

GAINING JOY IN TORAH

Parshas Vayikro

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The opening verse of the third Chumash, Vayikro, is fundamentally applicable to the whole Torah. Rashi quotes the Sifra, that before Hashem spoke to Moshe, whether in a form of a command or any communication, He preceded with VAYIKRO. Hashem first summoned Moshe lovingly, calling him by name “Moshe Moshe”, notifying him that Hashem is about to speak to him.

At first glance, this introduction may be regarded no more than normal protocol, similar to seeking to contact someone for some reason, calling before coming to visit. However, this is much more. This call, writes Rashi, was with the language of love, LOSHON CHIBA.

There is a known custom in Torah education when a child reaches the age to learn Chumosh, to begin with the portion VAYIKRO. The Midrash offers a reason: “The children are pure and the Korbonos (sacrifices on the altar) are pure, let the innocent pure children come and occupy themselves with matters of purity (a reference to Korbonos) (Vayikro Raba 7:3). Rashi’s quote, “a language of love” may be an additional reason to begin Vayikro. It is to impress upon the child that his teacher bequeaths Torah to him out of profound love. This helps cement a loving relationship between teacher and student, which is so essential to stimulate joy in Torah learning. “Rejoice Zebulun in your excursions, and Issachar in your tents” (Devorim 33:18). The blessing to rejoice applies to Issachar as well. The tent, says Rashi, is a reference to the house of Torah study. Joy in learning is a vital element in achieving success.

The second Bracha before reciting the Shema, both morning and evening, concludes with Hashem's love of Israel. The main theme of these Brochos is learning Torah with joy. How is it that these Brochos conclude with love of Israel? Apparently transmitting Torah with love is requisite in attaining joy thereof. The Vayikro warmth, helpful to Moshe, remarkably is also helpful to every impressionable child.

It remains to explore the connection of Vayikro introduction to the theme of Korbonos (sacrifices), which is the subject of the first six Sidrahs. It would have been more appropriate to mention the introduction in the second Chumash, Shemos, where Hashem communicates with Moshe close to fifty times.

The joyous spirit of Purim already in the air, it may be permitted to take a leaf from this upcoming holiday as a clue for insight in the above. One of the popular anecdotes of Purim is the "requirement" to imbibe wine during the Purim Seudah more than one is accustomed, "Ad Delo Yoda". From the point of Halacha, it is sufficient to drink a little more than used to. Why, then, use the extreme level? Perhaps it causes to ponder, what good quality can be learned from one who imbibed much more, to the point of "ad d'lo yoda"? It is the extraordinary friendship he demonstrates, asking his neighbor, his friend, to drink with him. He feels compelled to share his drink. To put this characteristic into a sacred Purim text, it is in the joyous Purim song "Shoshanas Yaakov... Someicho BiReosom Yachad...". The YACHAD represents the hearty inner feeling of togetherness. The "BiReosom" (Yachad) adds the friendship outwardly as well, the joy and the togetherness is noticed by all.

Chumosh Vayikro is a HEMSHECH, continuation to the last portions of Shemos, which elaborates about the MISHKAN, the

purpose of which is, the presence of SHECHINA in our midst. From there, at the Cherubim, came forth Hashem's communication with us. Vayikro goes a giant step further. Not only divine communication with Israel; even a friendship of sitting together, KEVEYCHOL (so to speak), at the dining room table. Some Korbonos are eaten by Kohanim only, some by non-Kohanim as well. The non-edible part is burned on the altar, called "achilas hamizbaiach", food of the altar. Numerous times in the Torah is the Korbon called Zevach l'Hashem. This is the ultimate of closeness to Hashem, as if a quest at our dining table.

Chumosh VAYIKRO is therefore the most appropriate context to reveal that extra loving summons to Moshe, representing that unique loving relationship between Hashem and Israel.

Many kolelim concentrate on studying that branch of Talmud called Kodoshim. Already the Chofetz Chaim encouraged kolelim to do so, saying: Soon the Beth Hamikdosh will be rebuilt, we will not know its laws, especially the korbonos. "Meanwhile", until that awesome day, we "recite" the mishnayos relating to the korbonos. "Whoever studies the laws of a Chatos is as if he brought a Korbon Chatos on the altar" (Menochos 110a).

No doubt the "daveners", conscious of the Rashi about the loving call in the beginning of Vayikro, recite those mishnayos with the mindfulness of that closeness to Hashem. How meaningful their daily entreaty, at the conclusion of those mishnayos, "May it be Thy will that the Beth Hamikdosh be rebuilt speedily in our days".

