Vayikra: Vayikra (Leviticus)

What's it all about?

God summons Moses to the Tent of Meeting, teaching him the laws of the *korbanot*, or the sacrifices and offerings brought in the sanctuary. These include *Olah*, the ascending offering, burned on the altar; *Minchah*, or various kinds of meal offerings prepared with flour, olive oil, and frankincense; *Shelamim*, or peace offerings, meat consumed by those who brought the offerings after portions have been given to the priests; *Chatat*, or sin offerings, brought to atone for transgressions of different sorts; and *Asham*, brought by anyone who is in doubt as to whether he sinned or not or by those who committed a "betrayal against God" by swearing falsely.



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"He called out to Moses. God spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, instructing him to address the people."

Take a deeper dive

This week's parsha kicks off the third of the Torah's books, the book of *Vayikra*, or Leviticus. As the name implies, it deals with the commandments pertaining to the tribe of Levi, the priestly class. This is why we refer to Leviticus as *Sefer HaKedusha*, or the book of sanctity.

Read it on a Torah scroll, and you'll notice something striking: the last letter of the parsha's first word, an *alef*, is almost comically small. Why?

Jacob Ben Asher, the 14th century rabbi known as Ba'al HaTurim, gave us a stunning explanation. Behold, he suggested, the parsha's first verse: "And He called to Moses, and the Lord spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting." Now, Ba'al HaTurim explained, this is Moses we're talking about! The holy man. The man who had already spent two stints—a total of 120 days—high up on the mountain with HaShem. So when the *mishkan* is finally built, and the Tent of the Meeting—the designated place for humans to convene with God—stands firm, you'd think Moses would simply walk right in and survey the magnificent edifice his flock just spent all this time and all this money building. But Moses does no such thing. Instead, he waits for God to summon him, to call to him, before entering the *mishkan*. **He makes himself small, like that *alef*, showing his *derech eretz*, or his humility, empathy, and care.**

And that is how we, too, should proceed in our own lives: It's up to us to understand, like Moses, that the story isn't about us, that we're just one tiny letter in an otherwise much larger and magnificent saga, the story of the Jewish people. Only once we realize that can we hear that moment of *Vayikra*, that divine calling urging us on.

But hearing the divine calling isn't easy. Explaining our parsha's first verse, Rashi argues that God kept on repeatedly calling on Moses, giving him ample time between each calling to process and understand the holy commandments he was receiving from on high. *HaShem*, in other words, understands what Apple's engineers, say, do not, namely that the human cognitive and processing capacity is limited. We cannot compute a torrent of data and stimuli; if we are truly to understand something, to internalize it, to transform it into valuable insights, **we need time to think and feel our way through life.**

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