

B”H

I can't believe I am doing this again, writing up a speech for Shabbos more than a day in advance! But, if that is what is needed, that is what I have to do. Here goes:

This week is like the eye of a storm, with special days before and after, Parshas Hachodesh and Chazak last week and Shabbos Hagadol next week (does that mean I have to write twice as much next week?), Purim a few weeks behind us and Pesach less than two weeks ahead of us. On the Chasidic calendar, 2 Nissan, yahrzeit of the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, R. Shalom Dovber, and about week ahead of us Yud Alef Nissan, the Rebbe's birthday. Before and after Shabbos we are busy preparing for Pesach, but of course we can't do that on Shabbos. So, this Shabbos seems kind of plain vanilla, not outstanding in any way. Of course every day, every Shabbos, and every Parsha is special. Let's talk about Parshas Vayikra.

The first word of the Parsha, which gives the Parsha its name, is Vayikra – “And He called..” Hashem called to Moshe and He spoke to Him. Rashi notes that although usually when Hashem speaks to Moshe it is introduced with **וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר** or **ויאמר ה' אל משה לאמר** (“And Hashem spoke to Moshe..”) or something similar, the truth is that every time Hashem spoke to Moshe, before that came a “call” from Hashem to Moshe. The “call” is a sign of Hashem's fondness for Moshe and the Jewish people.

Vayikra is Hashem's call of love, a love which downplays our shortcomings even when it is undeniably present. And, what is Hashem calling for? For us to draw close to him. The Torah goes on to enumerate various sorts of offerings and details the procedures for each. This is introduced with the words, **כי יקריב מכם קרבן לה'** which is generally rendered as “if a person from you wishes to bring a sacrifice to Hashem.” But, it can also be read as “if a person wishes to come close to Hashem, bring your self..” Hashem is calling to us, and asking us to reach out back to Him.

These offerings, Korbonos, are meant to be brought in the Mishkan and ultimately in the Beis Hamikdash. There is a fascinating story (Shmuel II, Ch. 24) of the events leading up to the siting of the Bais Hamikdash and Korbonos.

After King David is well established he decides to count the Jewish nation which takes more than nine months. When it is done, he realizes that he should not have done that, as we read in Parshas Shekalim that the proper way to count Jews is with Machtzis

Hashekel and not by taking a census. He prays to Hashem to forgive him. The following day the prophet Gad comes to him and tells him that Hashem has given him three options for punishment: seven years of famine, three months of being forced to flee from his enemies, or 3 days of pestilence (a fancy word for epidemic).

Dovid responds with a famous line which we recite in Selichos, and in some texts of davening it is included in Tachnun: **וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־גַּד צַר־לִי מְאֹד נִפְלֵה־נָא בְיַד־ה' כִּי־רַבִּים**; **רַחֲמֵי וּבִיד־אָדָם אֶל־אִפְלָה**: "David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hands of Hashem, for His compassion is great; and let me not fall into the hands of men."

What is Dovid saying? Explains the Radak (R. Dovid Kimchi), of the three choices presented to him, the first two involve being at the mercies of other people. Famine means there is no food here, but there is the option of going somewhere else where there is food, but then one is dependent on those people to share their food. (Think of Yosef in Egypt and all the world coming to him to get food.) Being pursued by enemies certainly involves other people and one puts one's fate in their hands, depending on how vigorously they pursue and what they do if they catch him. "Pestilence," in contrast, is totally Hashem dealing directly with him. One can't beg and plead with, or wage war against a virus. It comes and goes invisibly. So, Dovid chose the one that involved Hashem and Hashem alone.

Sure enough, the three days of the pestilence began but were quickly cut short when Hashem showed His compassion. Gad then tells Dovid to purchase the threshing floor of Aravna and to build an altar and bring Korbanos there, as a sign that Hashem has forgiven him. That spot is where the Bais Hamikdash was built where Hashem rests His presence.

In short, Hashem calls to us ("Vayikra"), reaching out to give us Torah and Mitzvos through Moshe ("Vayidaber") because He loves us and wants to reciprocate by reaching out to Him, bringing ourselves close to Him ("Korban") and this all happens in Hashem's Abode in the Mishkan and Beis Hamikdash.

Like Dovid we want Hashem to deal with us directly, He and us and no one and nothing in between. When we see it that way, and opt for that, then the pestilence is cut short, and Hashem gets us started on making possible the revelation of Hashem in this world.

As we spend our days, and weeks, in seclusion in our homes, avoiding the “pestilence” and waiting for Hashem to cut it short, we are not alone. The “pestilence” is “falling in the hands of Hashem for His compassion is great.” It is our opportunity to make our homes in the the Sanctuary for the Shechina by learning and davening and doing Mitzvos in our homes.

The Rebbe notes that Moshe Rabeinu, in the concluding verses of his Brachos to the Jewish people in Parshas Vzot Habracha, declares (Devarim 33:28) that “Israel dwells securely – alone.” The Rebbe asks, “What kind of Bracha is ‘alone?’ Why is this the culminating note of blessing which form the conclusion of the Torah?” The Rebbe’s explains that the ultimate state for every Jew is to be alone, beneath his own vineyard and his own fig tree, not dependent on anyone else, in a blissful state, alone with Hashem.

Hashem is calling to us. Let us heed the call. Together in our separate homes, let’s bring it all home, by being alone with Hashem, and through this Hashem’s presence with us will be openly revealed, with the coming of Moshiach NOW.