and removes from within himself the gross physical tendencies, then what remains is just "man". For this reason, the Jewish People are called *adam* (*Yevamos* 61a). He explains that for this reason at the time of the Exodus, the Torah says, "And for all the Children of Israel, a dog did not sharpen its tongue" (Ex. 11:7). This means that the Jewish People were outside of the usual model that consists of human and animalistic aspects. In fact, the word "dog" (כלב = 52)<sup>2</sup> equals the *gematria* of "animal" (בהמה = 52) because it is the quintessential animal. When we speak about "carcasses" in the Torah, the Torah commands that carcasses be thrown to the dogs (Ex. 22:30), meaning that one should "throw away" their

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (in *Maamarei Pachad Yitzchok*, *Pesach* 60) writes that one of his students asked about the deeper meaning behind the fact that no dog barked during the Plague of Firstborn. He answered by explaining that in Chazal we find that the defining characteristic of a "dog" is that a dog is especially brazen. This brazenness is best demonstrated by the fact that a dog considers itself almost human-like, so it pretends to be "man's best friend". In this way, a dog shows its *chutzpah* because it has the audacity to believe that a dog is like a human. In truth, man and animal are worlds apart and cannot even begin to be compared. The sharp contrast between man and animal is best seen at the Plague of the Firstborn, when dogs could not even delude themselves into pretending to be equal to man, so they did not bark.

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animalistic/carcass-like traits and become wholly human. In the time of the Exodus, the Jews were able to attain this wholly human level by slaughtering the Paschal Lamb and ridding themselves of their animalistic tendencies. In this way, the Jews had nothing to do with the “dog” inside of them, which is why no dog barked during the Plague of the Firstborn.

*Not to embarrass the sinners*

***And the Kohen atones upon him on his sin that he sins, and he will be forgiven (Lev. 4:35).*** What does it mean when it says, “his sin that he sins”? When a person brings a sin-offering for a mistaken offense, he must bring a female animal, unlike a burnt-offering which is a male animal. For a sin-offering, one either brings a she-goat (Lev. 4:28) or a ewe (Lev. 4:32). However, when one looks carefully at the text, one will notice that the Torah only says “and he will be forgiven” concerning one who brings a ewe as a sin-offering, not if he brings a she-goat. The Gemara (*Sotah* 32b) says that the reason why the rabbis instituted the silent *Shemoneh Esrei* is in order to avoid embarrassing those sinners who have to verbally admit their sins. If they can do so quietly, it would be less embarrassing. The Talmud supports this idea from the fact that the Torah does not differentiate between where a sin-offering and burnt-offering are to be slaughtered in the Temple Courtyard (both have to be done at the northside). Both are done in the same place so that the onlookers will not know if somebody is bringing a sin-offering or a burnt-offering. Nonetheless, the Talmud questions this proof by noting that there is another way to tell if somebody is bringing a sin-offering or a burnt-offering, i.e. by checking the sex of the animal and seeing if it is male or female. The Talmud answers that the sex of the animal is not so easily discernable to onlookers because its tail covers its private parts. The Talmud then calls this answer into question by noting that only a ewe has a tail that covers its private parts, while a she-goat does not have such a tail, so if somebody brings a she-goat the onlookers can tell that he is bringing a sin-offering and he will be embarrassed? The Talmud answers that since a person bringing a sin-offering can bring either a ewe or a she-goat, then if somebody brings a she-goat he is essentially embarrassing himself, because he could have gotten out of the situation by bringing a ewe.

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Based on this, the Maharil Diskin (*Vayikra*, p. 26) explains why the Torah only says, “and he will be forgiven” regarding the she-goat and not regarding the ewe. This is because the Talmud (*Brachos* 12b) says that if a person commits a sin and is then embarrassed from it, all his sins are forgiven. Accordingly, when a person brings a she-goat and essentially embarrasses himself because the onlookers will all know he is bringing a sin-offering, he gets a higher level of atonement, so specifically regarding the she-goat does the Torah say “and he will be forgiven.”

#### Dying Early

**...and a soul when it sins and hears the voice of an oath, and he is a witness or he saw or he knows, [then] if he does not tell, he carries his sin (Lev. 5:1).** Rabbi Menachem Mendel Kringel writes in *Dvash VeChalav* in the name of R. Tzvi Hirsch of Mir that this can be exegetically interpreted to refer to a righteous man who dies young. The word “it sins” (אִתּוֹ) can be understood as “lacking”, so it means, "when our understanding of why a life is lost is lacking," and when “he hears the voice of an oath”, this refers to hearing the oath imposed upon men before they are born that they should be righteous and should not be wicked, meaning, our understanding of his death is lacking "because he took heed of the oath made before birth". “And he is a witness” the word witness (עֵד) is spelled the same as “adornment” (עֲדָן), in reference to the fact that man is the crown jewel of creation, "and he was a jewel". So essentially, this passage is coming to explain why a righteous man would die young, if righteous people are the crown jewel of creation. To this it answers, because he does saw or he knows and he does not tell” meaning because he saw *other people* in his city committing sins or he knew about them doing various sins, and he did not tell them off by properly rebuking. Because he failed to reproach those sinners, he himself became caught up in their punishment and suffered an early death.

#### The Poorman’s Sin

**...And if his hand cannot afford the enough for a sheep, [then] he shall bring his guilt-offering for his sin as two turtledoves or two pigeons to Hashem—one as a sin-**

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*offering and one as a burnt-offering (Lev. 5:7).* If he was bringing an animal, then he only has to bring one animal. But if he is too poor to afford an animal and instead must offer a bird, then he must bring *two* birds. Why is this so? Ibn Ezra explains that when a poor man brings birds, he must bring one as a burnt-offering, whose limbs are totally burnt on the altar, just like some of the limbs of an animal sin-offering are burnt on the altar, and the second bird is a sin-offering that is eaten by the Kohen, just like some parts of the animal sin-offering are also eaten by the Kohen. In other words, a bird does not have the same amount of limbs as an animal, so while an animal brought as a sin-offering is partially burnt and partially eaten by the Kohen, we do the same with a bird by bringing two birds and burning one, while giving the other to a Kohen to eat.

Ibn Ezra writes in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak that if he is so poor that he must bring a bird, then in addition to his sin-offering, he should also bring a burnt-offering because a burnt-offering atones for sins of thought, and a person could be assumed to have sinned in through at some point or another by complaining against Hashem for his destitute position. A similar understanding is set forth by the Chida, Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, in his work *Pnei David* (3). He notes that the poorest of the poor who cannot even afford a bird sacrifice must bring a meal-offering, but does not have to supplement his sin-offering with a burnt-offering. This is because if the poorest of the poor have some complaints against Hashem because of their dire situation, this is not considered a sin against Him, and does not warrant bringing an extra burnt-offering to atone for his sin of thought. The Torah recognizes that a person in the most dire of situations is somewhat justified in complaining against Hashem given his destitute situation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I heard from Rabbi Yechezkel Weinfeld that this is alluded to in the passage, “Do not remind us of our earlier sins, quickly shall Your mercy arrive, for we are extremely poor” (Ps. 79:8). In this verse, we beseech Hashem not to hold us accountable for our sins because we are like “extremely poor” people, like those who bring the meal offering, whose circumstances can prevent sins from being held against them.

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