

Reb Pinchas of Koretz

Imrie Pinchas Parshas Vayikra

Siman #156

Vayikra – small Alef (Leviticus, small Alef) (Leviticus Rabba 30:30). In the name of the Rav, of blessed memory, that it is stated in the Baal HaTurim that Moshe, from his great humility, wanted to write “Vayikar” as is written by Bilaam, and therefore he wrote a small Alef.	וַיִּקְרָא – א' זעירא (ל', ל). בְּשֵׁם הָרַב ז"ל, דְּאִיתָא בְּבַעַל הַתּוּרִים שְׂמִינְיָה מְרַב עֲנוּנָתוֹ רָצָה לְכַתֵּב "וַיִּקְרָא" כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב בְּבִלְעָם, וְלִכּוֹן כָּתַב א' קְטַנָּה.
And from this a person should learn to be small and lowly. And this is the meaning of “Alef” – a language of learning, to accustom oneself to be small.	וּמִזֶּה יִלְמַד הָאָדָם לְהִיּוֹת קָטָן וְשָׁפֵל. וְזֶהוּ "אֶלֶף" לְשׁוֹן לְמוֹד, לְעָרִין זִיד וְיִין קְלִיין.

[NOTE: Expounded Explanation

The Torah begins the book of **Vayikra** (Leviticus) with the word "**וַיִּקְרָא**" – “And He called [to Moshe],” written with a **small Alef** – א' זעירא.

According to the **Baal HaTurim**, Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to write the word **וַיִּקְרָא** ("and He happened upon"), the same word used in reference to **Bilam**, the non-Jewish prophet (Bamidbar 23:4). That word implies **chance** or **distance**, suggesting a less personal connection. Out of his **profound humility**, Moshe didn't want to elevate himself by implying that G-d **intimately called out to him**, even though that *was* the case. So he wrote **וַיִּקְרָא**, but with a **tiny Alef**, almost as if to hide it.

The message? **True greatness lies in humility**. Even when G-d Himself chooses you to lead, to receive the Torah, to speak to Him directly—you don't feel *greater* than others. On the contrary: the more elevated you are, the more humble you feel.

The word "**Alef**" is also related to the root "**Lamed**" (to learn), as in "**אֶלְפֵיךָ תְּלַמְּדָה**" – “I will teach you wisdom” (Iyov 33:33). Thus, the small Alef becomes a teaching tool—a **lesson in humility**. It's as if the Torah is whispering: “*Learn to make yourself small.*”

Chassidic Story: The Rebbe and the Alef

Once, a young boy asked the **Tzemach Tzedek**, the third Lubavitcher Rebbe:

“Why did Moshe write a small Alef in **וַיִּקְרָא**?”

The Rebbe smiled and said:

“When a person is truly great, he doesn't need to tell the world. In fact, he wants the world to see G-d—not him.”

Then the Rebbe continued:

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“You know, the Alef is the first letter of the Ten Commandments—'אָנְכִי'. It's the first letter of the **Torah**, the first letter of **Emes (truth)**, and the first letter of **Elokim**. But here, it's small. Because even if you're at the beginning of everything, even if G-d speaks to you directly, you remain humble.”

The boy nodded, but then he asked:

“But Rebbe, doesn't being small mean you're less important?”

The Rebbe looked into the boy's eyes and said:

“No, my child. Being small means you know that **your greatness comes from G-d**, not from yourself. And when you live that way, you can become a vessel for something much greater than you.”



Practical Takeaway

Whenever you're given a leadership role, praised, or feel you're ahead in some way—**remember the small Alef**. It's not a sign of being less—it's a sign of being **more open to G-dliness**. Be humble, be quiet, and you'll hear that **still small voice** that calls to you—just like it did to Moshe. **END NOTE]**

Siman #157

"Vayikra" is written with a small Alef (Leviticus 6:6). It is stated (Tanchuma, Parshas Kedoshim, on the verse “For from all...” that Eretz Yisrael is in the center of all the lands, and the Beis HaMikdash is in the center of Eretz Yisrael, and from there Hashem sees the entire world.	וַיִּקְרָא בְּתֵיב בְּאֵל"ף וְעִירָא (ו', ו'). דְּאִיתָא (תַּנְחוּמָא) פְּרִשְׁתָּ קְדוּשִׁים כְּפִסּוּק כִּי מְכַל אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַמְצַע כָּל הָאֲרָצוֹת, וּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בְּאַמְצַע אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּמִשָּׁם רֹאֶה הַקָּב"ה כָּל הָעוֹלָם.
And the Torah is in the center of all wisdoms. And the proof is that the Torah scholar can understand all other wisdoms if he desires, but the one who is wise in other wisdoms, if he wants to learn Torah, he cannot.	וְהַתּוֹרָה הִיא בְּאַמְצַע כָּל הַחֲכָמוֹת. וְהִרְאִיָּה, כִּי הַלְמָדוֹן יָכוֹל לְהִבִּין כָּל הַחֲכָמוֹת כְּשֶׁרוֹצֶה, וְהַחֲכָם בְּשֶׁאֵר הַחֲכָמוֹת כְּשֶׁרוֹצֶה לְלַמּוֹד תּוֹרָה אֵינוֹ יָכוֹל.
And therefore, the book of Vayikra is written in the center of the Torah, because in it the korbanos (offerings) are stated, which were brought in the Beis HaMikdash—and this is tzimtzum (constriction/focus).	וְלִכְךָ נִכְתָּב סֵפֶר וַיִּקְרָא בְּאַמְצַע הַתּוֹרָה, כִּי בּוֹ נֶאֱמָרוּ הַקֹּרְבָּנוֹת שֶׁהָיוּ בְּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, וְזֶהוּ צְמִצְמוּם.
And therefore the vision of a person depends on the pupil (black of the eye). And therefore we begin teaching young children with Vayikra, because it too is in tzimtzum.	וְלִכְךָ הִרְאִיָּה שֶׁל אָדָם תְּלוּיָהּ בְּבֵת עֵינָיו. וְלִכְךָ מִתְחִילִים עִם הַקִּטְנִים לְלַמּוֹד וַיִּקְרָא שֶׁהוּא גַם כֵּן בְּצִמְצוּם.

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And this is “Vayikra” with a small Alef, and Hashem, so to speak, constricts Himself to learn with them. Therefore, a small Alef—He learns with the small ones (in Yiddish: “to learn with a small child”).	וְזֶהוּ וַיִּקְרָא א' זַעֲרָא, וְהַקָּב"ה כְּבִיכּוֹל מִצְמָצִים עֲצָמוֹ לְלַמּוֹד עִמָּם. לְכָךְ א' זַעֲרָא שְׁלֹמֵד עִם הַקְטָנִים (בְּל"א: "לַעֲרִין מִיט אַ קטן").
And also, the small Alef—because the Aluf (Master) of the world constricts Himself, etc.	וְגַם א' זַעֲרָא, שְׁאֵלּוּפּוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם מִצְמָצִים אֶת עֲצָמוֹ וְגו'

[NOTE: Expounded Explanation

The word "וַיִּקְרָא" in the opening of Vayikra is written with a **small Alef** (א' זַעֲרָא). This seemingly tiny letter opens a profound world of Chassidic insight.

The **Midrash Tanchuma** says:

- **Eretz Yisrael** is the center of the world.
- The **Beis HaMikdash** is the center of Eretz Yisrael.
- And from there, **Hashem sees the entire world**.

Similarly:

- The **Torah** is the center of all wisdoms.
- And the **book of Vayikra** is at the center of the Torah.
- And **korbanos (sacrifices)**—the essence of spiritual closeness and self-nullification—are at the heart of Vayikra.

So why is Vayikra taught first to **young children**?

Because **children are pure**, and the concept of **korban—giving of the self**—is foundational to Yiddishkeit. And Vayikra, full of korbanos, is the ideal entry point for a child to begin their Torah journey.

The small Alef, then, is a symbol of **tzimtzum—divine contraction**, focusing G-dliness into a specific, limited vessel. Hashem, the **Aluf of the world**, "contracts" Himself to **learn with little children**. He doesn't wait until we're brilliant or mature—He meets us in our smallness.

Chassidic Story: The Rebbe Rashab in Cheder

When the **Rebbe Rashab** (the 5th Lubavitcher Rebbe) was a young boy, he once entered cheder and saw that they were learning **Vayikra**. He asked his teacher, “Why do we start with Vayikra?”

The melamed answered, “Because children are pure, and the korbanos are pure.”

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But the boy wasn't satisfied. He went to his grandfather, the **Tzemach Tzedek**, and asked him the same question.

The Tzemach Tzedek responded with deep emotion:

"When a Yiddishe child begins to learn Torah, Hashem Himself comes and sits beside him. And He whispers into his ear the meaning of the letters. When the child reads **וַיִּקְרָא**, Hashem bends down with love and says, 'Yes, I am calling to *you*, little one. I am ready to dwell with you. I am ready to contract My infinite Self to your small world.' That's why it's a small Alef."

The Rashab never forgot that moment. Later in life, he said: "From then on, I always felt that when I learn, the Ribbono Shel Olam is sitting next to me."



Practical Takeaway (PT)

- **Start small.** Don't wait until you feel "ready" or "great" to start learning Torah or doing something meaningful. Hashem meets you where you are.
- **Teach children early**—Vayikra teaches us that even complex holiness like korbanos can and should be shared with little ones.
- **In every act of Torah study**, even the quietest moment of learning, Hashem is there with you. Not just watching — **learning with you**.
- The **small Alef** is your invitation: be humble, be focused, and don't underestimate the power of small beginnings done with pure heart. **END NOTE]**