


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 11 March 2011 - 5 Adar II 5771
 Sedra Vayikra

BOTH GREAT AND SMALL

THERE ARE MANY PARADOXES IN LIFE, MANY CONTRARY DEMANDS. One issue concerns the way we view ourselves, our self-image. Are we great or small? Do we have a sense of our own power and potential, our significance - or do we feel humble, behaving in a modest and self-effacing way? Of course, the answer is *both*, we should be both confident and powerful and also modest and unassuming. We get a clue to this “both/and” approach from a comment by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on this week’s Sedra¹.

The Sedra begins the third Book of the Torah, and the first word is *Vayikra*, - “And He called”. The beautiful Sanctuary had been built and now G-d called to Moses, that he should enter its holy inner chamber where G-d would teach him the laws of the offerings.

This moment of G-d “calling” to Moses is clearly significant, and it is expressed in the first word of this Book of the Torah: *Vayikra*. It is an important word expressing G-d’s loving relationship with Moses and, through him, with the entire Jewish people.

However, when you look at the parchment Torah Scroll you discover something strange about this first word, *Vayikra*. In English transliteration the last letter is an “A”, and similarly in Hebrew: the last letter is an Alef. But there is something strange about this Alef.



לזכרון נצח מרת טוי-ה בת פרחיה ע"ה
 In Loving Memory of Mrs Victoria Menashy ע"ה
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Following a tradition of more than three millennia the letter Alef is written in a strange and unexpected way: the Alef is small. It is a little letter, as if written in a superscript font, like the little number showing a footnote.

Why? What is the little Alef telling us? The Sages explain that it signifies the *humility* of Moses. The Alef is small because Moses was humble. In fact, the Torah later tells us about him that he “was more humble than any person on the face of the earth”². The Sages add, that he not only had a greater measure of humility in relation to G-d than anyone else, he also felt humble in relation to every other person. He felt that if anyone else had been given his own special opportunities - they would have utilised them to better effect. So rather than sensing his own power, he felt the significance of everyone around him.

So the small Alef in our Sedra means humility. By contrast, elsewhere in the Bible, we find a *large* Alef. This is in the first word of the Book of Chronicles, the word Adam. Again, the first letter is an Alef. Yet here the Alef is exceptionally *big*. Adam, the first man, created by G-d, placed in the Garden of Eden with the whole fresh world before him - Adam felt a wonderful sense of power and opportunity. Hence the large Alef.

Now the Sages do point out that this sense of his own significance may have contributed to Adam’s tragic error in eating from the Tree of Knowledge. A sense of one’s own importance can be dangerous. Nonetheless, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the teaching for each of us today is that we need both qualities. We need the small Alef of Moses, and at the same time the large Alef of Adam.

We need humility in relation to G-d and other people, and also a confident sense of our own significance, power and potential. If we lack confidence, a sense of our own worth, we may be afraid to undertake important responsibilities. At the same time, we need the humility which enables us to see the good qualities of all around us.

Balancing these two contrasting qualities, the large and the small Alef, we will be able to help complete the task given to Adam, Moses and the entire Jewish people: to reveal the Divine Presence in the world, to disclose the world of good for all humanity³.

1. Leviticus chs. 1-5. 2. Num. 12:3. 3. Based freely on *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.17, 1-8.

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SEDRA VAYIKRA

SKILL AND HUMILITY

Scowling, the boys followed Mr. Segal into his office.

The fight had begun on the pitch between Michael and Joe – the two football captains. It was about whether or not Jake scored a goal or something like that... to be honest no one even remembered what it was really about. It had somehow just turned into the battle of the egos. This was ironic because usually Michael was a quiet and humble kind of guy... That is, except for in football. Michael was always a good player but recently he had really begun to shine and somehow together with his talent, his ego shone too.

“Uhum,” Mr. Segal cleared his throat, once all the boys were seated. “Will someone care to tell me what this is all about?”

Clutching an icepack over his right arm, Joe replied in his usual confident manner. “Listen we’re super sorry about this – it’s really no big deal Mr Segal. It was just a little disagreement.”

“A *LITTLE* DISAGREEMENT?!” Mr. Segal roared, making the boys press back in their chairs. “A little disagreement leads to *this*?” His face flashed with anger as he looked around at all the bruises and what looked like the start of at least two black-eyes. “I repeat. WILL SOMEONE CARE TO TELL ME WHAT THIS IS ALL *REALLY* ABOUT?!”

“Guess it was really just about our egos,” said Michael. “We all just wanted to show we’re boss. That’s it really – it sort of went a little overboard though. Sorry everyone.”

Slowly, a small smile spread over Mr. Segal’s stern, red

face. "Boys!" he said, "Do you know why in the first word of this week's Sedra - Vayikra, the letter Alef is smaller than all the other letters?"

Looking somewhat bemused at the change of topic, Chaim replied, "To show the humility of Moses."

"Well done Chaim. But why specifically the Alef? The Alef is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, so it is, in a sense, the leader of the alphabet. If you are going to make a letter small to show his humility, could it not have been a different letter?"

Could be he was imagining it, but Michael, who was staring down at his own feet, could feel the headmaster looking at him. Slowly lifting his head, Michael said, "Umm, maybe because when someone's in a position of leadership – like doing something that they're good at, they need to make sure to stay humble too. It's easy to be humble when you're not very good at something but you've got to make sure specifically where you excel not to get bigheaded or anything."

The headmaster's face lit up. "Well said, Michael! You are right. In fact, the very thing that you are good at can bring you to more humility. Like with Moses - he thought that if someone else would have been given the same opportunities as he, then they would have surpassed his achievements. So if we keep in mind that if someone else had the same talent we have they might achieve much more, then the actual talent in which you excel can bring you to humility."

Michael thought about this. Being skilled at something can lead you to having a big head. But it can also lead to humility. Because you realize that if someone else had the same skill, they could achieve more...

Sitting in detention after school, together with several other boys, Michael regretted what had happened, especially since now he was stuck till six pm. But, at the same time, he kept thinking about the idea that Mr Segal had planted in his head. More skill can lead to more humility. Strange! He hoped that next time he would rise to the challenge.

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