
The little Aleph...

Rabbi Alon Meltzer

A New Page of Talmud

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Vayikra 5782



God called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: **Vayikra 1:** The alph of *vayikra* is small, since Moses wanted to write *vayikar* (he happened), as it is said of Bilaam, as if God had only happened upon him accidentally. God told him to write an aleph, so he wrote it small. **Kitzur Baal haTurim on Vayikra 1:1**² It is a way of expressing affection, the mode used by the ministering angels when addressing each other, as it is said (Isaiah 6:3) "And one called unto another [and said, Holy, holy, holy is *Adonai* of hosts]". To the prophets of the nations of the world, however, God revealed himself in a manner which Scripture describes by an expression ordinarily used for denoting events of a casual character -

God called to Moses and spoke...

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֶּר־ה' **Vayikra 1:1**

Rashi on Vayikra 1:1³ The Holy One, Blessed be God, disregarded all of the mountains and hills, and rested God's Divine Presence on the lowly Mount Sinai, and God did not choose to raise Mount Sinai up. God chose to give the Torah on Mount Sinai, as it was a symbol of humility due to its lack of height, and God lowered God's Divine Presence, as it were, to the mountain. – **Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sotah 5a**⁴ And Rabbi Eliezer also said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "His cheeks are like a bed of spices" (Song of Songs 5:13)? If a person makes himself humble like this garden bed upon which everyone treads, and like this spice with which everyone perfumes himself, i.e., which benefits not only the one who wears it, his Torah study will endure.

But if not, his Torah study will not endure.– **Babylonian Talmud Tractate Eruvin 54a**⁵ For many generations there has been a custom to begin a child's learning of Chumash with Sefer Vayikra, which Chazal call Torat Kohanim. The explanation is found as far back as the midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Tzav 479): "Why do young children start with Torat Kohanim? Let them start with Bereishit? Since the korbanot (sacrifices) are pure and the children are pure, let the pure come and deal with the pure."

Vayikra is not a book whose purpose is just to provide practical instructions on the way to bring sacrifices. Rather, it deals, on a fundamental basis, with Bnei Yisrael as a mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh (kingdom of priests and a holy nation). There is no more appropriate time to inculcate these values into children as when they have the freshness and purity of young age. – **Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli**⁶

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