

Parashat Vayikra , 5779, 2019:

And Hashem Called to Moshe

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Chamishah Chumshei Torah (The Five Books of the Torah) contain two instances of the exact phrase, “*vayikra Hashem el Moshe*” (“and Hashem called to Moshe”). The first appears in *Sefer Shemot* 24:16, in the context of *Kabbalat HaTorah* (the Receiving of the Torah), and the second is found in the opening words of our *parasha*, as a prologue to the many and varied laws of the *korbanot* (offerings to Hashem). Rashi (1040-1105), in his *Commentary on the Torah* on our verse, bases himself upon a statement found in the *Midrash Sifra*, and notes that each time Hashem communicated with Moshe, it was preceded by the Almighty directly calling upon him (“*kadmah kriah*”). In addition, he suggests that the word, “*vayikra*,” is an expression of abiding affection (*chibah*), since this is precisely the language the Ministering Angels use when they call to one another (“*v’karah zeh el zeh*,” *Sefer Yeshayahu* 23:4).

In a particularly trenchant analysis, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) opines that the words, “*vayikra Hashem el Moshe*,” carry singular theological significance. In his view, they teach us that the Word of Hashem came to Moshe directly from the Creator, rather than through some kind of internally-generated voice:

A call came, and then G-d spoke to Moses. This is probably meant to establish the speeches of G-d to Moses as the Word of G-d coming *to* Moses and to prevent that misused misrepresentation which tries to change the Divine revelation *to* Moses into some kind of revelation *in* Moses, and either put it on par with all those imaginary visions of a so-called ecstasy, or simply as an inspiration coming from within a human being. (*Sefer Vayikra* 1:1, *The Pentateuch: Translated and Explained*, second edition, page 3, translation from the German, Isaac Levy)

Rav Hirsch continues his exposition of our verse and notes that the words, “*vayikra Hashem el Moshe*,” separate Judaism from all other religions that have ever existed:

[It is certainly not the case that Moses' Divine revelations were merely self-created ecstatic moments.] This [notion,] of course, relegates Judaism, "the Jewish Religion," to the nature of all other religious phases which have occurred in human history, to a "contemporary phase in the history of the development of the human mind." But this is not so, [for as the Torah states:] "Then the L-rd would speak to Moses face to face, as a man would speak to his companion..." (*Sefer Shemot* 33:11, this, and the following Torah translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

At this juncture, Rav Hirsch recapitulates his first theme, and underscores the exceptional import of Hashem speaking to Moses "face to face, as a man would speak to his companion:"

[This means that just like] speech from one man to another emanates purely and completely from the mind of the speaker, and in no wise whatsoever comes from the mind of the hearer, and nothing from the mind of the hearer brings it about, so was G-d's Word to Moses purely and solely the speech of G-d. Not from within Moses, from without, it came to him, called him out of whatever train of thought he might be in at the moment, to listen to what G-d wished to say to him. This *vayikra*, this call preceding G-d's speech, does away with that idea of the words of G-d which He transmitted arising from within Moses himself. (Brackets my own)

Rav Hirsch highlights a crucial principle of Jewish theology, namely, that Hashem spoke directly to Moshe. As the Torah states: "And there was no other prophet who arose in Israel like Moses, whom the L-rd knew face to face" (*Sefer Devarim* 34:10, underlining my own) Moshe's encounters with Hashem, and the authentic prophetic experiences they entailed, form the foundation of our entire Torah. The Voice from Sinai continues to shape the nature of our people and Judaism, and echoes until our own historical moment. We are truly blessed for evermore that "Hashem called to Moshe."

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:
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*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.