

PARSHAS VAYIKRA

תשע"ט

I'd like to finish off a topic mentioned last week which is very significant in people's lives.

Moshe Rabbeinu is an individual who was on an unbelievably high level. Initially, Klal Yisroel didn't appreciate this level. When Moshe was first approached to lead Klal Yisroel, there was an already existing leadership in Egypt of Amram and Aharon, who carried the burden of supporting the Jews throughout the bitter golus. When Moshe was introduced to take over the leadership, he had to be introduced to Klal Yisroel by Aharon. The people accepted it at first because there was a long-standing tradition passed from generation to generation that a redeemer would come to take them out of Egypt with the phrase pakod pokaditi. But as the process of geuloh progressed, instead of things getting better, things got drastically worse. Klal Yisroel had no complaints against Hashem, rather, they challenged Moshe Rabbeinu's claim that he is the one who is supposed to save Klal Yisroel on Hashem's behalf. They were questioning Moshe as a representative of Hashem.

After the ten makkos and the total destruction of Egypt, and after kriyas Yam Suf and maamad Har Sinai, after hearing Hashem talking directly to Moshe Rabbeinu in nevuoh, there can no longer be a shadow of doubt that Moshe Rabbeinu represents the will of Hashem on the highest level. This makes their suspicion of Moshe Rabbeinu at this point all the more damaging.

If there had been some anonymous individual who just showed up one day and told Klal Yisroel a story about his nevuoh from Hashem and performed some flashy hocus pocus miracles, we could understand their skepticism. But after more than a year of performing open miracles involving the total breakdown of natural law affecting millions of people and seeing Hashem communicate with him directly, to then suspect Moshe Rabbeinu of theft is completely irrational. There is something more going on here. It would seem there is a powerful subconscious force within people to want to deny that other human beings are morally and spiritually superior and live on a higher level.

The tendency of human nature is to project one's own character flaws and weaknesses and those in one's close social circle to everyone else you come in contact with. You naturally assume that even those known to be pure and holy people really can't be much different than anybody else.

There is currently a trend in the liberal end of the Orthodox rabbinic world today to bring down the personalities of Chumash to our level and criticize them for their apparent character flaws. Why? It is because they simply haven't been exposed to people who have lived their lives on a higher level. They can't conceive something that is totally outside their frame of reference.

But Klal Yisroel were exposed to Moshe Rabbeinu and they should have appreciated the level he was on. The fact that they still suspected him of low character shows that they weren't prepared to confront their own low level and be inspired by Moshe Rabbeinu's example to improve.

It is a very important part of a person's chinuch to interact regularly with people who are on a higher level—whose lives are lived on a different level entirely. Only by so doing, can a person develop an awareness of what a human being can become and have ambitions to aspire to greatness himself.

The problem with the relationship between many people and their rabbonim is that people view a rabbi as someone who is basically just like them but went to a rabbinic academy to get a diploma. They don't view a rav as someone who is on a different level. Part of the obligation of aseil lecho rav is to submit yourself to someone whose behavior is different and whose entire being is a deep immersion in Torah. This consistent immersion throughout life is what uplifts one. Toiling in Torah uplifts you.

A significant percentage of Klal Yisroel didn't allow themselves to be inspired by Moshe Rabbeinu. They were too firmly stuck in their lower level that they had the psychological need to pull down to their level those who are greater than themselves.

The problem with many gedolim biographies is that you don't see the ameilus and the effort that these people put into themselves to make themselves great. Only by seeing this ameilus and seeing what it can produce, can give you the feeling that you are obligated to do the work and push yourself as far as you can go.

Moshe Rabbeinu was the onov mikol odom. He was the greatest novi in human history! He spoke to Hashem fully conscious. How is it possible to be humble while at the same time he knew how great he was. Anivus is a deep middoh. Chazal say that even if you learn a lot of Torah, don't take the credit for yourself. This is what you are born to do—everyone is obligated to actualize their G-d-given potential. Hashem gave each individual the tools to do the job they were created to carry out in this world.

Moshe Rabbeinu saw himself as the same as anyone who is trying to maximize the potential that Hashem gave him. This is what kept his anivus despite having the highest level of nevuoh.

Parshas Vayikra

Hashem called to Moshe to enter the Ohel Moed to talk face-to-face with the Shechinoh. Only Moshe Rabbeinu heard this call and no-one else. But, it was the same voice that was heard at Har Sinai. The difference is that at Har Sinai, Klal Yisroel were able to overhear this conversation in order to achieve total belief in the truth of Moshe Rabbeinu's nevuoh. But, this was an exception—in order to establish Moshe as the one to communicate the will of Hashem to the world in a completely authentic way. But in the Ohel Moed, this wasn't necessary.

The Chumash gives enormous amount of space to describe each type of korbon—with many repetitive details. When the Torah discusses hilchos shomrim for instance, it devotes a scant number of pesukim in Parshas Mishpotim and in Ki Seitzei which takes a few perakim in Bava Metzia and scattered sugyos in Bava Kamma to explicate. Why the disproportionate treatment? Apparently korbonos serve a vital role in understanding what yiddishkeit is all about.

Every ger needs to bring a korbon, just as Klal Yisroel brought a korbon at Har Sinai at kabbolas haTorah. Being Jewish means bringing a korbon. The posuk describing Kayin and Hevel's korbon reveals something very deep about what a korbon is supposed to be; with Hevel it says 'gam hu'—Hevel offered himself along with his best animal. Kayin brought second-grade produce as a korbon.

They both knew instinctively that korbonos are expected to be brought once you achieve material success. People realize that they need help from Hashem to survive and prosper. Some people show this gratitude enthusiastically—like Hevel—who wanted to give back

the best and give back of himself. If you resent the fact that you are beholden to Hashem for everything, and you'd rather feel that you are self-sufficient, then you try to get away with the bare minimum. You give back the lower quality and you don't give of yourself—like Kayin.

When Avrohom Ovinu went with Yitzchak to perform the akeidoh, the Soton tried to distract him and discourage him. How do we know this? It took three days to reach Har HaMoriah from Chevron. It shouldn't take that long! It means everything was going wrong and causing delay after delay. But despite it all, Avrohom didn't change his mind. He didn't lose his enthusiasm. He was ready and willing to offer up his one and only son from Soroh Imeinu to Hashem, and he was all psyched up—till Hashem stops him at the last minute.

Hashem wants to know if Avrohom is only capable of sacrificing his son because he put himself in a state of fanatic religious fervor. He wants to see if Avrohom is able to turn off the enthusiasm in an instant and not be pushed by his fiery emotions to continue with the akeidoh no matter what. It was an incredible nisayon on many levels. Avrohom succeeded, and stopped in an instant. It was without ego—without selfish satisfaction. This is total yiras shomayim—total kabbolas ol.

Immediately afterwards Avrohom picks up his eyes and sees a ram tangled in the thicket by its horns. He brings it up as an olah instead of his son. This is the yesod of all korbonos. Avrohom is telling Hashem: "I was willing to give up my most precious possession in the universe—my own beloved son. That was one incredible nisayon. I was ready to go through with it and show the world that I will not hold anything back in fulfilling Your will. But then You suddenly stopped me—all this built-up willingness to sacrifice was never expressed in action—this was yet another huge nisayon. Hashem, please take this animal korbon as a way of expressing what I was fully willing to sacrifice for You. Consider it as though I actually gave up my own son for You—a substitute for Yitzchak. I am not here for anything but to do your will. It was not for my own ego—but to express my willingness to sacrifice everything."

This is what kaporos and korbon chatos is all about. It is a substitute for ourselves because we really deserve to be brought as a korbon whenever we do an aveiroh. It expresses the willingness to sacrifice ourselves to Hashem. In our own lives, we are routinely confronted with great nisyonos where we are forced to show a willingness to sacrifice. We need to acknowledge that the will of Hashem is paramount and our own selfish desires and ego is secondary.

At every juncture in life, at every cross-roads—we ask ourselves a simple question, what is the will of Hashem for me at this moment?

We owe everything we have to Hashem, and we need to be willing to give it up for Him if He demands it. This is the idea behind korbonos.

This is why, at the beginning of the parsha of korbonos, we begin with a small alef. When Hashem calls to Moshe, it is with humility and submission—Moshe's ego isn't inflated by the experience, it is humbled. Because with the experience of nevuoh one comes to know intimately how great Hashem is and how nothing in the Universe exists without Him. By ourselves, we are nothing. Everything Moshe achieved is only because Hashem gave him the potential.

People don't appreciate great human beings. Some people feel inferior because great people show them that they didn't take the opportunity to maximize their potential like they did. They prefer to follow people with overblown egos who need to make a big splash and get everyone's attention. They are narcissistic and full of themselves, but at the same time charismatic and people easily get drawn after them. If anyone had the right to have a large ego it was Moshe Rabbeinu. But he was the most humble of men.

The gemara in Eiruvim makes an incredible statement. Who is a ben olam haboh? Someone who comes in quietly and leaves quietly, doesn't make any fuss about himself—he doesn't project his ego. He is constantly immersed in learning, and he doesn't think he is anything special because of it.

Here we have a parsha of Hashem addressing Moshe Rabbeinu, but at the same time, it emphasizes the humility of Moshe Rabbeinu with a small alef. It is emphasized in this parsha of korbonos in particular because everything we have is all a gift from Hashem—there is no room for ego. We give to Hashem of ourselves. We are not like Kayin who wanted to take care of his obligation with the bare minimum—he can't bear to acknowledge that he is nothing without Hashem. Kayin missed the point. His korbon wasn't accepted. Hevel got the point—he gave up of himself and Hashem accepted his korbon.

Kayin got upset at the rejection and Hashem sympathized with the difficulty of grappling with the human ego. Hashem tried to encourage Kayin by telling him that it's up to him whether he succeeds or fails in his struggle with the yetzer. He has the power to overcome and sublimate his yetzer. We do it by being immersed in Torah day and night.

Moshe Rabbeinu's greatness was in realizing that all his lofty achievements came from the potential Hashem gave him. He took absolutely no credit for any of it. The concept behind korbonos is the realization that all that I have comes from Hashem, and that I am willing to sacrifice everything to do His will, and will hold nothing back.