

Parshas Vayikra

This week's Parsha, Vayikra, is the name of both the Chumash and the Parsha. It is the beginning of the third sefer of Chumash. Chumash begins with macro preparations on a global level, starting at Bereishis for the world to accept and know Hashem. As time progresses, the details and practices become much more granular and communal, on the role of the Jews as a nation, i.e., redemption from Egypt to collective donations, to building the Mishkan. Then we arrive at the microscopic level, to the individual, which is what the parsha of Vayikra is about. It is about the personal sacrifice an individual must offer to Hashem. Chassidus, especially the Alter Rebbe, delves into the second posuk, "Adam Ki Yakriv Mikem Korban L'Hashem" (when a person brings a sacrifice). The wording seems circuitous, and Chassidus explains that it is to show that the sacrifice must come from the person and, more importantly, from within them.

Even now, in Golus, when there is no Beis Hamikdash, we can bring a Korban (sacrifice). A human is comprised of a Nefesh Ha'bihamis and Nefesh Elohis (an animalistic and spiritual soul). Both are important, but one, the Nefesh Ha'bihamis, can keep us from achieving high spiritual pursuits and connecting with our Nefesh Elohis. The physical fuel we need to sustain the body arrives through the Nefesh Ha'bihamis; we ought not completely indulge that soul, lest we remain purely material beings. We must pursue spiritual aspirations. Only now in the Chumash are we prepared to bring sacrifices and have direct instructions on connecting to Hashem using a physical offering. The individual pursuit of spiritual greatness adds to the

collective spiritual health of the world. The whole is the sum of the parts of all of us individually working on ourselves to pursue connecting to Hashem.

As outlined in Tanya, pursuing spiritual greatness is becoming a Beinoni (translated as an intermediary). This intermediary should not be confused for anything less than a completely righteous person. But this person vacillates between the temptations of the animalistic soul while endeavouring to connect to Hashem through the spiritual soul. The Tzemach Tzedek as a child, asked his grandfather, the Alter Rebbe, why the first word of the Parsha has a small aleph. The Alter Rebbe answered that in Divrei Hayamim, Adam has a big aleph because Adam knew of his greatness, which resulted in the sin of the tree of knowledge.

Whereas Moshe Rabbeinu, whose soul is sourced from a very lofty level, was able to quell his ego in the service of Hashem, represented by the small aleph of Vayikra. The former large aleph represents an inflated ego, whereas the latter smaller aleph represents a controlled ego. These two letter sizes are two of the three-letter sizes found in the Torah. The remaining (and the majority of the) letters are the intermediate size. The Alter Rebbe explained that we as Jews must pursue the Beinoni, which is the intermediate letter, that is neither the inflated ego nor, understandably, the completely controlled (and subdued to Hashem) ego. The 'ego' is what drives a wedge between Hashem and us. The ego, called "Yesh," is a self-centred, sometimes selfish, reality that, because it exists, develops to be mutually exclusive of all else, including the ability to cleave to Hashem. One must work their entire life to conquer this. This overthrowing manifests itself in different ways, to a lesser and greater extent, in service to Hashem. For

example, sacrificing of oneself to go above and beyond to perform a mitzvah or regularly perform Mitzvos even when 'inconvenient.'

Furthermore, true Ahvas Yisroel can be achieved when you love someone as much as you love yourself, or when you genuinely love yourself, you can also begin to love others. The purpose of quelling the ego isn't to make yourself a doormat because even with low self-esteem, a person can be self-centred, even narcissistic (that is a coping mechanism is for the person to use low self-esteem, as a manner through which to receive, albeit unhealthy attention). Even this negative form of denigrated ego can result in a person being disconnected from Hashem (as the first Chapter in Tanya relates, breaking oneself can result in depression and irreverence, resulting in distance between the Jew and Hashem.) Tanya, among other shittos, teaches us how to achieve being a servant of Hashem and becoming a Beinoni whereby we truly cleave to and draw down G-dliness into this material realm and turn as much of the materialism into spiritual greatness (for example, make a bracha on food does precisely that)¹.

In this week's parsha, Hashem tells us about this individual pursuit of self-sacrifice. We take the animal within us, allegorically representing the actual animal that would be offered to Hashem. All this is done in a manner of love. Rashi points out in 1:1 that

the term calling "Vayikra" is a term of affection, as opposed to transgression (the word Vayakar, that is, the word Vayikra less an aleph). I believe Rashi explains this so we are not confused that Hashem was somehow using harsh language to call Moshe; instead, it was affection. Because Hashem loves every one of us and desires, we cleave to him, and truthfully, as a Jew with a G-dly soul, even if we don't know it, we desire to cleave and be close to Hashem.

The final point is that Hashem spoke to Moshe alone, and the words didn't reverberate past the confines of the tent of the meeting. I believe Rashi is detailed in explaining this to us, to tell us the power vested in the Rabbinical Authorities. Even if every Jew or select few heard directly the same message from Hashem regarding their pursuits, they would have individuated and interpreted it as they see fit, with their editorialization. This is a human error, and if it is based on subjective interpretation from the source, it could be a source of contention and, worse, war and dispensation from service to Hashem, chas vishalom. Therefore, by telling Moshe alone and Moshe retelling it to the people, the words of individual connection to Hashem can be subjective (much like Hashem said that at exactly midnight, the Makas Bechoros would strike, but when Moshe retold it, he said K'chatzos Halyala, that is around midnight). Hashem is precise, and what he wants from us is precisely what we

¹ The story of the Lubavitcher Rebbe responding to a person's letter about their depression and anger by circling "I I I" is a well-known anecdote that has been widely shared among the Jewish community. The story goes that a person wrote a letter to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, expressing their feelings of depression and anger. In response, the Rebbe circled the letters "I I I" in the letter and sent it back to the person. At first glance, the person was confused by the Rebbe's response, as it seemed to offer no real advice or guidance. However, upon further

reflection, the person came to understand the Rebbe's message: the focus should be on the "I," meaning the individual, rather than external factors that may be causing their distress. The Rebbe was known for his wisdom and compassion, and this story is just one example of his ability to convey deep and meaningful messages in simple yet profound ways.

can work on using the Torah to connect to Him. Therefore, telling it to Moshe alone allows us to interpret and subjectively interpret, and more importantly, subjectively pursue getting close to Hashem using Torah.

Good Shabbos