

Parashat Vayikra: Newfound Intimacy

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York¹

Vayikra 1:1	
וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר:	And he called to Moshe— God to spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying:

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Hidden Order of Intimacy: Reflections on the Book of Leviticus*, 4

Who is the one who calls? Presumably, it is God who calls Moses' name. But He is unnamed. Strangely, the new book begins with an unnamed subject of revelation. God's name follows only in the next clause, "And God spoke to him." Only after the anonymous call does *God* speak to Moses...There is, of course, no real mystery about who is calling. Nevertheless, why, at the very beginning of the book, is His identity somewhat awkwardly obscured?

1. God Respecting Moshe

Bavli Yoma 4b	
<p>"וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר", למה הקדים קריאה לדיבור? לימדה תורה דרך ארץ, שלא יאמר אדם דבר לחבירו אלא אם כן קורוהו. מסייע ליה לרבי חנינא. דאמר רבי חנינא: לא יאמר אדם דבר לחבירו אלא אם כן קורוהו. "לאמר", אומר רבי (מוסיא בר בריה דרבי מסיא משמיה דרבי מוסיא) רבה: מניין לאומר דבר לחבירו שהוא בבל יאמר עד שיאמר לו: לך אומר — שנאמר: "וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר".</p>	<p>The verse says: "And He called unto Moses, and the Lord spoke unto him from within the Tent of Meeting, saying" (Leviticus 1:1). Why does the verse mention calling before speaking, and God did not speak to him at the outset? The Torah is teaching etiquette: A person should not say anything to another unless he calls him first. This supports the opinion of Rabbi Hanina, as Rabbi Hanina said: A person should not say anything to another unless he calls him first. With regard to the term concluding the verse: "Saying," Rabbi Musya, grandson of Rabbi Masya, said in the name of Rabbi Musya the Great: From where is it derived with regard to one who tells another some matter, that it is incumbent upon the latter not to say it to others until the former explicitly says to him: Go and tell others? As it is stated: "And the Lord spoke to him from within the Tent of Meeting, saying [lemor]." <i>Lemor</i> is a contraction of <i>lo emor</i>, meaning: Do not say. One must be given permission before transmitting information.</p>

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Hidden Order of Intimacy: Reflections on the Book of Leviticus*, 4

To start speaking abruptly without calling by name is a kind of aggression, an entry into private space...Calling before speaking, then, is a matter of propriety shared by God, angels, and human beings.

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

2. Moshe Respecting God

Ramban on Shemot 40:34:2	
<p>וּכְבוֹד ה' מָלָא אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן, כִּי תוֹכוֹ מָלָא הַכְּבוֹד, כִּי הַכְּבוֹד שׁוֹכֵן בְּתוֹךְ הָעֶנָן תּוֹךְ הַמִּשְׁכָּן, כְּעֵנִין שְׁנֵאֵמַר בְּהַר סִינִי (שמות כ':כ"א) "אֶל הָעֶרְפֶּל אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הָאֱלֹהִים", וְאָמַר כִּי לֹא יָכוֹל מֹשֶׁה לָּבֹא אֶל אֱהִל מוֹעֵד (שמות מ':ל"ה) אֲפֹלוּ אֶל הַפֶּתַח, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיָה הָעֶנָן מְכַסֶּה אוֹתוֹ וְלֹא הָיָה רִשְׁאִי לָבֹא בְּתוֹךְ הָעֶנָן. וְעוֹד, כִּי הַמִּשְׁכָּן מָלָא כְבוֹד ה' וְאִיךָ יִכָּנֵס בּוֹ. וְהַטָּעָם, שֶׁלֹּא יָבֹא שָׁם בְּלֹא רִשׁוּת, אֲבָל יִקְרָא אוֹתוֹ וְיָבֹא בְּתוֹךְ הָעֶנָן כְּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּהַר סִינִי "וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִתּוֹךְ הָעֶנָן" (שמות כ"ד:ט"ז), וְאָמַר "וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה בְּתוֹךְ הָעֶנָן" (שם יח).</p>	<p>And the glory of God filled the mishkan: this means that it was filled completely with the Glory, for the Glory rested within the cloud inside the Tabernacle, just as it is said with reference to Mount Sinai, <i>unto the thick darkness where G-d was</i>. It states further on that <i>Moses was not able to come into the Tent of Meeting</i> — even to the door, because the cloud covered it, and he was not permitted to come into the cloud. Moreover, <i>the Glory of the Eternal filled the Tabernacle</i>, so how could he enter it? The reason for this was so that Moses should not go in without permission, but instead, G-d would call him and then he was to come into the midst of the cloud, just as He had done at Mount Sinai, as it is said, <i>and He called unto Moses on the seventh day out of the midst of the cloud</i>, and then it says, <i>And Moses entered into the midst of the cloud</i>.</p>

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Hidden Order of Intimacy: Reflections on the Book of Leviticus*, 3-4

Moses's situation outside the Tabernacle, excluded by God's presence, is resolved by God's call to invitation. In this situation, the divine call overcomes Moses's exclusion.

3. Mutual Respect

Rashi on Vayikra 1:1	
<p>ויקרא אל משה. לְכָל דְּבָרוֹת וּלְכָל אֲמִירוֹת וּלְכָל צְוִיִּים קִדְמָה קְרִיאָה, לְשׁוֹן חֲבֵה, לְשׁוֹן שְׂמֵלָאֲכִי הַשָּׂרִת מִשְׁתַּמְשִׁין בּוֹ, שְׁנֵאֵמַר וַיִּקְרָא זֶה אֶל זֶה (ישעיה ו')</p>	<p>And he called— All oral communications of the Lord to Moses whether they are introduced by דבר or by אָמַר or by צו were preceded by a <i>cal</i>. 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]"...</p>

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Hidden Order of Intimacy: Reflections on the Book of Leviticus*, 4

Rashi shifts the scene from the call of God to a human being to a mutual calling between equals...An intimate calling to attention. For Rashi, this tone always characterizes God's calls to Moses. In a sense, it bridges a gap that exists even between equals.

4. Newfound Intimacy

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, <i>The Hidden Order of Intimacy: Reflections on the Book of Leviticus</i> , 9	
<p>The world of sacrifices...will form the subject matter of [Moshe's] teaching. But the midrashic tradition is interested...in the emotional tone of his newly intimate connection with God.</p>	

Big Question: Why might God and Moshe form a new relationship at this moment?