



DVAR TORAH

PARSHAS VAYIKRA



By: Rabbi Aryeh
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Wisdom Beyond Mitzvos

Sefer Vayikra opens with the words, “He called out to Moshe and Hashem said to him from the Ohel Moed saying.” The Medrash (Vayikra Rabbah 1:15) deduces from this verse that any talmid chacham who lacks wisdom is worse than an animal carcass. What is the meaning of this striking statement, and what proof is there for it in this seemingly inconspicuous verse?

The Medrash continues and explains itself: “Go and learn from Moshe, the father of wisdom and prophecy, who took Klal Yisroel out of Egypt. Through him numerous miracles were performed in Egypt and awe-inspiring wonders occurred at the Yam Suf. He ascended to heaven and brought the Torah down. He erected the Mishkan and still waited to enter its innermost chamber until Hashem called him.”

Despite Moshe Rabbeinu’s extraordinary accomplishments, he did not simply enter when he wished. He waited until Hashem gave him permission. However, it is difficult to understand how this proves that a Torah scholar without wisdom is worse than a carcass. Even if Moshe had entered without permission, we might have understood and justified his actions because of his great accomplishments. The lesson would seem to be that one should strive for humility. It shows the exceptional virtue of Moshe’s behavior. Why then does the Medrash emphasize that lacking this trait is so lowly?

Rav Hutner (Pachad Yitzchok Succos 27) identifies two distinct areas of avodas Hashem. The clearer but less common area is the realm of commandments. These are the actual mitzvos, what Hashem explicitly tells a person to do. The second area is less defined yet far more encompassing. It includes the ordinary aspects of life that occupy most of a person’s time and attention. This includes a person’s actions and thoughts, aspirations and desires, occupation, interactions, and life circumstances.

This second category is not addressed explicitly in the Torah. Knowing how to elevate these areas of life is not always clear. The proper approach can change depending on the situation. For that reason it is not spelled out directly in the Torah. Yet this part of life makes up the vast majority of a person’s experience and may be even more significant because it fills so much of one’s time.

Rav Hutner explains that this second category is the subject of the Medrash. The Medrash teaches that living without the wisdom needed to guide this part of life is more unbecoming than a carcass. A carcass had no choice in its condition. A person who has the ability to think and refine his behavior but fails to do so wastes that gift. A lifestyle lacking this basic derech erez casts a dark shadow on how a Torah scholar is perceived. Others may even react with disgust.

Rav Aharon Kotler adds that the term talmid chacham in this Medrash is not limited to great scholars. It is a call for every Jew to develop this wisdom. Because so much of life falls into this category, the Medrash uses strong language to impress upon us how much emphasis must be placed on it.

How did the Medrash derive this lesson from Moshe waiting to be called?

Moshe Rabbeinu stood in a unique position. As the Medrash describes, he reached the highest level attainable by a human being and served repeatedly as a conduit for Divine revelation. He separated from family life and remained in heaven for forty days and nights without eating or drinking. Unlike anyone else in history, Moshe lived with remarkable clarity about the will of Hashem. Much of his life rose above the ordinary category and became the realm of direct command. He often knew exactly what Hashem wanted.

Yet there remained one area that was not commanded. Should he enter the Mishkan without being called?

Moshe therefore faced a dilemma. Entering might allow him to receive further clarity and continue on his extraordinary level. Waiting meant remaining in uncertainty while maintaining proper derech erez.

Moshe chose to wait.

In perhaps the only moment when Moshe stood fully within that second category of ordinary human decision, he taught Klal Yisroel the most important lesson. Wisdom must guide even the most ordinary decisions. By waiting to be called, Moshe showed how everyday conduct can elevate a person and sanctify Hashem’s name, so that others will proclaim: “Praiseworthy is this nation that is beloved by its Creator.”



By Rabbi Chaim
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HALACHA CORNER

TAANIS BECHORIM



The Tur¹ cites Meseches Sofrim which records the custom that firstborns fast on Erev Pesach to commemorate the miracle that the Jewish firstborns were saved during the Plague of the Firstborn.

This raises several questions:

If the firstborns were saved through a miracle, why do they fast? It would seem more appropriate to celebrate. The miracle occurred on the night of the Seder, so why is the fast observed the day before?
The miracle applied to all firstborns, male and female, so why do only males fast?
The plague struck the oldest member of each household, not necessarily the firstborn child, so why is the fast limited to firstborns?
If the fast commemorates the miracle in Egypt, it would seem that only descendants of those original firstborns should observe it. Why do all firstborns today fast?

The Mikrei Kodesh cites the Zichron Yehuda, which explains that the fast commemorates the fasting of the firstborns in Egypt. When they learned of the impending decree, they fasted and prayed to be saved.

The Ohr Letzion explains that when a miracle occurs for a person, it may be deducted from their merits. The fast serves to restore those lost merits through teshuva.

The Shalmei Moed offers a different explanation. Before the sin of the Golden Calf, the service in the Mikdash belonged to the firstborn males. After the sin, the avodah was transferred to the Kohanim. Thus, the night of Pesach, when Hashem passed over the houses of the Jewish firstborns, was also the moment they were sanctified for Divine service, a status that applied only to male firstborns. On Erev Pesach, when the Beis HaMikdash was filled with the avodah of the Korban Pesach, the firstborns felt deep embarrassment that they no longer performed this sacred role. Out of this shame, they fast. He adds that the widespread custom to attend a siyum reflects the idea that Torah study surpasses even the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur in the Kodesh HaKodashim.

The notes to Shalmei Moed cite the Ateres Tzvi, who suggests that the text of Meseches Sofrim may contain an error. Instead of saying מתענין they fast, it should read מתענגין they rejoice. According to this reading, the day was originally intended as a celebration rather than a fast.

The Mishnah Berurah writes that the prevalent custom is for firstborns to attend a seudah mitzvah, such as a bris or a siyum, and then eat. The Aruch HaShulchan explains that this leniency reflects the weakness of later generations and the concern that fasting would make it difficult to properly eat maror and conduct the Seder. Since the fast is not mentioned in the Gemara and is based only on Meseches Sofrim, one may rely on this leniency. The Ohr Letzion writes that ideally, one should fast. However, if fasting would make it difficult to conduct the Seder, one may attend a siyum instead.

To be considered as participating in the seudah, one should eat at least a kezayis of mezonos or drink a reviis of wine. The Teshuvos V'Hanhagos² maintains that one should partake in a more substantial meal, not merely a small amount of mezonos.

The Dvar Yehoshua³ writes that today the widespread custom is not to fast at all, but rather to participate in a siyum. Therefore, someone who cannot attend a siyum is considered an ones and may nevertheless eat. He suggests redeeming the fast through tzedakah.

1. O.C 470
2. 2:210
3. 2:81

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