

The Little Aleph **Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer**

ג"ר

Parshat Vayikra

In the Torah Scroll, the final letter, *aleph*, of the word וַיִּקְרָא, *vayikra*, with which the Book of Leviticus begins, is written smaller than the other letters, and we are necessarily drawn to wonder why. A strictly rationalist explanation, of course, would ascribe it to scribal error many centuries ago, an error in the Torah scroll from which all those which we have today are descended (for Torah scrolls are not written from memory but are copied, letter by letter, from an already-existing scroll).

But that rational explanation misses something. The Torah is not just what the scribes have transcribed. The Torah is a living entity, and the Torah comes to us through Divine, not solely human means. Perhaps, on a strictly historical level, the rational explanation is correct. Indeed, it very likely is exactly what happened. But that only answers the *what* of our question, not the *why*, and so we still wonder why.

Two forms of the question, then.

- ✧ Why did G*d lead the scribe to make this particular letter smaller than the others?
- ✧ What can we learn from this particular letter being written small?

Vakikra (and [G*d] called) el-Moshe (to Moses). Thus begins the Book of Leviticus. The Book of Exodus has just ended, and the *Mishkan*, the Sanctuary which we were to carry through our forty years' wandering in the wilderness, has been completed, and G*d now calls to Moses. G*d calls to Moses in a very special way, a new way, a way which is signaled to us by the small aleph at the end of the word *vayikra*.

With the Sanctuary built, we have established – at G*d's instruction – a physical form in which to receive G*d's Revelation, in which we can speak to G*d, in which we can hear G*d speak to us. Previously, G*d spoke to Moses and Moses told the people. Indeed, at the Revelation at Sinai, when the people hear G*d's unmediated Voice (Exodus 20:16), they cower in terror and say to Moses, **Thou, Moses! Speak thou to us, and we will hear. But let not G*d speak directly to us, lest we die!**

Now we have built the Sanctuary. We have a place where we can hear G*d's Voice. And G*d now speaks to Moses in a new way. In *gematria* (Hebrew numerology), *aleph* has a value of 1. *Aleph*, then, represents G*d, The One. The letter *aleph* of *vayikra* is written small to express the idea that G*d has now agreed to restrict G*dself (in a foreshadowing of *tzimtzum*, the process by which, our holy master and teacher Rabbi Isaac Luria teaches us, G*d restricted G*dself in order to provide space in which to create the Universe) in order to provide listening space in which we could hear G*d's Voice without fear of death. The *aleph* of *vayikra* is written small to signal to us that G*d has voluntarily restricted G*dself to inhabit the Sanctuary in order that we may hear G*d's Voice unmediated.

But, just as G*d has restricted G*dself in order to speak to us, so we must restrict ourselves in order to be able to hear. For the events related in the Torah are not merely (some would say not at all) historical events; they are events which are intended to take place in our own souls. It is not enough to know that G*d has restricted G*dself. We must respond if we are to hear; we must restrict ourselves.

We need to understand that we are not fully independent agents. We are Israel, ישראל, *Yisrael*, the ones who wrestle with G*d. And, by a reversal of the first two letters of the Hebrew form of *Yisrael* – changing ישראל to שיר-א*ל – we become not just the G*d-wrestlers (important as that identity is) but also the Song of G*d (שיר, *sheer*, means *song*, and א*ל is a form of G*d's Name), as we allow G*d to sing us. As we lessen our ego-involvement (a process called in the Hassidic tradition *bittul ha'yesh*), we enable G*d to sing us.

“G*d is present everywhere people permit G*d in.” –Rebbe Menahem Mendel of Kotzk.

“There is no room for G*d in one who is filled with oneself.” –The Baal Shem Tov.

May we all speedily learn to put ourselves aside in order to become G*d's Song and to hear G*d's Voice.

Shabbat Shalom.