

Every now and then we come across a pasuk, a word, or even a letter that reminds us of the Divinity of our Torah and its Kedusha. At times, even a mere translation can evoke within us such feelings.

A case in point is our parasha. ל-א ויצב שם מזבח ויקרא לו ל-א אלקי ישראל [33:20] “There he [Yaakov] erected an altar, and called it “GD, (is) the GD of Israel.” This is Rashi’s translation. Rashi then cites the Gemara Megillah (18a), translating this phrase differently: “*and the GD of Israel called him ל-א.*”

There is a vast difference and halachic implications to the two translations. According to Rashi’s translation, the word Alef-Lamed ל-א, has the Kedushah of GD’s name, so the Sofer [scribe] must have the proper Kavanah [intention] while writing it, otherwise, the Sefer Torah is pasul [invalid]. Some even hold that the Sofer must go to the Mikvah before writing GD’s name. However, according to the Gemara, the word Alef-lamed referring to Yaakov, has no Divine connotation in this context, and therefore does not require this Kavanah. Furthermore, Rav Soloveitchik suggested that if one has Kavanah for writing GD’s name while writing a word that is not in fact GD’s name, the Sefer Torah is also pasul. According to halacha, we rule in accordance with Rashi’s interpretation of this phrase, so that while writing the word ל-א in this pasuk, one must have the Kavanah for GD’s name.

Along the lines of the second translation, the Midrash [Bereishit Rabbah] cites a perplexing statement by Yaakov directed to GD: *You are the GD above, and I am the GD below.* So the Rav explained this assertion through the imperative of *vehalachta bidrachav*, that man must imitate GD’s attributes. Thus, *You are the GD above*, because the angels can observe You and imitate Your ways, while *I am the GD below*- man observes me, and learns of GD’s ways through my actions.

The Divine Presence is reflected in the biography of our great leaders. Just as Avraham responded with “Hineini”- I am ready and willing to oblige with anything You ask of me. Just as Yaakov tithed everything he earned (28:22) so must we give charity. From Yosef we learn to be forgiving and not to take revenge. From Moshe we learn the attribute of patience, how he learned to see the good in the Children of Israel despite their repeated infractions in the desert. So must we learn to see the good in every Jew despite his non-observance of Torah and Mitzvot [at this moment]

Yaakov wanted to publicize his gratitude to HaShem for His Kindness and Compassion so he named every altar that he erected with GD’s name. So too, many parents stamp their children’s name with ל-א, Micha-el, Dani-el, Refa-el, Gamli-el, Yisra-el, etc. It’s a wonderful beracha for the child and merit for all of us to have GD’s name always in our midst.

Shabbat Shalom from Brooklyn, NY.

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler