

MARCH 10, 2008

## Parashat Vayikra

### Humble Pie

#### Vayikra el Moshe “And He called to Moshe” (Leviticus 1:1)

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When reading the Hebrew, we notice that the word *vayikra* is written with a small *alef*. In Numbers (23:16), God’s prophecy to Bilaam is referred to by the word *vayikar* (without an *alef*), a word that can have two connotations: “chance” (*mikreh*) and “spiritual contamination” (see Samuel 20:26). The implication of this phraseology is that while God, indeed, called to Bilaam, He did not do so with affection. The Baal HaTurim, in his commentary, tells us that the humble Moshe intended to use the same term for his calling as the one used for Bilaam. In His love for Moshe, God instructed him to use the *alef* but Moshe, ever the humble servant, could not aggrandize himself more than to use a miniature letter.

While Moshe’s humility is an admirable trait, it is interesting that HaShem, in this case, wants him to stand out a little.

Too often, people in our community who love Israel are reluctant to make the pro-Israel case to their leaders in Congress. “Surely, they know more than I do about these issues,” they think. “Why would a Member of Congress want to hear from me?” While the humility in these statements may be admirable, the truth is that our leaders in Washington both want and need to hear from us. Representatives and Senators are responsible for a wide range of issues and simply cannot be experts on everything. With the exception of a very few foreign policy experts, most Members are focused on the domestic concerns of their states and districts. They rely on their constituents to tell them when important pieces of legislation are being considered. And they rely on constituents to explain and contextualize current events.

A perfect opportunity to take the pro-Israel case to our Members of Congress is AIPAC’s Policy Conference. After two full days of hearing from top policy, political, and military experts, and substantial sessions on lobbying training, delegates have the powerful experience of going to Capitol Hill to lobby their elected leaders. Humility is admirable – but, sometimes, we are called on to stand out a little. ■

### Keeping Connected

#### Vayikra el Moshe “And He called to Moshe” (Leviticus 1:1)

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*Davar acher.* The beginning of our *parashah* serves as a link between the Book of Exodus and *Torat Kohanim*. Now that the *mishkan* has been inaugurated, the Torah dictates laws that pertain to worship in the Temple. Moshe is summoned by God to speak to *B’nei Yisrael*. Moshe, always the obedient and reverent leader, patiently waits to be called by God. The word *vayikra* is generally used to indicate the naming of a person, place or thing. The usage in our *parashah* is unique and distinct. HaShem speaks directly to Moshe and calls out to him. The Midrash (Vayikra

Rabbah 1:9) teaches us that the calling to Moshe was not like the calling to Avraham. All others received God's word in a dream state. However, *lo kam b'Yisrael k'Moshe*. Moshe had a direct, 24/7 connection to God. Clearly, this was an uncommon relationship.

Hopefully, we are all blessed with uncommon relationships in our lives – spouses, children, parents, and dear friends. These relationships allow us to grow and prosper, to be safe from harm, and to give in return for that which we get.

The relationship between the United States and Israel certainly fits such a mold – both countries prosper from the alliance, both countries are stronger and safer, and the relationship is certainly a two-way street. Late last year, the Bush administration signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on foreign aid to Israel. Effectively an enhanced renewal of the MOU signed by then-President Clinton and then-Prime Minister Netanyahu, the MOU calls for \$30 billion in security aid over the next ten years. This figure represents an increase in security aid and an elimination of economic aid, which Israeli leaders felt Israel's economy had outgrown. In addition to the fact that 75% of this aid is spent in the United States, the U.S. benefits from the relationship in other ways. The two countries share intelligence and technology. Israel and the U.S. are working together to develop the Arrow anti-missile system and American soldiers and marines are already benefiting from Israeli military know-how being employed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While Moshe's special connection to God is of a more spiritually elevated nature, the bond between the U.S. and Israel is of vital important to both countries and should be deepened and strengthened. ■

## Listen Up

### **Tishava l'vatei vis'fatayim “If he swore rashly with his lips” (Leviticus 5:4)**

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In detailing the punishment for sins of omission, our *parashah* briefly discusses the topic of oaths. Judaism generally frowns on swearing lest the swearer prove incapable fulfilling the oath. The word used most often for oath is *sh'vua* – a word that also appears in this section. However, the phrase from our *pasuk*, *l'vatei visfatayim*, has a much more nuanced and specific meaning. Ibn Ezra teaches us that a person “speaks with his lips and not just a thought (*hirhur*) in his heart.” The rabbis saw “uttering with our lips” as being so dangerous that they chose to include *bitu'i s'fatayim* in the *al cheit* section of the *t'fillah*.

Words matter and, once spoken, cannot be unspoken. The Psalmist (Psalms 34:14) has taught us *n'tzor l'shoncha*. When someone does not guard their tongue, however, it behooves us to take seriously what they say.

Words uttered by those who want the destruction of Israel must be taken very seriously. Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has repeatedly called for Israel to be wiped off the map and referred to the Jewish state using a variety of insults. As Iran continues to pursue nuclear technology only relevant to a weapons program, these words must be taken seriously. Hizballah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has recently indicated that his terrorist organization will embark upon a “real war” against Israel. As Hizballah has demonstrated its global reach and willingness to kill non-Israeli Jews, these words must be taken seriously. Hamas continues to refuse to recognize Israel's existence and calls for the destruction of the Jewish state. As Israel faces increasing barrages of rocket attacks from Gaza, these words must be taken seriously.

Words matter and should be taken seriously. It falls to our community to sound the alarm about these dangerous actors on the world stage – not just to our congregations and friends, but to our elected leaders. ■