

Parshat HaShavua – and Crowd-Sourcing our Dvar/Discussion

VAYIKRA: Lev. 1:1-4, 5-9, 10-13, 14-17. Lev. 5:24-26. Isaiah 43.

- Have your chumash out! Lots more good stuff, thanks to W. Gunther Plaut
 - The Aleph Ze'ira – the teeny tiny aleph in the opening word
 - Relevance-o-mometer: Proceed; Pivot; or Punt?
- Don't print this; it's a few long articles, on the hunt for relevance & meaning...

PROCEED: The Sacred Pause

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Parashat VaYikra 5779

God speaks to Moshe on a regular basis. The formula that usually introduces this communication is **לֵאמֹר** ,God spoke to Moshe, saying. However this parashah and the book of Vayikra opens with God's summoning Moshe before He speaks to him: **וַיִּקְרָא** ,God called to Moshe. Instead of just speaking to Moshe, God invites him to listen first. God's invitation to Moshe can teach us about what it means to listen to God's voice and to accept His personal invitation to learn His Torah.

[With Dena Weiss as our guide, we'll go deep on the Rashi (1040-1104, Troyes) comment to Leviticus 1:1 --]

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה AND [THE LORD] CALLED UNTO MOSES — All oral communications of the Lord to Moses whether they are introduced by **דָּבַר** or by **אָמַר** or by **צִו** were preceded by a call (to prepare him for the forthcoming address) (cf Sifra, Vayikra Dibbura d'Nedavah, Chapter 1 1-2). It is a way of **expressing affection**, the mode used by the ministering angels when addressing each other, as it is said ([Isaiah 6:3](#)) “And one called unto another [and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts]”. To the prophets of the nations of the world, however, God revealed himself in a manner which Scripture describes by an expression ordinarily used for denoting events of a **casual character** and of uncleanness, as it is said, ([Numbers 23:4](#)) “and God happened to meet (וַיִּקְרָא) Balaam” (the term וַיִּקְרָא, from the root, קָרָה, is connected with מִקְרָה which denotes “chance”, “occurrence”, and has also the meaning of “uncleanness”, by analogy with [Deuteronomy 23:11](#): לֹא יִהְיֶה טְהוֹר מִקְרָה לַיְלָה (cf. [Bereishit Rabbah 52:5](#))). **[though contrast this with the וַיִּקְרָא of the teeny tiny aleph!]**

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה AND HE CALLED UNTO MOSES — This implies that the Voice went on and reached his (Moses's) ears only, but all the other Israelites did not hear it). One might think that for the subsections there was also such a call! It, however, states, “[And the Lord called unto Moses] and spake (וַיִּדְבֹּר) [to him]”, thus intimating that a **דְּבָר**, a complete section had (was preceded by) a call (e. g., in our text chapters 1-4), but not the subsections. And what purpose did these subsections serve (i. e., why are the larger sections broken up into smaller ones)? To give Moses an **interval for reflection** between one division and another, and between one subject and another — something which is all the more necessary for an ordinary man receiving instruction from an ordinary man (Sifra, Vayikra Dibbura d'Nedavah, Chapter 1 9).

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה TO HIM — This is intended to **exclude Aaron**. Rabbi Judah said, “Thirteen communications in the Torah are stated, according to the wording of the text, to have been spoken to Moses and Aaron together; but corresponding to these there are thirteen which include expressions with a limitative force to teach you that they were spoken not to Aaron

but to Moses only, with the view that he should communicate them to Aaron. The following are the thirteen limitations: ([Numbers 7:89](#)) “[And when Moses had come into the appointed tent] that He might speak with him, [then he heard the Voice] speaking unto him ... [from between the two cherubim]: and he spoke unto him”; ([Exodus 25:22](#)) “and there I will be met by thee”; — all the thirteen instances you will find in Torath Cohanim (Sifra, Vayikra Dibbura d'Nedavah, Chapter 2 1. — I might, however, think that they (Aaron and all Israel) heard at least the sound of the Divine utterance (הדבור), even though they could not distinguish the words! However, in the text, [Numbers 7:89](#): וישמע את הקול מדבר אליו, where it might have said לו... [ה]קול, it says אליו... [ה]קול, “And he heard the voice (הקול) uttering itself (מדבר) right up to him (אליו)” — consequently Moses alone heard the utterance, and all Israel did not hear it) (Sifra, Vayikra Dibbura d'Nedavah, Chapter 2 8).

מאהל מועד FROM THE APPOINTED TENT — This teaches us that the Voice broke off and did not issue beyond the appointed tent. One might think that this was so because **the Voice was a very low one!** Scripture, however, states, ([Numbers 7:89](#)) “[when he entered the tent he heard] the Voice”. What does it mean by the Voice? It was the Voice that is so minutely described in Psalms, (29:4, 5) “The voice of the Lord is **powerful**; the voice of the Lord is full of **majesty**. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars”. But if this be so (that it was a very powerful voice), why does Scripture state, “[and the Lord spoke to him] from the appointed tent” (מאהל מועד) and does not state (באהל מועד)? Because it intends to tell us that the Voice broke off and that it was **heard only in the tent**). A similar case we have in Ezekiel that a powerful sound uttered within the Temple was not heard outside: ([Ezekiel 10:5](#)) “And the sound of the cherubims’ wings was heard up to the outer court”. One might think then that the sound was a very low one! Scripture, however, continues “as the Voice of the Almighty God when He speaketh”! If this was so why, then, does Scripture state, “[it was heard] up to the outer court only”? Because when it (the sound) reached there it broke off (Sifra, Vayikra Dibbura d'Nedavah, Chapter 2 10-11).

מאהל מועד לאמר [AND THE LORD ... SPOKE UNTO HIM] OUT OF THE APPOINTED TENT, SAYING — One might think from this that the Lord spoke to him from the entire house (i.e. from any part of the appointed tent)! Scripture, however, states, ([Numbers 6:89](#)) “[and he heard the Voice speaking unto him] from off **the covering**”. From this, again, one might think that he heard the Voice coming from off the entire covering (from any part of it)! Scripture, however, continues, “from **between the two cherubim**”. Consequently the words מאהל מועד cannot denote the place from which the Lord spoke to Moses, but the area within which the Voice was heard (Sifra, Vayikra Dibbura d'Nedavah, Chapter 2 12). [the two cherubim, facing each other from either side – **social distance!**]

לאמר SAYING — This implies “Go and speak to them words that will bring them to **a subdued frame of mind**”: “It is for your sake that He communicates with me”! And indeed we find this was so; for all the thirty-eight years during which Israel in the wilderness were placed, as it were, under **excommunication** — from the time of the incident of the spies and onwards — there was no intimate conversation of God with Moses, for it is said, ([Deuteronomy 2:16](#), 17) “So it came to pass, when were consumed all the men of war (i. e. the men who had waged war immediately after the return of the spies; cf. [Numbers 14:40-45](#). It was they and their generation who wandered in the wilderness as though excommunicated) ... that the Lord spake unto me, saying, ...” — **only then** was a divine communication again made to me (Sifra). Another explanation of לאמר is that it means “**to speak to God**”: it implies, “Go and tell them My commands and bring Me back word **whether they will accept them**, as it is said, ([Exodus 19:8](#)) “And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord (Sifra, Vayikra Dibbura d'Nedavah, Chapter 2 13). [hmm: will the people accept expert word?!]

The first element that Rashi notices is the strange verb of calling, *VaYikra*, which, as we noted, he explained as a language of affection. Rashi wants to make sure that the reader hears God's tone correctly. God is not yelling at Moshe and demanding his presence; God is inviting Moshe to join Him. Just as the angels use this language to make sure that they can pray in unison, so too God asks Moshe to join Him in a loving, respectful, and joint communication.

The second aspect that Rashi notices is the redundant language of "to Moshe" and then "to him." The verse would have been more simply written as, "God called out and spoke to Moshe." The extra reinforcement of calling to Moshe and then speaking "to him" indicates that the communication was exclusive to Moshe, only to him. God calls out and only Moshe, His intended recipient, hears.

The third element that Rashi addresses is the redundancy in the verse of calling, *vayikra*, then speaking, *vayedabeir*, then saying, *leimor*. Rashi resolves this peculiarity by pointing to what we learn from the word, *vayedabeir* -- that the calling only precedes speaking and doesn't precede silence.

Rashi could have stopped his comments there. Yet Rashi goes on to ask a question that the text does not compel him to ask. Rashi wants to know why God's communication with Moshe needs to be interrupted, why there needs to be a second and renewed invitation. Why can't God continue speaking without cessation? The answer is that God is speaking to a human and Moshe himself cannot listen non-stop. Moshe needs some time in between lessons to process what he is learning.

Rashi's third comment is also a lesson to us, telling us the importance of taking a moment to process. If God and Moshe built in time for pausing, for the learning to sink in, then we too have to understand that we need to strategically place gaps in our schedules so that we can absorb all that we observe. This need is not limited to the study of Torah. Whenever we are engaged in learning, making progress, accomplishing, there is a tension between breadth and depth—we want to see more, do more, get more. Rashi's interpretation warns us not to confuse more with better and not to sacrifice better for more. It is important to receive the Torah but it is equally important to hold on to the Torah, to let its words penetrate deeply, and to let its lessons have an impact. Sometimes you need to stop and be still in order to fully understand.

:Perhaps this is what Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel meant when he praised the role of silence in study

משנה אבות א:יז

שמעון בנו אומר, כל ימי גדלתי בין החכמים, ולא מצאתי לגוף טוב אלא שתיקה.

Mishnah Avot 1:17 Shimon [Gamliel's] son says: All of my life I grew up among the wise, and the most valuable thing I found was silence.

On a first read, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel seems to be advocating for listening. He seems to be saying that when you are among the wise you should seize the opportunity to be receptive, to listen to the wisdom that is being shared. However, Rabban Shimon does not say that what he found to be most valuable was listening; what he actually found to be most valuable was silence. Perhaps what he learned from the noise of the academy was that, sometimes, in order to really internalize what was being spoken and what he was hearing, he needed to step away from his colleagues and teachers and into silence.

Understanding the import of the last of Rashi's comments invites us to look at his earlier explanations in a different light. Right before Rashi's teaching about pausing for the sake of deepening our understanding, Rashi taught that the teaching that God shared with Moshe, In fact, in Devarim 5:18, God's voice in the giving of the Torah is described as *סֵף יִיָּאֹל גְּדוֹל קוֹל*, often translated as "a great unceasing voice."

...was in a voice that reached only to him. This teaching is consistent with other Rabbinic teachings about the Torah and the way that it is designed to speak to each person individually:

מדרש תנחומא (ורשא) שמות כה

היאך הקול יוצא, אצל כל ישראל כל אחד ואחד לפי כחו, הזקנים לפי כחו, הבחורים לפי כחו, והקטנים לפי

כחו, והיונקים לפי כחו, והנשים לפי כחו, ואף משה לפי כחו, שנאמר (שמות יט:יט) משה ידבר והאלקים

יעננו בקול, בקול שהיה יכול לסובלו, וכה"א (תהלים כט:ד) קול ה' בבח, בבחו לא נאמר אלא בבח, בבחו

של כל אחד ואחד

Midrash Tanhuma (Warsaw) Shemot 25 And how did the voice emerge? To all of Israel, each individual according to their ability. The elders according to their ability, the young men according to their ability, the little kids according to their ability, the infants according to their ability, the women according to their ability, and even Moshe according to his ability. As it says, Moshe would speak and God would respond in the voice (Shemot 19:19) in the voice that he could bear. And it—, says, The voice of God is in power (Tehillim 29:4)not in His power, but power—the power/ability of each individual

It was not only Moshe for whom God has a specific and exclusive message. Each of us, according to our abilities, interests, inclinations, and needs, has a unique way of hearing and learning from the Torah. But in order to understand what the Torah comes to teach you, you need to be present as an individual. You need to separate yourself into your own ohel mo'ed, your own tent of meeting where you can bear witness to yourself. When you take the time to tune out the sound of every other voice that is trying to mold and influence you, you will be able to hear your own voice, still and small as it may be. Yes, we need to pause in order to concentrate and to grasp the Torah intellectually. We may need to reduce the quantity in order to improve the quality of our experience of learning. And we also need to be careful to listen to ourselves, lest we miss that a critical component of fully absorbing Torah is to understand not only what the Torah says, but what it says to you. **What is the Torah that you need to hear and what is the Torah that only you can hear?**

This is something that you can only do in pauses, in the silence. When you stop listening to the words and you stop listening to other people's opinions of the words, you can hear the sound of your own heart. You can hear yourself listening and provide yourself the time, the space, and the privacy you need to make the Torah your own.

.Yet, Rashi's first comment reminds us that the Torah that we learn is not exclusively for or about us. According to Rashi, God's invitation to Moshe is an expression of His affection and love. The Torah is not only about building ourselves up, but about improving our relationship with God and turning us into the better people God wants us to be. **The Torah is not only about understanding, it is not only about meaning—it is also about connection and love, responsibility and interdependence.** When we feel ourselves becoming too preoccupied with listening to our own voice, we should listen for God's call of VaYikra again.

The source for the idea that VaYikra is a language of love is that it is how the angels call to one another before they jointly praise God. This image, in addition to being sweet, is also instructive. Prayer might be seen as a task that concerns each angel turning to God on its own. But before the angels go on their mission of prayer, they check in with one another. They learn from and teach one another. They have a kind of spiritual hevruta before they pray. The angels demonstrate that divine service is not limited to our interactions with God, it is also constituted by our care and regard for one another. If our Torah study is only for us and about us then it is not for and about God.

.The angels call to one another in order to make sure that they are all ready and able to sing to God in unison. There is a time for solitude and individual reflection, for silence and contemplation, but that needs to happen on a schedule that works for the other people with whom you are in community. We don't always get to

decide when we are going to need to pay attention to someone else's needs, to be present to them. We need to coordinate our time alone with those who need us to be with them.

This is the subtle way that **the pausing on Shabbat functions**. First, God makes sure to complete His work by the seventh day, so that He can rest on Shabbat. Then, God tells us to complete our work in six days, so that we too can rest on Shabbat. God is coordinating with us, constructing the world and the religious calendar in a way that allows us to be free at the same time **When we are free at the same time, we are able to stop ourselves from being distracted from anything other than the task at hand: being present to God and one another** on the day of rest. Shabbat shalom.

SECOND: SHAI HELD, HADAR, at <file:///C:/Users/fsd/Downloads/CJLIParashatVayikra5774.pdf> -- five brilliant pages of social science and human and biblical insight. Then "What does all this have to do with Vayikra? An awful lot, I think..." Picking up near the end:

The tabernacle (mishkan) is nothing if not a tightly structured, highly ordered space. Who may enter where, at what time, and in what garb—all is tightly regulated. The profane must never spill over into and thus violate the sacred. The sacrifices are carefully choreographed and presented "just right." In a chaotic, terrifying world, one place, at least, is governed by order and structure.

Bible scholar Richard Nelson explains that in Leviticus, "sacred space was seen as an island of structure and order surrounded by malevolent chaos. Sacred space provided the human mind with a fixed center, the solace of formed order in the midst of formless chaos."

It is **perhaps tempting for many of us to adopt a condescending approach to all this preoccupation with order**. We may imagine that we have moved beyond the kind of anxiety that seems at least partly to underlie Leviticus' manifold legislation, and congratulate ourselves for our willingness to embrace life's messiness. To be sure, there is something important—humanly and religiously—in our ability to tolerate and even embrace messiness. And yet the reality of chaos and the experience of seemingly total randomness are always with us, and the fear they induce is real—as, for many of us, is the theological questioning and struggle they call forth.

Leviticus presents another, alternate reality to inhabit. Worship in the mishkan is "intended [as] a counterworld to Israel's lived experience, which is dangerous and disordered. The counterworld offered in the tabernacle holds out the gift of a well-ordered, joy-filled, and peace-generating creation." Bible scholar Samuel Balentine captures beautifully the point I am trying to make: "Who among us does not yearn for that one place, however small and difficult to find, that invites us to believe the 'very good' world God created and the world in which we scratch out our frail existence are in fact one and the same?"

Leviticus attempts to describe and thus to evoke that place. In reading and studying Leviticus, we are invited to imagine and inhabit just such a space—if only for a brief moment. Just as God has separated and ordered, so Israel must engage in separation and ordering.

What happens to a person who has visited the mishkan—and by extension into our own time, who has imaginatively entered the mishkan through close study of the book of Leviticus? Having partaken of, or merely glimpsed, the counterworld that the mishkan represents, a person is changed (at least when the practice “works”). After the glimpse he has been afforded, nothing looks quite the same anymore. He sees that another reality is possible, that the chaos and suffering he observes all around him are not ultimately all there is.

As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz wonderfully puts it, “Having ritually ‘lept’... into the framework of meaning which religious conceptions define, and the ritual ended, returned again to the common-sense world, a man is—unless, as sometimes happens, the experience fails to register—changed. And as he is changed, so also is the common-sense world, for it is now seen as but the partial form of a wider reality which corrects and completes it.”

To read Leviticus, then, is to enter a different kind of world, a small pocket of reality in which God’s will is heeded and perfectly executed, in which chaos and disorder are kept at bay—in which, thus, God is already fully God, even as the realities outside fall painfully short of that long longed-for dream. Shabbat Shalom.

PIVOT: Former UK Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (3/25/20):

Sacrifices, the subject of this week’s parsha, were central to the religious life of biblical Israel. We see this not only by the sheer space devoted to them in the Torah, but also by the fact that they occupy its central book, Vayikra.

We have not had the sacrificial service since the destruction of the second Temple almost 2000 years ago. What is deeply relevant today, however, is the *critique* of sacrifices we find among the Prophets of the first Temple. That critique was sharp and deep and formed many of their most powerful addresses. One of the earliest was delivered by the Prophet Samuel: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to the Lord’s command? Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice, compliance than the fat of rams” (**1 Sam. 15:22**).

Amos said in the name of God: “If you offer Me burnt offerings—or your meal offerings— I will not accept them; I will pay no heed to your gifts of fatlings ... But let justice well up like water, righteousness like a never-ending stream” (**Amos 5:21-24**). Likewise Hosea: “For I desire goodness, not sacrifice; obedience to God, rather than burnt offerings” (**Hosea 6:6**).

We find a similar critique in several Psalms. “Were I hungry, I would not tell you, for Mine is the world and all it holds. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?” (**Ps. 50:8-15**). “Lord, open my lips, and let my mouth declare Your praise. You do not want me to bring sacrifices; You do not desire burnt offerings. True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit; God, You will not despise a contrite and crushed heart” (**Ps. 51:17-19**).

Jeremiah seems to suggest that the sacrificial order was not God’s initial intention: “For when I

freed your fathers from the land of Egypt, I did not speak with them or command them concerning burnt offerings or sacrifice. But this is what I commanded them: Do My bidding, that I may be your God and you may be My people; walk only in the way that I enjoin upon you, that it may go well with you” (**Jer. 7:22-23**).

Strongest of all is the passage at the beginning of the book of Isaiah that we read on Shabbat Chazon (before Tisha b’Av): “What need have I of all your sacrifices?” says the Lord. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of My courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to Me” (**Is. 1:11-13**).

This entire line of thought, sounded by many voices and sustained across centuries, is extraordinary. The people were being criticised not for disobeying God’s law but for obeying it. Sacrifices were commanded. Their offering was a sacred act performed in a holy place. What then aroused the Prophets’ anger and rebuke?

It was not that they were opposed to sacrifice as such. Jeremiah foresaw the day when “People shall come from the towns of Judah and from the environs of Jerusalem ... bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, meal offerings and frankincense, and bringing offerings of thanksgiving to the House of the Lord” (**Jer. 17:26**).

Likewise Isaiah: “I will bring them to My sacred mount and let them rejoice in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be welcome on My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (**Is. 56:7**).

They were not criticising the institution of sacrifices. They were criticising something as real now as it was in their time. *What distressed them to the core of their being was the idea that you could serve God and at the same time act disdainfully, cruelly, unjustly, insensitively or callously toward other people.* “So long as I am in God’s good graces, that is all that matters.” That is the thought that made the Prophets incandescent with indignation. If you think that, they seem to say, then you haven’t understood either God or Torah.

The first thing the Torah tells us about humanity is that we are each in the image and likeness of God Himself. Therefore if you wrong a human being, you are abusing the only creation in the universe on which God has set His image. A sin against any person is a sin against God.

In the first mission statement of the Jewish people, God said about Avraham, “For I have chosen him that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right” (**Gen. 18:19**). The way of the Lord is to act justly and righteously toward your fellow human beings. In context, this meant that God was inviting Avraham to pray on behalf of the people of Sodom, even though he knew that they were wicked and sinners.

It is specifically in the book of sacrifices, Vayikra, that we find the twin commands to love your neighbour as yourself, and love the stranger (**Lev. 19:18**, 33-34). The sacrifices that express our love and awe of God should lead to love of the neighbour and the stranger. There should be a seamless transition from commands between us and God to commands between us and our fellow humans.

Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah all witnessed societies in which people were punctilious in bringing their offerings to the Temple, but in which there was bribery, corruption, perversion of justice, abuse of power and the exploitation of the powerless by the powerful. The Prophets saw in this a profound and dangerous contradiction.

The very act of bringing a sacrifice was fraught with ambiguity. Jews were not the only people in

ancient times to have temples, priests and sacrifices. Almost everyone did. It was precisely here that the religion of ancient Israel came closest, outwardly, to the practices of their pagan neighbours. But the sacrificial systems of other cultures were based on totally different beliefs. In many religions sacrifices were seen as a way of placating or appeasing the gods. The Aztecs believed that sacrificial offerings fed the gods who sustained the universe. Walter Burkert speculated that the ancient Greeks experienced guilt when they killed animals for food, so they offered sacrifices as a way of appeasing their consciences.

All these ideas are alien to Judaism. God cannot be bribed or appeased. Nor can we bring Him anything that is not His. God sustains the universe: the universe does not sustain Him. And wrongs righted by sacrifice do not excuse other wrongs. So intention and mindset were essential in the sacrificial system. The thought that “If I bring a sacrifice to God, He will overlook my other faults” – in effect, the idea that I can bribe the Judge of all the earth – turns a sacred act into a pagan one, and produces precisely the opposite result than the one intended by the Torah. It turns religious worship from a way to the right and the good, into a way of easing the conscience of those who practice the wrong and the bad.

To serve God is to serve humanity. That was the point made memorably by Micah: “He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: To do justice, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.” (**Micah 6:6-8**). Jeremiah said of King Josiah: “He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know Me? says the Lord” (**Jer. 22:16**). Knowing God, said Jeremiah, means caring for those in need.

Maimonides said essentially the same at the end of *The Guide for the Perplexed* (III, 54). He quotes Jeremiah: “Only in this should one glory: that they have the understanding to know Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” says the Lord” (**Jer. 9:23**). To know God is to know what it is to act with kindness, justice and righteousness.

The danger of the sacrificial system, said the Prophets, is that it can lead people to think that there are two domains, the Temple and the world, serving God and caring for one’s fellow humans, and they are disconnected. Judaism rejects the concept of two disconnected domains. Halachically they are distinct, but psychologically, ethically and spiritually they are part of a single indivisible system.

I believe that to love God is to love our fellow humans. To honour God is to honour our fellow humans. We may not ask God to listen to us if we are unwilling to listen to others. We may not ask God to forgive us if we are unwilling to forgive others. To know God is to seek to imitate Him, which means, said Jeremiah and Maimonides, to exercise kindness, justice and righteousness on earth.

Shabbat Shalom

Tanchuma, Vayikra 1:

ויקרא אל משה. זה שאמר הכתוב: ברכוה' מלאכיו גבורי כח עושי דברו לשמע בקול דברו (תהלים קג, כ). ברכוה' מלאכיו, אלו משה ואהרן שנקראו מלאכים, שנאמר: וישלח מלאך ויוציאנו ממצרים (במדבר כ, טז). וכן הוא אומר, ויהיו מלעיבים במלאכי אלהים (דה"ב ו, טז). רב הונא בשם רבי אחא אומר, אלו ישראל. שהוא אומר, גבורי כח עושי דברו לשמע בקול דברו, שהקדימו עשייה לשמיעה. רבי יצחק נפחא אומר, אלו שומרי שביעית. ולמה נקרא שמם גבורי כח. רואה ששדהו מפקרת ואילנותיו מפקרים והסיגים מפרצים ורואה פרותיו נאכלים, וכובש את יצרו ואינו מדבר. ושנו רבותינו, איזהו גבור, הכובש את יצרו. רבי תנחום בר חנילאי אומר, מי גבורי כח, זה משה, שאין גבור כמותו, שישאל עומדים לפני הר סיני ולא יכלו לשמע את קול הדבור, שנאמר: אם יוספים אנחנו לשמע את קול ה' אלהינו עוד ומתנו (דברים ה, כב), ומשה לא נזק. ללמדך, שגדולים הצדיקים יותר ממלאכי השרת. שמלאכי השרת אינן יכולין לשמע קולו שנאמר: וה' נתן קולו לפני חילו (יואל ב, יא) אלא עומדין ונבהלין. והצדיקים יכולין לשמע קולו, שנאמר: וה' נתן קולו לפני חילו. כי רב מאד מחנהו (יואל ב, יא), אלו המלאכים, שנאמר: מחנה אלהים זה (בראשית לב, ב). וכן הוא אומר, אלף אלפין ישמשוניה (דניאל ז, י). ומי קשה מהם. הצדיקים, שנאמר: כי עצום עשה דברו (יואל ב, יא), זה צדיק שעושה רצון יוצרו. ואיזהו, זה משה שאמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא עשה לי משכן, ועמד ונדרדור ועשה משכן. והיה עומד מבחוץ, שהיה מתירא לבא אל אהל מועד, שנאמר: ולא יכל משה לבא אל אהל מועד (שמות מ, לה). אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא, אינו דין שמשנה שעשה את המשכן והא עומד מבחוץ ואני מבפנים, אלא הריני קורא אותו שייכנס. לפיכך כתיב: ויקרא אל משה. וזו, קשה כהן של צדיקים שייכולין לשמע קולו. וכן בשמואל כתיב: ויבא ה' ויתיצב ויקרא בפעם בפעם שמואל שמואל, ויאמר שמואל, דבר כי שומע עבדך (ש"א ג, י). לפיכך אמר דוד, גבורי כח עושי דברו. ואם תאמר, כשהיה מדבר עם משה, בקול נמוך היה מדבר, לפיכך היה יכל משה לשמע. לא היה מדבר אלא בקול מתן תורה ששמעו ישראל ומתו בדבור ראשון, שנאמר: אם יוספים אנחנו וגו' (דברים ה, כב). וכן הוא אומר, נפשי יצאה בדברו (שה"ש ה, ו). ומנין שבקול מתן תורה היה מדבר. שכן הוא אומר, קול ה' ברח (תהלים כט, ד). וכן הוא אומר, ובבא משה אל אהל מועד לדבר אתו וישמע את הקול מדבר אליו (במדבר ז, פט), הקול שהיה שומע במתן תורה, שנאמר: קול ה' שובר ארזים (תהלים כט, ה), ובו היה מדבר על כל דבור ודבור ועל כל אמירה וצווי. שמא תאמר, שנשמע הקול לישראל מבחוץ. תלמוד לומר: וישמע את הקול, הוא היה שומע בלבד. וכי מאחר שבקול גבה היה מדבר, למה לא היו שומעים. לפי שגזר הקדוש ברוך הוא על הדבור שיצא והלך אצל משה ועשה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא שביל שבו יוצא הקול עד שיגיע למשה ולא נשמע לקאן ולקאן, שנאמר: לעשות לרוח משקל (איוב כח, כה), שכל דבור ודבור יוצא מפי הקדוש ברוך הוא, הכל במשקל. וכן הוא אומר, וידרך לחזיו קולות (איוב כח, כו), שעשה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא דרך לאותו הקול שילך אצל משה בלבד, שנאמר: ויקרא אל משה וידבר ה' אליו, אליו היה נשמע ולא לאחר. לכך נאמר: גבורי כח עושי דברו. ויקרא אל משה. זה שאמר הכתוב: כי טוב אמר לך עלה הנה מהשפילך לפני נדיב (משלי כה, ז). רבי תנחום אמר, רחק מן מקומך שנים ושלשה מושבות שיאמרו לך עלה, ואל תעלה שלא יאמרו לך רד. רבי תנחומא אומר, יש זקב ורב פנינים וכלי יקר שפתי דעת (משלי כ, טו). מתלא אומר, דעת חסרת מאי קניית, דעת קניית מאי חסרת. אף משה לא עלה עד שקראו הקדוש ברוך הוא, שנאמר: ויקרא אל משה.

([Lev. 1:1](#)): “Then [the Lord] called unto Moses [and spoke unto him].” This text is related (to [Ps. 103:20](#)), “Bless the Lord, O His messengers,¹ *Mal’akhaw. Throughout this section of the midrash mal’akh(im) is interpreted as referring to humans; therefore “messenger(s)” is a more appropriate translation here than the more usual “angel(s).”* mighty in strength who fulfill His word.”² [Lev. R. 1:1](#). These are the prophets, since they are called messengers where it is stated (in [Numb. 20:16](#)), “and He sent a messenger (*mal’akh*) who brought us out of Egypt.”³ [Numb. R. 16:1](#); see also [Gen. R. 68:12](#), according to which the angels on Jacob’s ladder symbolized Moses ascending and descending Sinai. So also (in [II Chron. 36:16](#)), “But they mocked the messengers (*mal’akhim*) of God, [disdained His words, and taunted His prophets].” R. Huna said in the name of R. Aha, “These [messengers] are Israel, since it says (in [Ps. 103:20](#)), ‘mighty in strength who fulfill His word, hearkening to the voice of His word,’ in [reference to the fact] that they [were the ones who] had put fulfilling ahead of hearkening.”⁴ In [Exod. 24:7](#), where Israel promises: *WE WILL FULFILL AND WE WILL HEARKEN, in that order.*

R. Isaac the Smith said, “These are those who observe the sabbatical year. So why were they called mighty in strength? When [such a one] sees his field abandoned, his trees abandoned, his fences breached, and sees his fruit trees eaten, he suppresses his drive (like one mighty in strength) and does not speak.” And thus have our masters taught (in *Avot* 4:1): And who is mighty? One who subdues his drive.⁵ *Also Tamid 32a.*


R. Tanhum ben Hanila'i says ([Ps. 103:20](#)), “‘Mighty in strength.’ This is Moses because no one is as mighty in strength as Moses. When Israel stood before Mount Sinai, they were not capable of hearing the divinely spoken word, as stated (in [Deut. 5:22](#)), ‘if we continue hearing the voice of the Lord our God any longer, we shall die.’ But Moses was not harmed.” [This is] in order to teach you that the righteous ones are greater than the ministering angels, since the ministering angels are not able to hear His voice. Rather they stand with excitement and dismay, while the righteous are able to hear His voice. It is so stated (in [Joel 2:11](#)), “The Lord shouts aloud before His army, for His host is very great, for mighty is the one who fulfills His word.” “His host” denotes angels, since it is stated (regarding angels in [Gen. 32:3](#)), “This is God's host.” And so it says (in [Dan. 7:10](#)), “thousands upon thousands ministered to Him.” And who is stronger than them? The righteous, of whom it is stated (in [Joel 2:11](#)), “for mighty is the one who fulfills His word,” i.e., a righteous person who does His bidding. And who is this? This is Moses, to whom the Holy One, blessed be He, said, “Make a tabernacle.” So he was hurried and made it. Then he stood alone outside, because he was afraid to enter the tent of meeting, as stated (in [Exod. 40:35](#)), “Now Moses could not enter the tent of meeting.” The Holy One, blessed be He, said, “It is not right for Moses, since he made the tabernacle, to stand outside while I stand inside; so look, I am calling upon him to enter.” It is therefore written (in [Lev. 1:1](#)), “Then [the Lord] called unto Moses.” Ergo, greater is the strength of the righteous, in that they are able to hear His voice! So also it is written concerning Samuel (in [I Sam. 3:10](#)), “Then the Lord came, and stood there, and He called as at other times, ‘Samuel, Samuel’; so Samuel said, ‘Speak, for Your servant is listening.’” Therefore David has said (in [Ps. 103:20](#)), “mighty in strength who fulfill His word.” Now if you say that, when He spoke with Moses, He spoke in a low voice, [and] for that reason he was able to hear, He only spoke in the voice [used in] the giving of Torah. [That was] when they heard His voice and were dying at the first utterance. It is so stated (in [Deut. 5:22](#)), “if we continue [hearing the voice of the Lord our God any longer, we shall die].” And so it says (in [Cant. 5:6](#)), “my soul departed when He spoke.” And where is it shown that He spoke with the voice [used in] the giving of Torah? Where it says (in [Ps. 29:4](#)), “The voice of the Lord has power.” It also says so (in [Numb. 7:89](#)), “When Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he would hear the voice speaking unto him,” the voice which he heard in the giving of Torah. He also spoke thus for each and every utterance and for each and every saying, as it is stated ([Ps. 29:5](#)), “The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars.” Perhaps you will say that Israel heard the voice from outside.⁶ *Sifra to Lev. 1:1, (2: Wayyiqra, Pereq 2).* The text (of [Numb. 7:89](#)) reads, “he would hear the voice.” He alone heard the voice. But since He spoke in a loud voice, why did they not hear? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, decreed over the utterance, that it would go forth and come to Moses. So the Holy One, blessed be He, made a path for it by which the utterance went forth until it reached Moses, but it was not heard here and there. It is so stated (in [Job 28:25](#)), “To fix a weight for the wind.” Thus, when each saying went forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, every one had a [fixed] weight. And so it says (in [Job 28:26](#)), “and a way for the thunder of voices,”⁷ *The midrash requires this literal translation. A more idiomatic translation would read: A WAY FOR THUNDERSTORMS.* in that the Holy One, blessed be He, made a way for that voice, because it was going forth to Moses alone. Thus it is stated (in [Lev. 1:1](#)), “Then [the Lord] called unto Moses and spoke unto him.” It was heard by him and not by another. It is therefore stated (in [Ps. 103:20](#)), “mighty in strength who fulfill His word.” ([Lev. 1:1](#)): “Then [the Lord] called unto Moses [and spoke unto him].” This text is related (to [Prov. 25:7](#)), “For it is better that you be told, ‘Come up here,’ than

that you be put down before a prince, whom your eyes have seen.” R. Tanhum says, “Keep two or three places distance from your [rightful] place so that they will say to you, ‘Come up higher.’ So do not come up, lest they tell you, ‘Go down.’” R. Tanhuma says ([Prov. 20:15](#)), “There is gold and a multitude of jewels, but lips with knowledge are a precious object.’ The proverb says, ‘If you lack knowledge, what do you possess? If you possess knowledge, what do you lack?’”⁸ [Ned. 41a](#); [PRK 3:1](#); [Numb. R. 19:3](#); [Eccl. R. 7:23:1](#). Even Moses did not ascend until the Holy One, blessed be He, called him (in [Lev. 1:1](#)), ‘Then [the Lord] called unto Moses.’”

Worldwide Yom Tefillah
Erev Rosh Chodesh Nisan 5780

Hebrew Chant and Spiritual Writing
with Rabbi Malkah Binah Klein, Philadelphia

יְעֹנֶה יְהוָה בְּיוֹם צָרָה
Ya'ancha Yah b'yom tzarah
May the BREATH OF LIFE answer you in
time of trouble (Psalm 20:2, original melody)



Worldwide Yom Tefillah
Wednesday, March 25, 2020
Erev Rosh Chodesh Nissan
11:30 AM EDT; 5:30 PM Israel time

We call on our communities to join the entire Jewish People in focusing extra effort on prayer throughout the day on this Wednesday, Yom Kippur Katan.

Additionally, at 11:30 am EDT, all are asked to join - from their individual homes - in the recitation of Tehillim 20, 41, 120, 130, 142, 91, followed by Avinu Malkeinu.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכוּת מַעַם מִצִּיפָה מְחַלְלִין

In response to the global pandemic of COVID-19 we, Orthodox and believing Jews, turn our hearts and prayers to our Father in Heaven with pleas for a speedy end to this pandemic:

תְּפִלָּה:
for complete recovery for all those who are ill;
for support and encouragement for all those who are suffering and lonely;
for comfort to those who are mourning;
and for inspiration and wisdom for our researchers to find a cure.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכוּת קוֹל בְּיוֹמֵינוּ וְיִצְרָן אֶת הַחַיִּים

מִמַּעְמְקִים קְרָאתִיךָ יְהוָה
Mima'amakim k'raticha Yah
From the depths I call to you. Hear my voice, hear my voice.
(Psalm 130:1-2, Shefa Gold)

קוֹלִי אֶל־יְהוָה אֶזְעַק
Koli el yah ezak
I cry aloud to Yah (Psalm 142:2, original melody)

יֵשֵׁב בְּסִתְרֵי עֲלִיּוֹן בְּצֵל שְׁדֵי יִתְלוֹנָן
Yoshayv b'sayter Elyon, b'tzayl Shadai yitlonan
Whoever sits in the secret of the Highest
will abide in the shade of *Shaddai* (Psalm 91:1, Shefa Gold)

אֶרְךָ יָמִים אֲשֶׁר־יִצְהָרְךָ אֶרְאֶהוּ בִישׁוּעָתִי
Orech yamim asbee'eyhu v'areihu beeshu'ati
I will grant them long life and show them My salvation (Psalm 91:16)