

The little Aleph...

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The book of Vayikra opens with the God calling out to Moses from the newly established Mishkan¹. When one looks into the Torah scroll, you find the letter aleph in the word Vayikra shrunk. While the common answer as to why it is reduced in size is because it will make children ponder and ask questions, as traditionally (as we will see later) the book of Vayikra was the starting point of Torah instruction for children, I believe that the little aleph has a much greater philosophical reason.

The Kitzur Baal HaTurim explains that the little aleph represents the kind of relationship that Moses and God had, one of love, respect and empathy. God didn't just happen on Moses, Moses doesn't just get random voices in his head barking instructions, rather God calls out, and gives warning². Rashi comments similarly (not focussing on the little aleph), establishing that the way in which Jewish prophets receive communication from God is always done in an endearing manner³.

Moses however, at least according to the Kitzur Baal HaTurim doesn't want to publicise this difference, and originally he wrote the word vaikar without an aleph, God instructs him to add the aleph, and so Moses writes it small.

Moses acts out of humility. As we know the Torah establishes that Moses was incredibly humble. But this act of humility goes a step further. What Moses does with the little aleph is establishes a foundational principle of Torah and humility.

The Talmud in Tractate Sotah tells us that Sinai became the mountain on which the Torah was given because it was the smallest of all peaks⁴, and in Tractate Eruvin it tells us that a person who is humble in their Torah knowledge and wisdom will have their Torah legacy live on⁵.

In discussing the custom of having children begin with Vayikra, Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli comments that it is because of the laws found within the book – they are about sacrifices, about avodah, worship of God. As the Jewish people are commanded to be a nation of priests, what better way than to start early and teach children about what our worshiping looks like, what purity looks like, what avodah and connection to God looks like.

I might say the same thing about the little aleph – what better way to instill in our children the attribute of humility than by starting with the little aleph, and teaching them the message that Moses is trying to convey to all generations.

As Rabbi Dr Aaron Lichtenstein says “The Torah wants Man to work on nature and improve it, to conquer the earth and understand it, but at the same time to perceive the world in its hidden and obscure state, thus maintaining Man's lowliness and humility.”

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**