

The Path To Follow

Vayikra

485

A Hevrat Pinto Publication

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Nisan 5th, 5773
March 16th, 2013



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Humility Can Lead Man to the Greatest Heights

It is written, “Vayikra [And He called] to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying...” (Vayikra 1:1).

Rashi states that the term vayikra is an expression of love, and the phrase “from the Tent of Meeting” means that a voice emerged from the Holy of Holies and passed through the Tent of Meeting and stopped. The word “saying” means: “Go and tell them sobering words: ‘It is for your sake that G-d communicates with me.’” Rashi adds that during the 38 years that Israel was in the desert, placed under a ban, the prophetic word did not come uniquely to Moshe.

This raises several questions. First, why does the letter aleph in the term vayikra appear smaller than the other letters? Next, why does the voice stop at the Tent of Meeting and speak there, without proceeding to Moshe’s tent? Finally, in regards to Rashi’s comment, “Go and tell them sobering words: ‘It is for your sake that G-d communicates with me,’” Rav Yoel of Satmar states that sobering words are made to win over the hearts of the Jewish people so they may return to the right path, as the Sages have said (Ta’anith 16a). Yet here, Moshe was actually complimenting them when he said: “It is for your sake that G-d communicates with me.” What was sobering about this?

He also cites the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Vayikra 431), according to which Hashem should have spoken with Moshe for his own sake. Yet in that case, why did Moshe say that Hashem spoke with him for Israel’s sake? It was in order to teach us that it was not for his own needs. Another explanation: Is it possible that Hashem only spoke to Moshe for the needs of the community? After all, the verse states that Hashem spoke “with him,” indicating that He also spoke with him for his own needs. This passage from the Midrash requires an explanation.

Moshe was the father of the prophets, a man of G-d. He had attained levels that no other human being had ever attained. Hashem knew him face to face, as it is written: “He is trusted in My entire house. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles; at the image of Hashem does he gaze” (Bamidbar 12:7-8). Moshe ascended to the heavens, ate the bread of the mighty, and seized the Throne of Glory. Nevertheless, he was small in his own eyes and considered himself as nothing, to the point that he said of himself and his brother: “What are we?” (Shemot 16:7). Furthermore, the Torah says of him: “Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth” (Bamidbar 12:3). It was this tremendous degree of humility that the small aleph alludes to.

Now Moshe, who left us with such a heritage, revealed the secret that the Torah is like water, for just as water travels from higher to lower ground, likewise the Torah can only be acquired by one who humbles himself for it. A person must consider himself as an offering, for just as an offering had its neck stretched out to be slaughtered, a person must completely annul himself before the Torah. As such, his Torah will consist of doing his Creator’s will, not to glorify himself. This is also alluded to in the small aleph, which signifies obedience and humility.

The small aleph also alludes to children, who love and cherish this letter because it is the first one which they learn. This idea is alluded to in the term vayikra, which may be read as yikru aleph (“the aleph is dear to them”). Of them it is said, “Let the pure come and engage in the study of the pure” (Vayikra Rabba 7:3), for children begin the study of Torah with Sefer Vayikra. Moshe rejoiced in

all the words of Torah, like someone who finds a great treasure, just as children who rejoice in the letter aleph.

We may also say something else according to the teachings found in the works of the Arizal. The shape of the letter aleph (which is formed by one vav and two yuds, the combined numerical value of which is 26) alludes to the Name of Hashem [the Tetragrammaton], whose numerical value is 26. The small aleph directs us to the words of the Sages, for whom pride is so reprehensible that the Holy One, blessed be He, says of the arrogant: “I and he cannot both dwell in the world” (Sotah 5a). As for one who is small in his own eyes, G-d says: “I am with the contrite and humble of spirit” (Isaiah 57:15). This is why Moshe, who was the humblest of all men on the earth, was worthy of revelations and insights beyond those of any other human being.

The Sages have said, “Man is led along the path which he desires to take” (Bamidbar Rabba 20:12). Thus when the Holy One, blessed be He, saw Moshe’s humility, He demonstrated affection for him by allowing him to believe that everything revealed to him was only for the sake of Israel. Thus for the Holy One, blessed be He, these revelations were for Moshe, while for Moshe these revelations were for the Jewish people. In reality, the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to Moshe because of his own importance.

This allows us to understand the specifics of the verse that we cited at the start. G-d’s word addressed itself to Moshe in the Tent of Meeting, which was the domain of the Children of Israel, the place that testifies to the Jewish people that the Shechinah rests upon them. As we have said, the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to carry out the will of His servant, and therefore He showed Moshe that He was only speaking to him for the sake of Israel. That is why He spoke to him there, in the Tent of Meeting. We can also answer the question that we raised earlier, namely how these could be sobering words. We can now fully understand this: Moshe was asking the Children of Israel to constantly be engaged in teshuvah, to study Torah, and to perform good deeds, for it was only for their sake that Hashem addressed him. After all, throughout the 38 years in which they journeyed in the desert, G-d only addressed Moshe for the needs of the Jewish people. Moshe himself was worthy of revelations, but since G-d does the will of those who fear Him, He only revealed Himself to Moshe when it was necessary for the Jewish people. This is certainly a sobering thought, one that allows us to understand the words of the Satmar Rebbe, may his merit protect us, in an amazing way.

Another interesting idea came to me, one in line with the above explanation that Hashem’s Name is alluded to in the letter aleph, and which connects to the end of Parsha Pekudei. There we read, “For the cloud of Hashem would be on the Sanctuary by day, and fire would be on it at night, before the eyes of all the House of Israel throughout their journeys” (Shemot 40:38). This may allude to the fact that when someone enjoys obvious success in life, he should not grow proud of it. Rather, he should examine his deeds, just as he would on a cloudy day, when it is possible to make mistakes. As such, he will avoid falling into error. If he experiences hardship and feels confused, as if wandering around in the fog, he should remember that Hashem is a devouring fire, a powerful and awesome G-d, Who ensures the coming of day. All Jews should remind themselves of this during their journeys, meaning every situation in which they may find themselves. By acting in this way, the vav in vayikra hints to a person that man was created on the vav (sixth) day, and that he is yakar (dear) in the eyes of the aleph, meaning in the eyes of Hashem.

For the Sake of Social Status

It is written, “A man [nefesh – ‘soul’] who offers his meal-offering [mincha]” (Vayikra 2:1).

Here Rashi comments: “Regarding all the offerings that were donated voluntarily, the only instance where Scripture uses the word nefesh is in the case of the meal-offering. Who usually donates a meal-offering? A poor man. The Holy One, blessed be He, says: ‘I account if for him as if he has offered his very soul!’ ”

Sometimes a person may deserve to be punished, but he is in such a state that a punishment from G-d would have little effect. In fact when a person is poor, he will not really suffer greatly if G-d prevents him from becoming rich. He will almost not perceive such a punishment, since he is already used to a life of hardship and want.

On the other hand, it is awful and terrifying for a wealthy man to undergo a reversal of fortune. Before going to a dinner party, he will be forced to borrow a large sum of money in order to offer his hosts a gift they expect, for he cannot allow himself to be the object of disparaging remarks. He would rather offer his furniture as collateral so he can organize a grandiose party that all his friends and acquaintances would expect, even going heavily into debt, all in order to prevent people from discovering his true state and making disparaging remarks about him. Everything in order to protect his social status.

Regarding this subject, the book Umatok HaOhr recounts the story of a wealthy Jew who went to see the gaon Rabbi Chaim Kreiswirth and confided a secret to him: “Everyone thinks that I’m rich. People see me dressed in fine clothes and driving in luxury. In reality, I’ve lost my entire fortune and don’t have anything to live on. I don’t even have bread with which to feed myself.” Moved by this account, Rabbi Chaim decided to collect money for him.

The Rav therefore went with his gabbai to see a wealthy man in the community and shared this story with him. After listening to the Rav’s account, the man asked him: “Rabbi, what amount are you looking for?”

“One hundred thousand dollars,” he replied.

“I would need to know the identity of the man who went bankrupt. I am prepared to give him \$30,000 in cash, but only if you reveal his name to me.”

The Rav replied, “He asked me not to divulge his identity, so that would be impossible for me to do.”

The wealthy man increased his offer: “If you tell me his name, I’m ready to give him \$50,000.”

However Rabbi Chaim continued to refuse.

The man then offered an even greater amount, eventually promising that he would immediately provide the Rav with the complete sum he was looking for, but only if he revealed the identity of the recipient.

The Rav then turned to his gabbai and said, “Come, we’re leaving. If he’ll only give with conditions, we won’t accept anything from him.”

They had already reached the door when the man called to Rav Chaim: “Please, come into my office. I want to speak to you privately.”

The Rav agreed, and so they went into the man’s office.

After the man closed the door, he sat down and burst into tears.

After having calmed himself a little, the man started telling his story: “Rabbi, I found myself in the exact same position as the person you are taking care of. I also lost all my money, and today I barely have enough

to live on. Until now, I haven’t asked anyone for help, even though my family and I are suffering from hunger. I prefer to die from starvation rather than to ask anyone for help, for fear that my situation becomes known. Until now, I’ve found no solution to my problem, and I haven’t counted on anyone. Now, however, I know that I can trust you to keep a secret. That’s why I’m please asking you to help me as well.”

Thus a man is ready to endure tremendous hardship, just as long as people never learn of his downfall. The worst of all punishments consists of “riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune” (Kohelet 5:12).

That being the case, when G-d wants to inflict a particularly severe punishment upon someone, He first lets him rise in social status. He allows him to live a pleasure-filled life in the midst of a society that reflects his own values. At that point, once he has grown accustomed to leading a life of luxury and has become known in “high society,” G-d takes away his wealth. He then falls from the rooftop to the abyss.

This is precisely what Hashem did to Lot.

He provided him with flocks, cattle, and tents, allowing him to grow accustomed to occupying a high social position. He then made him lose everything in an instant.

What were the results? “And he lingered” (Bereshith 19:16). Lot was so stunned that he seemed to have lost all his ability to reason. Why did all this happen? He thought to himself, “How can I lose all my silver, gold, precious stones, and gems?” He was unable to bring his money with him, for his sons-in-law had ridiculed him, preventing him from taking anything with him. What would become of him now?

In this way, Lot felt his punishment in all its intensity: “Sometimes wealth is given for the sake of punishment.” In such cases, the experience is that much more difficult, and the blow that much more painful.

This principle (that the bestowal of wealth may end up being a punishment) is applicable in every area. “Wealth” does not necessarily mean money, but may include honor, abilities, and children. Indeed, everything that a person benefits from may constitute “wealth” that may be to the detriment of its owner.

It is therefore clear that if Hashem does not grant us a certain benefit, it is not because He does not love us. On the contrary, it is precisely because He does love us that He doesn’t give us benefits in excess. He knows that making a person rich may eventually cause him to suffer, and because He is righteous and fair, He does not want to cause us misfortunes that we do not deserve.

We must always remember that if we do not possess a certain kind of “wealth,” it is because G-d’s will is not to give it to us. We must realize that His will is motivated only by His love for us, and by His desire to help us.

Guard Your Tongue!

Not Even to His Wife

In regards to the prohibition against speaking Lashon Harah, there is no difference between speaking to others, be they relatives or not, or to one’s wife, unless the speaker must inform her for some future constructive purpose. For example, if his wife is planning on selling items on credit to dishonest individuals, meaning that it will be difficult for her to get paid afterwards, he should warn her about their dishonesty so she will not sell anything to them on credit.

In the Place of the Great

It is written, “Vayikra [And He called] to Moshe” (Vayikra 1:1).

The letter aleph in the term vayikra appears smaller than the other letters, this being to teach us that G-d reveals Himself to the nations of the world only partially, as it is written: “G-d vayikar [happened] upon Bilam” (Bamidbar 23:4). Here vayikar is used, not vayikra, for the latter is the term used for the prophets of Israel, whom G-d addressed directly.

In that case, why does the aleph not appear larger? In order to differentiate between the call addressed to angels and the call addressed to Moshe.

– Midrash Otiyot Ketanot

He Seeks the Pursued

It is written, “From the cattle or from the flock shall you bring your offering” (Vayikra 1:2).

The only kinds of animals that may be brought as an offering are those among the flock or cattle, meaning “the ox, sheep, and goat” (Devarim 14:4). What is so special about them that caused them to be chosen? They are defenseless and obedient. Rabbi Yehudah ben Shimon said in the name of Rabbi Yossi bar Nehorai, “The ox is pursued by the lion, the goat by the leopard, the lamb by the wolf. Hashem says, ‘Do not bring Me offerings from the pursuers, but from the pursued,’ as it is written: ‘The offerings of G-d are a broken spirit’ [Tehillim 51:19].”

Another explanation: “How have I wearied you? Answer Me!” (Micah 6:3). According to Rabbi Yehuda bar Shimon, G-d said: “I have given you ten kinds of [clean] animals. Three are in your domain and seven are not in your domain. The three in your domain are, ‘The ox, the sheep, and the goat’ [Devarim 14:4].... I did not put you to any trouble, and I did not tell you to weary yourselves on the mountains in order to bring Me an offering from those that are not in your domain. Rather, I asked only for those that are in your domain, from that which was reared upon your own crib.” Hence it is written, “From the cattle or from the flock.” – Midrash Hagadol

Live Fish

It is written, “If one’s offering to Hashem is a burnt-offering of fowl” (Vayikra 1:14).

Why can we bring offerings of birds, or of sheep and goats from the flock, but not of fish? In fact we read, “If one’s offering to Hashem is a burnt-offering of fowl.”

Like man, all these animals are made of flesh and blood, and like man they emerge from their mother. They may therefore serve as an atonement for man. As for fish, they lay eggs that become live fish. (A bird does not hatch from an egg on its own, but instead must be covered by its mother, which is not the case for fish.) - Midrash Tanchuma

The Soul Above Them All

It is written, “Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: ‘When a soul sins...’” (Vayikra 4:2).

Ten things serve the soul [the essence of man’s life]:

The gullet for food, the windpipe for the voice, the liver for anger, the lungs to absorb liquids, the stomach to grind [food], the spleen for laughter, the maw for sleep, the gallbladder for jealousy, the kidneys think, and the heart decides – and the soul is above them all.

The Holy One, blessed be He, says [to the soul]: “I made you above them all, and yet you go out and rob, act violently, and sin!” – Vayikra Rabba 4:4

Do Not Shame Them

It is written, “He shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and he shall slaughter it in the place where they slaughter the burnt-offering” (Vayikra 4:24).

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, “Why was it instituted that the prayer should be recited softly? So as not to put transgressors [who confess their sins during prayer] to shame. For behold, Scripture made no distinction as to the place of a sin-offering or burnt-offering [i.e., they were offered on the same side of the altar, meaning that onlookers would be unable to tell which offering was being made].”

But this is not so, for there is a difference in the treatment of the blood: The blood of a sin-offering [was applied] above [the red line which ran round the altar], whereas the blood of a burnt-offering [was applied] below it! Only the priest would know this [i.e., the priest alone, no one else, and therefore no one would be shamed]. – Sotah 32b

In the Light of the Parsha

On the Greatness of Torah Study

In regards to reading the Torah passages on the offerings, our Sages say that Abraham asked Hashem: “Sovereign of the universe... what will befall [the Jewish people] when there will be no Temple?” G-d replied, “I have already fixed for them the order of the offerings. Whenever they will read the passage dealing with them, I will consider as if they were bringing Me an offering, and I will forgive all their sins” (Megillah 31b).

In the same spirit we read, “Whoever studies Torah is as if he were offering a burnt-offering, a meal-offering, a sin-offering, and a guilt-offering. ... Whoever studies the laws of the sin-offering is as if he were offering a sin-offering, and whoever studies the laws of the guilt-offering is as if he were offering a guilt-offering” (Menachot 110a). Although our forefathers established the rule that boys should begin their study of Torah with the offerings, it doesn’t mean that the principle of “study is equivalent to action” applies only to minors. Rather, anyone who reads the passage on the offerings is considered to have brought the corresponding offering.

Let us explain this by referring to a teaching of our Sages: “One should never abstain from the Beit HaMidrash and from Torah, even in the hour of death, for it is said: ‘This is the Torah, when a man dies in a tent’ [Bamidbar 19:14]. Even at the hour of death, one should be engaged in Torah. Resh Lakish said: ‘Words of Torah only endure with one who kills himself for it’” (Shabbat 83b).

In his book Chiddushei Aggadot, the Maharal explains: “The Torah belongs to the realm of the intellect. How can it be implanted in man, who is entirely material? The two are complete opposites! Hence this Torah (intellect) can only be fulfilled in one who is ready to die for it, a person who completely negates his body, his material life. Separating himself from his body, he is no longer considered as such in comparison to the Torah. Thus the Torah – which is ‘intellect’ – can be fulfilled in him, not in someone who, next to Torah, attributes importance to his body.”

This needs to be explained, for how can a person completely detach himself from materiality as he studies Torah? After all, man was created from the material realm! Can that which is material disassociate itself from materiality? In reality, by selflessly devoting oneself to the study of Torah, a person can detach himself from his material side, allowing the Torah’s words to enter his heart.

What does selfless devotion entail? Our Sages describe it in discussing the expression “with all your soul” (Devarim 6:5). That is, “Even if He takes your soul [i.e., your life]” (Berachot 54a). This means that when a person studies Torah, his mind must be free of all material concerns. Even if he was busy all day long working, he must set aside some time to study Torah, during which he will completely forget about his work. How much more will he abstain from bringing his work along with him to the Beit HaMidrash, such as with his cellphone or other such devices!

A Living Sefer Torah

An extraordinary description of the prayer of Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka, the Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef, is found in his biography *Vezot Liyhuda*:

Each day as he prepared for prayer, he would hum the verse: “Prepare to meet your G-d, O Israel” (Amos 4:12). During the prayer service itself, he held the siddur in his hands and never lifted his eyes from the page. People could see his great intensity on his forehead and by the expressions on his face.

Upon seeing him, people felt – as Rabbeinu Avraham the son of the Rambam stated in his commentary on the Torah – “that prayer is an encounter between a faithful servant and his Master,” a cleaving to the Shechinah.

His face also reflected joy and happiness, as Rabbi Aibu advocates: “When you stand before Him in prayer, let your heart rejoice because you are praying to a G-d without equal” (Midrash Shocher Tov). The words that he spoke were as harmonious as the songs of a nightingale. When he sang the Pesukei D’Zimra, he was like a harp in the service of King David’s songs. When he read the Shema, his face was imprinted with supreme light.

He would usually stand during the repetition of the Amidah, his eyes and heart focused on his open siddur. He stood there listening with fear and awe to the prayer of the shaliach tzibur, word after word. He never abandoned his custom of standing during the repetition of the Amidah, just like “angels who remain standing.” He did so even when he had grown old and frail, and even during the Days of Awe, when the prayer service was lengthy.

As he bowed and recited the words, “Our Father, our King; You are our Father” with an emotional voice, he put special emphasis on the expression, “Our Father.” At that point his entire body grew excited, blazing like a torch. People saw that he truly lived and wholeheartedly perceived the words: “You are the children of Hashem your G-d” and “we are Your children, and You are our Father.”

His energetic appearance during prayer evoked the image of a true believer who turns directly to G-d, as the Rambam writes in his golden language: “One who prays... stands on his feet, his lips express his heart’s delight, his hands are outstretched, his vessels of speech are active in operation, and all his other parts tremble and shake. He does not cease to sing sweet songs. He holds close, prepares himself, supplicates, kneels and bows down. He weeps, for he is in the presence of a great and awesome King” (Pirkei Hatzalah).

In reading the Rambam’s words, the sanctified image of Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka standing in prayer naturally appears before us. He was a man of humility and total self-annulment, a man who completely poured out his soul as he recited supplications that were filled with longing and repentance.

“I remember days long past,” recounted one of his relatives in the synagogue that carries his father’s name, Shaul Tsadka, “as our Rav was standing before the lectern of the shaliach tzibur as we reached the repetition of Shacharit on Yom Kippur. When he began to recite the vidui of Rav Nissim Gaon, his voice became choked by his constant tears, and we could barely hear him. At that point, the heart of all the faithful melted like wax, for they found themselves standing before a living Sefer Torah, weeping and confessing amid a torrent of tears. If he was so anxious and in such distress, what can we possibly say?”

Rabbi Haim Pinto and His Student Rabbi Shlomo Azoulay

It was Rabbi Haim Pinto’s custom to give all the money that he collected to the poor. At the very least, he tried to always have food ready at his home, so that the poor could always find something to eat if they came by.

Rabbi Haim once asked his student, Rabbi Shlomo Azoulay, who was also a “slaughterer” (shochet), to come and slaughter some poultry for the poor. Rabbi Shlomo replied, “Rabbeinu, I don’t have time right now. I’ll slaughter them tonight.” Rabbi Haim began to laugh, telling him: “Now you don’t want to help me for a mitzvah? Half your day will be bad and half will be good, and you’ll realize that it’s not by coincidence.” Rabbi Shlomo laughed and continued on his way. He reached a certain street where a woman offered to sell him some gold jewelry. When he asked her about the price, he realized that it was a bargain. He therefore purchased a few gold items and left. The woman called him back and said, “If you like this gold jewelry, I have much more at home. If you’re interested, you can come over and I’ll sell them to you for even less.”

Now Rabbi Shlomo was very handsome, and he didn’t realize that the woman desired him and wanted to entrap him in sin. The Satan won, and he went to her home. She then led him into her bedroom and closed the door. She told him that she had good things for him, and that everything would be his if he just listened. Rabbi Shlomo began to tremble and didn’t want to hear another word. She began to seduce and threaten him, but nothing worked. When she realized that he wouldn’t even think of sinning, she struck him on the head and he fell unconscious to the floor. The woman thought that she had killed him, and she feared for her life. She went to the police and began to scream, “A Jew came to my home and wanted to take me by force. It was difficult, but I struggled and managed to escape. He fainted and fell to the floor in my home.” The police commissioner, who hated Jews, was only too happy to hear this story, and he sent his officers back with the woman to her home.

In the meantime, Rabbi Shlomo regained consciousness and gathered his strength: He saw an open window, and with difficulty he managed to climb through it and jump from rooftop to rooftop, making a miraculous escape. The police arrived at the woman’s home, but didn’t find any Jew. They thought that the woman was making fun of them, and therefore they jailed her. In the meantime, Rabbi Shlomo began to reflect upon what had happened to him, and he remembered what Rabbi Haim Pinto had said regarding a day that was half bad and half good. At noon, he went to where sheep were sold, and there he saw a bag filled with money. He purchased some sheep and worked until nightfall. He then realized that everything that Rabbi Haim had told him came true in every detail. He ran to Rabbi Haim’s home to tell him, as well as to ask him for forgiveness. He entered and saw him smiling at him and saying: “Now when you’re asked to do a mitzvah for the poor, you’ll gladly do it right away.” Happy are the tzaddikim, who decree and G-d executes. Happy was Rabbi Shlomo Azoulay, who in this trial was like Joseph HaTzaddik, who did not succumb to sin.