

ספר ויקרא ופורים

Of course, there is no calendrical association between Purim and Sefer Vayikro. In fact, in most years when there is only one month of Adar, Purim is celebrated towards the end of Sefer Sh'mos. In such years, Parshas Zachor is most often read on the Shabbos of Parshas Tezaveh and thus Purim is observed during the week prior to the reading of Parshas Ki Siso.

But, even though there is no specific relationship regarding the calendar, that doesn't mean that Sefer Vayikro cannot provide us with insights that are relevant to any other part of the Torah, including Purim.

Sefer Vayikro begins with the verse:

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר:

He called to Moshe; Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed saying.

Rashi writes:

ויקרא אל משה - לכל דברות ולכל אמירות ולכל צוויים קדמה קריאה, לשון חבה, לשון שמלאכי השרת משתמשים בו, שנאמר (ישעיה ו/ג¹) וקרא זה אל זה, אבל לנביאי אומות העולם נגלה עליהן בלשון עראי וטומאה, שנאמר (במדבר כג/ד²) ויקר א...ל'קים אל בלעם:

He called to Moshe – Prior to every instance of 'dibbur'-speech, 'amira'-saying, commands, there was a Divine calling. That calling was an expression

¹ The entire verse reads:

וַיִּקְרָא זֶה אֶל זֶה וַאֲמַר קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ ה' צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כֹל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ:
An angel called to another angel and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy. Hashem of Hosts, the earth is filled with His Glory.

² The entire verse reads:

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת עָרַכְתִּי וְאָעַל פָּר וְאֵיל בְּמִזְבְּחִי:
Hashem happened to Bil'am and he said to Him: the seven altars I have prepared and I brought a bullock and a ram on [each] altar.

The translation of ויקר to 'happen' does not convey the point that Rashi is making of 'transience and impurity'. His reference is to the term קרי which implies a certain type of impurity relating to bodily emissions.

of affection, an expression that the angels use as it says, 'this angel called to that angel'.

But, in regards to the prophets of the nations, G-d reveals Himself to them with an expression of transience and impurity as it says, 'Hashem appeared to Bil'am'.

That is, the Word of G-d that came to Moshe Rabbenu and the other prophets of Israel, each on their respective level, was qualitatively different than that which was transmitted to Bil'am.

At the same time, we do notice an anomaly in our verse. We would have expected this opening verse of Sefer Vayikro to begin with the words 'ויקרא ה', Hashem called to Moshe, identifying the One Who was speaking to Moshe Rabbenu. Yet the Torah writes only 'ויקרא', He called, without identifying the 'Caller' until the second half of the Posuk.

Does the immediate anonymity of the One addressing Moshe Rabbenu seem to convey love and affection or, as it does seem, does it convey a sense of separation and disconnectedness?

Anonymity certainly seems in opposition to love and affection where the oneness of the relationship is conveyed by the close and intimate interpersonal relationship between the two parties. 'Hiding' the Name of G-d until the verse's continuation seems to imply the opposite of closeness and intimacy.

How is this to be understood in light of the affection that is being displayed?

This question increases in importance when noting that this is how the entire Sefer Vayikro opens. Sefer Vayikro seems to be anything other than a closed book.

In fact, Sefer Vayikro, containing the Mitzvos of Korbonos in particular, is far more open and explicit about its Mitzvos than are other sections of the Torah. That is what the Mishnah in Masseches Chagiga (Perek 1/Mishnah 8) teaches:

היתר נדרים פורחין באויר ואין להם על מה שיסמכו הלכות שבת חגיגות והמעילות
הרי הם כהררים התלויין בשערה שהן מקרא מועט והלכות מרובות הדינין והעבודות
הטהרות והטומאות ועריות יש להן על מי שיסמכו הן הן גופי תורה:

The Halachos of permitting and releasing vows are ‘flying in the air’ and they do not have verses upon which to rely³. The Halachos of Shabbos, *Chagiga* offerings and *Me’ila*-violations of the sanctity of the property of the Beis HaMikdosh are like mountains hanging by a hair⁴ because they have few verses and multiple laws. Civil and criminal law and the service in the Beis HaMikdosh and the laws of purity and impurity and the laws of forbidden relationships all have verses upon which to rely. All of the above are all basic Halachos of the Torah.

Thus, if Sefer Vayikro, with its ‘service in the Beis HaMikdosh’ is uniquely expressive and clear regarding its laws, wouldn’t we expect that its opening be particularly open and clear? But it is not. Why not?

Let us note the comment of Baal HaTurim on the way that the opening word of Sefer Vayikro is written.

If you look in a Sefer Torah you will see that the letter *alef* of the word ויקרא is written much smaller than the other letters. As is most-likely noted in your Chumash, it is an אלף זעירא, a miniature letter *alef*. Baal HaTurim writes:

אל"ף דויקרא זעירא. שמשה היה גדול ועניו לא רצה לכתוב אלא "ויקר" לשון מקרה כאילו לא דבר הקדוש ברוך הוא עמו אלא בחלום כדרך שנאמר בבלעם כאילו לא נראה לו השם אלא במקרה (מדרש אותיות קטנות), ואמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לכתוב

³ Bartenura explains:

היתר נדרים פורחים באויר - מעט רמז יש במקרא שיוכל החכם להתיר הנדר, ואין לסמוך עליו, אלא כך מסור לחכמים בתורה שבעל פה:

The Halachos permitting vows are flying in the air – There is little hint about this in the Written Torah upon which the Chacham can permit and release the vow and it is not sufficient upon which to rely. But, [these laws are known because] such was the transmission to the Chachamim in the Oral Torah.

⁴ Bartenura writes:

הלכות שבת - והלכות חגיגה והלכות מעילה. יש בהן הלכות שהן תלויות ברמז, במקרא מועט, כהר התלוי בשערות הראש:

The Laws of Shabbos – and the laws of Chagiga and Me’ilah. They have Halachos that are dependent on hints in the Written Torah. They have few verses in the Written Torah and are, thus, like a mountain hanging on strands of hair.

גם האל"ף ושוב אמר לו משה מחמת רוב ענוה שלא יכתבנה אלא קטנה יותר משאר אלפי"ן שבתורה וכתבה קטנה:

The letter *alef* of the word *Vayikro* is written small. This is because that Moshe was a great person and humble and he wished to write the word as ויקר, conveying an expression of transience⁵ as if Hashem did not speak to him directly, only through a dream as it says by Bil'am – as if Hashem only appeared to him transiently.

Hashem told Moshe to write the letter *alef* in addition to the rest of the word. Moshe told Hashem, due to Moshe's humility, that he would write it in miniature, smaller than the other letters *alef* in the Torah and wrote it small.

Thus, the form in which the word ויקרא is written at the opening of Sefer Vayikro, this most open of Sefarim, conveys a double meaning.

Vayikro certainly conveys love and affection.

But, at the same time, *Vayikro* can be seen hinting at *Vayikor*, hinting at transience, hiddenness and a lack of openness.

What meaning is conveyed by a hint of transience, hiddenness and a lack of openness at the onset of Halachos that are particularly open?

The answer is that the information with which the Torah is providing us can seem to be hidden from us at times. Even in an 'open-book' such as *Vayikro* there will be questions about meaning, Halacha and its application.

Thus, even though the Mishnah in Chagiga distinguishes between those Mitzvos and Halachos that are more expounded in the Written Torah and those less expounded in the Written Torah, there will always be questions that arise and need to be adjudicated and decided.

In such circumstances we hear less about the subject, the One Who calls and more about the one who is the object of the call.

⁵ Of course, Baal HaTurim did not write 'impurity', because it would have been false to write such an idea and *sheker* could not be excused because of humility.

The One Who calls is Hashem and the one who is the object of the call is Moshe Rabbenu.

By making the Name of the Caller anonymous and only naming the recipient of the call the result is that the recipient becomes the focus because the Caller is not yet identified.

And thus we are told that even when there seems to be a lack of clarity, when the call isn't clear, even when there seems to be more ויקר than ויקרא, there is a solution. There is a way of verification. There is a possibility of validation.

That is, even when the validation and verification does not seem to be implicit in the words of the Torah, HaKodosh Boruch Hu has prepared a mechanism for enlightenment and clarity. That is part and parcel of the love and affection which Hashem showers upon His Chachamim by calling to them and placing authority in their hands.

The Torah has made this point in other places as well⁶. We read in Parshas Shoftim (D'vorim Perek 17/P'sukim 8-11):

כִּי יִפְּלֵא מִמֶּךָ דְבַר לְמִשְׁפָּט בֵּין דָּם לְדָם בֵּין דִּין לְדִין וּבֵין נֹגַע לְנֹגַע דְבַר רִיבַת בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְקִמַּתְּ וְעִלִּיתְּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' א...לְקִיָּהּ בּוֹ: וּבֵאתְּ אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם וְאֶל הַשֹּׁפֵט אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַּיָּמִים הֵהֵם וְדִרְשֵׁתָּ וְהִגִּידוּ לְךָ אֵת דְבַר הַמִּשְׁפָּט: וְעָשִׂיתָ עַל פִּי הַדֹּבֵר אֲשֶׁר יִגִּידוּ לְךָ מִן הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' וְשִׁמְרַתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר יֹרֹךְ: עַל פִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר יֹרֹךְ וְעַל הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁר יֹאמְרוּ לְךָ תַעֲשֶׂה לֹא תִסּוּר מִן הַדֹּבֵר אֲשֶׁר יִגִּידוּ לְךָ יָמִין וּשְׂמָאל:

When a matter is wondrous for you for its judgment, between questions of blood and questions of law and between questions of leprous marks, arguments within you gates, you shall arise and ascend to the place that Hashem your G-d will choose. You shall come to the Kohanim and to the judge who will be in those days and you shall seek and they will tell you the matter of the judgment. You shall do according to the word that they will tell you from that place that Hashem will choose and you shall guard to do all that which they will instruct you. According to the Torah that they will

⁶ See as well Parshas Haazinu (D'vorim Perek 32/Posuk 7) where we read:

זְכֹר יָמֹת עוֹלָם בֵּינוּ שָׁנוֹת דֹר וָדֹר שְׁאֵל אָבִיךָ וַיִּגְדֶּךָ זְקֵנֶיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְךָ:

Remember the days of the world, the years of each and every generation; ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will say to you.

instruct you and according to the judgment that they will say to you, you shall do; do not turn from the matter that they will teach you right or left.

Perhaps the sceptic will ask, 'How can it say 'according to the Torah'? What they say is not the Torah; it is their words.

The answer is that since the Torah calls it 'Torah' it is Torah. Torah defines itself and declares that the decision of the Beis Din HaGodol, the *Sanhedrin* is conclusive and serves as the conveyor of the Word of G-d - Torah.

If so, if the statement is so clear in Parshas Shoftim, what is the need for a similar idea to be expressed at the introduction to Sefer Vayikro?

The answer is that here, in Sefer Vayikro, the Torah is not telling us the Halachah of the authority of the Chachamim and the Sanhedrin. Here in Sefer Vayikro the Torah is informing us of the nature of the transmission of Halachah. The place of Moshe Rabbenu and his successors is given precedence at times over the place of G-d. That is how Hashem wrote His Torah. Hashem gives precedence to the name of His wise men over His own Name!

And thus, we may posit here that the difference between the passage here and those in Parshas Shoftim is that in Parshas Shoftim we are taught the Halachah of Rabbinic authority and in Parshas Vayikro we are taught the *hashkafa* of Hashem's revelation to us that leads to the necessity of the Halachah of Parshas Shoftim⁷.

Perhaps we will be audacious enough to borrow a concept from physics and apply it to our situation.

The 'uncertainty principle' espoused close to a century ago stated that it is impossible to make certain measurements with precision. Those measurements, or a combination thereof will always be approximations. There is no exactitude; there is only uncertainty.

⁷ See Posuk 11 there in Parshas Shoftim for the Ramban's explanation of *Hashkafas HaTorah* in this instance.

The 'uncertainty principle' in Torah is that in general⁸ there are means of arriving at a conclusion which is certain. Authority is invested in the Sanhedrin and its chachamim to issue statements that are certain and that are 'Torah'.

And that takes us to the holiday of Purim where the central Mitzvah is the reading of Megillas Esther.

G-d's Name is absent from this Book of Kesuvim. His Name does not appear.

We read in Masseches Chullin 139 b:

אסתר מן התורה מנין? (דברים לא/יח⁹) ואנכי הסתר אסתיר:

Where in the Torah do we learn about Esther? From the verse 'I will certainly hide'.

We will not entertain the thought for a moment that this statement is a mere play on words. That is patently false.

We understand that Esther, besides being her name, also means 'hidden' and G-d's Name is hidden from the written Megillas Esther. But His Presence wasn't hidden and that was the salvation of that time.

⁸ There are times when the Torah establishes uncertainty. According to Ritva in Masseches Rosh Hashanah (28 a) the nature of *bein hashe'moshos*, twilight, is a *din safek*, a Halacha that was promulgated to always be uncertain. Man cannot determine exactly when one day ends and the next begins. Only G-d can. In this regard, see Rashi to B'reishis Perek 2/Posuk 2 and to Sh'mos Perek 11/Posuk 4.

See also Masseches Yoma (52 a) that writes:

חמש מקראות בתורה אין להן הכרע:

Five verses in the Torah cannot be decided.

The Gemara there lists five verses for which words are subjects and which are adjectives are indeterminable.

⁹ The entire verse reads:

אֲנֹכִי הַסְתֵּר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי בְיוֹם הַהוּא עַל כָּל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים:

I Hashem will certainly hide My Face on that day because of all of the evil that Israel did because Israel turned to other gods.

In times of exile, in an era of הסתר פנים many events befall us and we do not know how to attribute them – are they ‘good for the Jews’ or not¹⁰. That is the uncertainty principle which is an expression of exile, of *hester ponim*.

At such times, because of uncertainty, we seek consolation in deciding that which is good and that which is bad.

We may be correct in our conclusions and we may err. But we seek certainty even when our decisions are far from certain. We may console ourselves in our false conclusions and disaster may await us.

Do we think that the Jews of Shushan who partook of the feasts of Achashveirosh were reformers and apostates? Not at all. They ate food and drank wine with the finest of hechsherim¹¹.

Rather, they concluded hopefully, and without any basis, that Achashveirosh was to be their guardian and patron. Why not show him that they were his supporters and loyal citizens and join with their fellow citizens in a Shushan-type celebration?

This does not mean that the Jews of Shushan should have rebelled against their king. This does mean that they violated the words of Dovid Hamelech in Tehillim (Perek 146/P’sukim 3-5):

אַל תִּבְטְחוּ בַּנְדִיבִים בְּבֶן אָדָם שֶׁאֵין לוֹ תְּשׁוּעָה: תִּצָּא רוּחוֹ יָשׁוּב לְאֲדָמְתּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא
אָבְדוּ עֲשֵׂתֵנִתִּיו: אֲשֶׁרִי שָׂא... לַיַּעֲקֹב בְּעֶזְרוֹ שָׁבְרוּ עַל ה' אָ...ל"קיו:

Do not trust in benefactors, in man who has no salvation. His spirit will leave him and he will return to his ground; on that day his plans are lost. Happy is the one for whom the G-d of Yaakov is in his aid; the one who depends on Hashem, his G-d.

And, perhaps with this, we can arrive at a new understanding of Chazal’s statement that seems perplexing to many. We read in Masseches Megilla (7b):

מיחייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי.

¹⁰ Of course there are disastrous results that have nothing uncertain about them, *Hashem Yerachem*.

¹¹ See Esther Perek 1/Posuk 7 and Rashi there.

A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he does not know to distinguish between 'cursed Homon' and 'blessed Mordechai'.

The term לבסומי which we translated according to its context as 'to drink', doesn't literally mean drink. לבשומי is like the word *bosem* which means perfume.

This phrase could mean to be 'pleasantly drunk', and so it is interpreted by many, especially to deter the holiday of Purim as being an excuse for inexcusable behavior.

But, the term לבשומי could also imply that a certain point in intoxication may bring a pleasant and worthy cognition and understanding. There are times when we don't know if an event is blessed or cursed. There are events that require understanding and investigation far beyond our abilities and yet we come to our own conclusions because that makes us feel better. It would have been proper to leave the matter as unknown, with prayers that all should turn out for the best.

When we realize that the false conclusions that we may reach make us no better than the drunk who absurdly confuses between Mordechai and Homon, then we are preparing ourselves to deal more responsibly with the long-lasting *Golus* that we are experiencing for the past two millennia.

Let Purim awaken us to those dangers of *Golus*. Let Purim awaken us to the false sense of security we seek for ourselves when we have little or knowledge or ability to reach conclusions about which we are totally incapable.

Let Purim give us the motivation to seek the Revealed Hand of Hashem Who will reign over us with the certainty of His salvation and His redemption.

Purim Sameach

Shabbat Shalom

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