YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

**PARASHAT VAYIKRA**

**SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN ZT”L**

“And He Called to Moshe”

Translated by Kaeren Fish

The Call as a Continuation of *Sefer Shemot*

Last week’s *parasha*, concluding *Sefer Shemot*, described a situation in which Moshe was unable to enter the *Mishkan*:

And the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the *Mishkan*. And Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud rested upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the *Mishkan*. (*Shemot* 40:34-35)

The first verse in our *parasha*, introducing *Sefer Vayikra*, goes on to describe the encounter between Moshe and the Divine Presence:

And He called to Moshe, and the Lord spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying… (*Vayikra* 1:1)

The two verses are actually a single unit, representing the continuation of the historical record of Moshe’s first encounter with God within the *Mishkan*. In fact, there is a very similar verse earlier in *Sefer Shemot*, appearing as part of a longer description:

And the glory of the Lord rested upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day, He called to Moshe out of the mist of the cloud. (*Shemot* 24:16)

The Call as a Contrast to *Sefer Shemot*

However, upon closer examination, we discover that there is a different way of understanding the relationship between the two verses. From *Shemot* 40:34-35, it is clear that Moshe is unable to enter the Tent of Meeting. The Divine Presence is too overwhelming, too intense an experience. The first verse of *Sefer Vayikra* is a contrast; here, God calls to Moshe to enter, and he enters and hears God’s command. What changed in between these two verses? How is it that Moshe is first unable to enter and forced to remain outside, but afterwards is able to enter and to listen to God speaking?

If we look back to the beginning of *Sefer Shemot*, we find another occasion when Moshe was hesitant and afraid of an encounter with God. We refer here to the events at the burning bush:

And Moshe hid his face for he feared to gaze at God. (*Shemot* 3:6)

The *gemara* (*Berakhot* 7a) records a difference of opinion among the *Amora’im* as to whether Moshe’s covering of his face is noted by the Torah in a positive or negative light. Either way, why did Moshe hide his face? We might answer this question from two different perspectives:

1. Moshe himself: As *Chazal* define it, at this early stage, Moshe was still a “novice prophet”. His lack of experience and relatively low level of prophecy led him to choose to avoid this direct exposure to God.
2. Moshe as representative of the nation: The prophet is the emissary of the people, and his status is in direct proportion to theirs. *Am Yisrael* at this time was mired in the 49th level of impurity. Moshe, as representative of the people, could not expose himself to too high a level of prophecy, which would not match their spiritual state.

However, in *Parashat Pekudei*, the situation has changed from both perspectives. Moshe himself is certainly no longer a novice when it comes to prophecy; he has reached the highest level. And *Am Yisrael*, spiritually speaking, has come a long way since their slavery in Egypt. They have experienced the plagues, the exodus, the splitting of the Reed Sea, and the culmination of this entire process at Mount Sinai. It can no longer be said of them that they (or their representative) are unworthy of the Divine Presence or of entering the Sanctuary.

Why, then, do we find that Moshe is unable to enter the *Mishkan*? Let us consider two different answers.

A Call as Invitation to an Encounter

The phenomenon of prophecy itself is not an easy experience. It leaves the prophet weak and exhausted. In his definition of prophecy, the Rambam notes this as one of the differences between all the other prophets and Moshe, who experienced no such weakness. However, even for Moshe, there were limitations on what he could bear. Such massive, dense, intensive presence of God’s glory in the *Mishkan* was daunting even for him. As a result, he was able to enter only after God called upon him to do so: “And He called to Moshe…”

The word “call” (*k-r-a*, “*Vayikra*”) has two different meanings. It is sometimes used in the sense of a command or normative instruction, while at other times it signifies a type of relationship. As an example, we find that Esther says, “And I have not been called (*lo nikreiti*) to come to the king for the past thirty days” (*Esther* 4:11). It is difficult to classify unequivocally God’s call to Moshe at the beginning of our *parasha*. In any event, however, Moshe is unable to enter until he is called upon to do so.

A Call to Atonement

Another way of explaining the gap between *Parashat Pekudei* and *Parashat Vayikra* focuses on a different factor, one that looms like a shadow over *Am Yisrael* of that generation – the sin of the golden calf. In fact, the shadow looms not only over that generation, but also over *Am Yisrael* for all time, as the verse teaches:

And on the day when I punish, I will punish their sin upon them. (*Shemot* 32:34)

Think back to the description of the *teshuva* (repentance) for that sin. If you have a good memory and know *Chumash* well, you may be puzzled by the fact that you can’t place where exactly we read of the nation’s repentance! The explanation is simple: Nowhere is any such description recorded. Moshe performs an act that is meant to bring atonement, leading the tribe of Levi with the call, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Let him come to me!” (*Shemot* 32:26). But nowhere is there any record of the people’s repentance.

Ramban, at the beginning of *Parashat Vayakhel*, speaks of a complete *tikkun* (repair) and a return to the previous situation:

He issued another command, and the entire congregation gathered to him – men and women alike. This might have taken place on the morrow of his descent. And he told them all about the idea of the *Mishkan*, concerning which he had been commanded previously, before he broke the Tablets. For since God had been appeased towards them and He gave them the second Tablets and forged a covenant with [Moshe] that God would accompany them in their midst, they returned to their previous situation, and the love of them like a bride, knowing that God’s Presence would be in their midst, as He had commanded him previously. (Ramban, *Shemot* 35:1)

However, even as Ramban speaks of a return to the nation’s previous status, he must admit that there is no description of a national campaign of repentance.

What does this have to do with *Sefer Vayikra*? *Parashat* *Vayikra* opens with various voluntary sacrifices, and soon moves on to the different sin offerings: the sin offering of the individual and of the collective; the sin offering of the *nasi*; and the sin offering of the *mashiach*. One sin offering following the next, all entailing confession. Whether this confession is, as the Rambam maintains, the culmination of the process of *teshuva*, or whether it is one of its early stages, all opinions agree that the confession is an essential and significant part of that process. This element is integral to all the sin offerings mentioned in *Parashat Vayikra*.

Moreover, aside from the sin offerings listed in our *parasha, Chazal* view even the voluntary sacrifices as bringing about atonement and repair. For example, the burnt sacrifices comes to atone for a positive commandment that was neglected or to repair other misdeeds. Seemingly, our *parasha* illustrates, time and time again, the same principle of repair, atonement, and repentance that was so blatantly lacking in *Sefer Shemot*.

We learn from all of this that a significant, intensive presence of God’s glory may not allow a person to draw close. As high as the nation’s spiritual level might be, and as unique, singular, and advanced as Moshe may be in his level of prophecy, the lack of a general movement of repentance stands in the way. Only with the command concerning the sacrifices of atonement in *Sefer* *Vayikra* can Moshe receive and respond to the Divine call and enter the Sanctuary.

The encounter and meeting with God require of Moshe – and continue to require of each and every one of us – a profound and far-reaching process of repentance and repair. This alone clears the way for the encounter with the glory of God that fills the *Mishkan.*

(Sicha originally given Leil Shabbat Parashat Vayikra 5772 / 2012. Summarized by Immanuel Meyer.)