



## The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

### Vayikra: The Power of Preparation

**Please discuss:**

- What is more authentic, a spontaneous feeling, or a moment that you have prepared for?
- Do prophets prepare to talk to God or does it just happen?
- Is a vacation better if you plan for it? How about a business meeting? A date?

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

Many commentators have dealt with the dual calling, the repeated verb, in the opening line of Vayikra. Frequently, a new section of the Torah begins with the phrase: “And the Lord spoke to Moses saying.” Here, God “CALLED to Moses, and the Lord SPOKE to him.” Why the double communication? Rashi addresses this element of repetition:

For every communication [between God and Moses], whether denoted by the expressions: “And He spoke,” “and He said,” “and He commanded,” all were preceded by a prior summons [ויקרא]; This is an expression of affection, the same expression employed by the ministering angels [when addressing each other], as it says, “And one called (וּקְרָא) to the other...” ([Isa. 6:3](#)). To the prophets of the nations of the world, however, He revealed Himself through expressions denoting coincidence and impurity, as the verse says, “and God happened upon (וַיִּקְרָא) Balaam” ([Num. 23:4](#)).

Rashi has a habit of opening each and every book of the Torah with a comment about God’s love for Israel.<sup>1</sup> Here Rashi suggests that God calls out to Moses before engaging him in conversation or instruction, giving him the opportunity to prepare himself and to enter the divine encounter in the appropriate frame of mind. God is

sensitive to Moses in that he doesn't want to take him by surprise. But the upshot of this comment is that a Godly epiphany necessitates that one is primed, focused.

Rashi adds a further point. He suggests that a spontaneous address by God reflects "impurity." The corollary then is that sanctity is based in an atmosphere of preparation, by planning and forethought. Our contemporary society romanticizes spontaneity, as if immediate, instinctive and impulsive actions are an ultimate test of truth; a window into one's heart, a person's inner world. Rashi here is proposing an alternative model of authenticity, as we recite in Lecha Dodi:

סוף מעשה במחשבה תחילה / The (successful) completion of a process is due to the initial thought and planning

A look at *peshat* (the literal meaning) explains it beautifully. At the end of the Book of Shemot, we read:

Then a cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud abode on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. (Exodus 40:34-36)

Moses is waiting for God to invite him in. Why is Moses not allowed in initially? Why the wait? And at what point does God respond? Very simply, it is in our opening verse:

And [He] called to Moses, and God spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying... (Leviticus 1:1)

In other words, Moses has to wait for God! Then, *Vayikra* - God calls him in, *VaYedaber* - he speaks to him. But why the wait? Back to Rashi: There is value in the wait. It prepares Moses for the great rendezvous with the Almighty. God teaches us that when something is valuable, it would be good to adjust and focus our senses, to purify our thoughts and minds.

And indeed our tradition teaches the power of preparation. The month of Elul precedes Rosh Hashanah, halakha mandates preparations on Friday for Shabbat; what is Pesach without the planning beforehand? To enter the Temple, all manner of purification processes are necessary! If it is to be worthwhile, it needs prior planning and forethought. The Talmud tells us that the pious men of that era would sit and prepare before they prayed. They planned, meditated and studied for a considerable amount of time. We cannot rightfully expect prayer to be deep and moving if we run off the street with a hundred things on our minds and then say the words. Our minds are elsewhere! Proper prayer needs serious planning.

This lesson is a difficult one in our digital, instant, online age. And yet, if we **do** want to reach *kedusha*, a genuine contact with God and a deep sense of His presence, it

needs to be preceded by קריאה - by anticipation and preparation, a slow, gradual process. Not spontaneity but rather hard persistent work must precede our encounter with God.

Shabbat Shalom!

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<sup>i</sup> In this instance, he also seems to denigrate gentile prophets. Having lived through the first Crusade and seeing the mass-murder of Jewish communities in the Rhinelands, Rashi was not always charitably disposed to his gentile environment.