



TAL

VAYIKRA

5775

THE COMMUNITY PARASHA SHEET

The Secret Small Aleph

Rabbi Jonathan Tawil



There is a story of a US Naval ship travelling on a stormy winter night off the coast of Newfoundland;

The captain on the deck notices a dim green blip that suddenly appears on the radar screen.

Radioing into the Canadian Naval authorities, he says: "Please divert your course 20 degrees to the North to avoid a collision."

The Canadians respond: "Recommend you divert YOUR course 20 degrees to the South to avoid a collision."

The US captain responds: "This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course."

Canadians retaliate: "No. I say again, you divert YOUR course."

Eventually getting fed up the US captain states, "THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS LINCOLN, THE SECOND LARGEST SHIP IN THE UNITED STATES' ATLANTIC FLEET. WE ARE ACCOMPANIED BY THREE DESTROYERS, THREE CRUISERS AND NUMEROUS SUPPORT VESSELS. I DEMAND THAT YOU CHANGE YOUR COURSE 20 DEGREES NORTH, THAT'S TWO ZERO DEGREES NORTH, OR COUNTER-MEASURES WILL BE UNDERTAKEN TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THIS SHIP."

The Canadians take a gasp and say, "This is a lighthouse. Your call..." A little humility goes a long way.

This week, we begin the third book of the Torah called Vayikra, known as Torat Kohanim - the law of the priests - in rabbinic literature. Most of the book is occupied with the laws of the specific sacrifices and the duties of the Kohanim in the Temple.

The book opens with an interesting encounter that hinted at with the unusual writing of the first word Vayikra.



The last letter of Vayikra — the Aleph — is written much smaller than the rest of the word.

Why is the Aleph small?

Our Sages explain that when G-d told Moshe to write the word Vayikra- "And He called"- Moshe didn't want to write that last Aleph. It seemed to Moshe that it gave him too much importance. How could he write that G-d called to him? Who was he, after all? A mere man. Moshe would have

preferred to write Vayikar — "And He happened (upon him)."

In other words, G-d just "came across" Moshe. He didn't "go out of His way" to appear to him.

In spite of Moshe's protestations, G-d told him to write Vayikra — "And He called".

Moshe put the Aleph at the end of the word as G-d had commanded him — but he wrote it small.

This is a fascinating story, but the Sages are confused. Don't we already know that Moshe was humble? Are we not told on numerous occasions in the Torah itself that Moshe was humble? Why the necessity to make the Aleph small?

The Midrash Tanchuma (Teruma) brings an intriguing encounter. Rabbi Akiva was once challenged by a Roman general called Turnus Rufus.

"Why does your G-d hate us?" stated the general, quoting the Pasuk "VeEt Eisav Saneti"-and I hate Eisav.

Rabbi Akiva seemed startled by the question. If he were to answer what he really thought, the general would kill him. Any false answer would not do justice to the question.

He told Turnus Rufus to return tomorrow and he would have a reply.

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The next day, Turnus Rufus returned promptly and again asked him the question.

Rabbi Akiva told him that it was interesting seeing him, since that night he had a dream about two dogs. One was called Rufus and the other Rupina.

Turnus Rufus was not impressed.

"How dare you! Are you insinuating that my wife (Rupina) and I are dogs? You will pay with your life!" exclaimed the general.

Rabbi Akiva stopped the general before the guards would take him away.

"Stop, I don't understand. Dogs see and you see, dogs walk and you walk. Why are you so upset?"

Rabbi Akiva proceeded with his master plan.

"Look how upset you were when I compared you to a dog, and in actual fact there are many similarities!

"G-d Almighty has created the heavens and earth, the vast seas and beautiful lands. How do you think He feels when you prostrate yourself to idols made of wood and stone proclaiming they have created all of this?"

Rabbi Akiva made his point and with that the general moved away. Rabbi Shach zts'l once asked on this Midrash. Why is it that Rabbi

Akiva didn't give Turnus Rufus this answer yesterday? Did he not know the answer then and there? Why wait?

Rabbi Shach explained that sometimes in order to portray a message we need to envisage or experience certain things; speech alone would not do justice to the cause.

If Rabbi Akiva would have just turned around and said, "G-d hates you because you worship idols," it is not certain that Turnus Rufus would have accepted his answer.

Once Rabbi Akiva made him come back the next day and via his 'dream' put Turnus Rufus in a personal situation, he was able to explain much better. Hence he waited that extra day to respond. Moreover, sometimes speech alone cannot portray a concept. In order to fully comprehend, we need to use other means of action as well.

Aleph is unique in the Hebrew alphabet, for it has no sound. The rest of the Hebrew alphabet is consonantal. Each consonant has a sound: Bet is "B", Mem is "M". When the vowel markings are added the sounds can be extended: Ba, be, boo, etc. But

Aleph is soundless. Only when vowels are added do we hear it – or its absence: ah, eh, oh, oo. Aleph begins the alphabet, but has no sound.

Aleph is compared to the voice of G-d. That is, Aleph is the open space, the silence, the pregnant possibility, the soundless inspiration, the in-breath that precedes all human speech. We see the Aleph, we shape it, we read it, but we cannot make its sound.

The opening of our alphabet points us to the mystery from which our ability to speak emerges, giving us pause, making us listen before we begin.

We might already know that Moshe is humble. We might learn this every year, but when we see with our own eyes the small Aleph and we ask into its history, the lesson that it portrays is much more resounding. The simple action of writing a small Aleph depicts this message in a more powerful way.

As we begin the third book of the Torah, let us ask Hashem to bless us that we too may portray the characteristics of our fine leader Moshe and succeed in all our endeavours.

This week the Parshah (aside from Parshat Vayikra) has a special name, Parshat Hachodesh. With the month of Nissan beginning, we read a portion from Parshat Bo relevant to Rosh Chodesh Nissan and the laws of the Korban Pesach, this is Parshat Hachodesh. Let us take a close look at Parshat Hachodesh.

G-D commands the Bnei Yisroel to perform the Mitzvah of Korban Pesach, before they could perform this command, they were told to perform the mitzvah of Brit Milah and to refrain from idolatry. The great Sephardic commentator

Rabbeinu Chaim Ben Attar zecher tsaddik libricha, in his commentary on the Chumash which is called the Ohr Hachaim asks the following question; Surely the Bnei Yisroel had been in contact with dead people and had become Tammei (spiritually defiled) and normally speaking one of the requirements of the korban pesach is purity, so why did G-D not command that before they perform the korban pesach

they should first purify themselves from their tumah status, this would be by giving them the mitzvah of Parah Adumah (the red heifer) with all its laws.

The Ohr Hachaim explains with a question; Why is it that many of the laws of tumah apply only to the Jewish people, but non-Jewish people are not considered defiled at least biblically, for instance when carrying a dead body?

p.t.o.

Parashat Hachodesh

Rabbi Betzalel Grossnass



The answer is explained with an experiment. Imagine one had two barrels, one of the barrels was filled with honey, and the other barrel was filled with waste. After some time on a hot sunny day, the owner of the two barrels, emptied both the barrels, and then put them out in the street in the sun. As one can imagine soon these two barrels will be full of buzzing insects, however the barrel that had contained honey will be far more attractive to the buzzing insects than the barrel that had contained dirt and waste, therefore we can conclude that the barrel that was emptied from its honey content will be far more populated by the buzzing creatures than the barrel of waste. The Ohr Hachaim explains that there are lowly spiritual elements that seek spiritual heights that they do not have, and when a Jewish person dies, they enter his body for they see it as a barrel of honey emptied of its contents, and they wish to enter this body in the hope of licking off the remnants of the honey (i.e. spiritual heights), and

these lowly spiritual elements are actually the source of tumah in the dead person, [and they will also cling to a Jewish person who picks up the dead person].

“there are lowly spiritual elements that seek spiritual heights that they do not Have, and when a Jewish person dies”

Why is a Jewish person perceived by these elements as one with spiritual heights and worth entering, as opposed to a non-Jewish person whom they do not enter upon death [which is the reason that there is no tumah by a non-Jewish person] ? Says the Ohr Hachaim, the underlying difference is that the Jewish nation received the Torah and this is our greatness and what makes us like a barrel of honey. With this understood, the Ohr Hachaim concludes to answer the

question that was first asked, why was there no commandment for Bnei Yisroel to purify themselves before performing the Korban Pesach in Egypt: The answer is simple, since the Jewish nation had not yet received the Torah, in turn they would not become Tammei (defiled), for the lowly spiritual elements would not be attracted to them for they are not comparable to the barrel of honey for they lack the sweetness of the Torah and the Spiritual heights that the Torah bestows upon the nation that observes the Torah. Let us internalize this great message, that what seems to be a certain lowliness amongst specifically the Jewish people, for only we become impure from the impurities of death, is actually the sign of our greatness, and reminds us of the spiritual heights and sweetness as in holiness that we can attain through the Torah. **May we be inspired by this message and strengthen our commitments to the holy Torah, Shabbat Shalom.**

Near the home of Rabbi Yisrael Abuchatzairah a new mikvah was built, during the month of Tamuz, in the midst of the dry, hot summer. When the structure was complete, the townspeople lacked water - rain water, of course, in order to finish the mikvah. The Baba Sali lifted his eyes to Heaven, and proclaimed, "Master of the universe - You commanded us to behave in holiness and purity. So, we desire to fulfil Your Will. Please, please, for the sake of Your great Name, let it rain!" Suddenly, clouds gathered in the sky, and instantly, rain fell! In no time at all, the mikvah filled with water. However, they realized that the mikvah was not quite built according to the opinion of the Beit

Yehuda, so the people informed their master, their teacher, the Baba Sali. Immediately, he ordered them to drain the mikvah. Someone raised an objection: "It does not rain like this in the middle of the summer," they said. "This is a rare miracle!" He turned to Baba Sali, and said, "I take it upon myself, the sin, that this mikvah is not perfect, built according to the opinion of the Beit Yehuda." But the Baba Sali, stood firm, replying, "we are obligated to empty the mikvah." So, they drained the mikvah, and completed the design according

to the Beit Yehuyda, in splendour and perfection. The Baba Sali then raised his eyes to Heaven again, and beseeched of Hashem: "Master of the universe, you know very well that we made this mikvah not for my honour, or the honour of my father, but rather, only to increase the increase purity among Israel, Your people. Please, don't turn Your face from us, and let it rain! Let the mikvah will with fresh, new rain water..." Then, as before, in the midst of the dry, scolding summer, the sky darkened... clouds gathered... and rain began to fall.

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RED SEA FREIGHT

1. Who does the word "eilav" in verse 1:1 exclude?

1:1 - Aharon.

2. Name all the types of animals and birds mentioned in this week's Parsha.

1:2,14, 3:12 - Cattle, sheep, goats, turtledoves (*torim*), and doves (*bnei yona*).

3. What two types of sin does an *olah* atone for?

1:4 - Neglecting a positive command, and violating a negative command which is rectified by a positive command.

4. Where was the *olah* slaughtered?

1:5 - In the *Mishkan* Courtyard (*azarah*).

5. What procedure of an animal-offering can a non-kohen perform?

1:5 - Ritual slaughter.

6. Besides the fire the *kohanim* bring on the altar, where else did the fire come from?

1:7 - It descended from Heaven.



7. At what stage of development are *torim* (turtledoves) and *bnei yona* (young pigeons) unfit as offerings?

1:14 - When their plumage turns golden. At that stage, *bnei yona* are too old and *torim* are too young.

8. What is *melika*?

1:15 - Slaughtering a bird from the back of the neck using one's fingernail.

9. Why are animal innards offered on the altar, while bird innards are not?

1:16 - An animal's food is provided by its owner, so its innards are "kosher." Birds, however, eat food that they scavenge, so their innards are tainted with "theft."

10. Why does the Torah describe both the animal and bird offerings as a "satisfying aroma"?

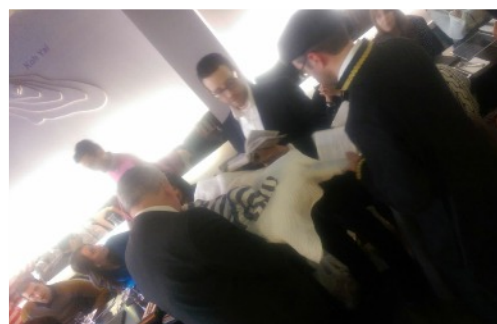
1:17 - To indicate that the size of the offering is irrelevant, provided your heart is directed toward G-d.

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