

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Parashat Vayikra / פרשת ויקרא

The Great and Small of Yerushalayim

The first word of our parsha – Vayikra (and He called) – ends with a small aleph. The Ba'al HaTurim¹ comments that this teaches of Moshe's humility. Instead of writing "Vayikra" which truthfully indicates that of all of the Jewish people he was lovingly singled out by God, Moshe instead wanted the Torah to be able to be read as "Vayikar" (and He happened upon). This would then imply that God merely "chanced" upon Moshe, but really could have equally have spoken to any other Jew.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe² noted that this small "aleph" is not the only abnormal "aleph" that we find in Tanach. In the beginning of Divrei HaYamim the word "Adam" is written with a large aleph.³ The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained that this anomalous letter teaches of man's greatness. Adam was the direct creation of God who deliberately fashioned man in His own "mold." He was singular and unique just like his Creator. The large aleph represents the fact that all humans are children of Adam and carry his distinctiveness.

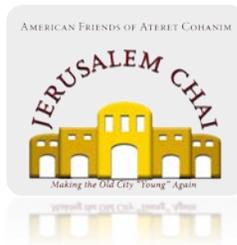
Is there a connection between these two abnormal letters? The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained that these alephs and their lessons must be understood together. On the one hand, we must believe in our own capacity for greatness as we are all created "in the image of God." However, simultaneously we must realize our own lowliness and futility when comparing ourselves to Hashem or even our own more potentially more perfect selves. Thus, either aleph without the other would create a skewed perspective on man and his standing. Only the combination of these poles teaches the true double tale of man.

Many aspects of life are felt more acutely in Yerushalayim, the home of the Shechinah, the source of life. On the one hand, proximity to the Shechinah can raise us up as people to greater

¹ Ba'al HaTurim, Vayikra 1:1.

² *Likkutei Sichos* Volume 17, Vayikra.

³ Divrei HaYamim 1:1.



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heights. The experience of being “before Hashem” is associated the feeling of joy,⁴ when we realize that we are close to God, the ultimate source of meaning. This engenders a feeling of elation.

However, simultaneously, Yerushalayim teaches us of our own smallness. Being close to the Shechina allows us to see our own limitations and pettiness. Any actual difference in stature between individuals is effaced before the Face of God. When the Mishna in Bikkurim suggests that there are “great ones” (gadol) and “small ones” (katan) in Yerushalayim, the Talmud Yerushalmi immediately rhetorically asks: “are there great ones and small ones in Yerushalayim?”⁵ Rather, says the Yerushalmi, the terms in the Mishna must refer only to the amount of people who are present, but does not refer to the personal stature of the individual. Just as all Yerushalayim lets us access our greatness it simultaneously discloses the universal smallness of man.

May we merit to imbibe and experience our own paradoxical nature in our Holy City!

⁴ See, for example, https://torahweb.org/torah/2005/parsha/rsob_reeh.html.

⁵ Yerushalmi Bikkurim 3:3. See Tzafnas Panayach on the Torah, Volume 1, Pirkei Mevo, pg. 74.