**[Palace of Silence – Parshat Vayikra](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/palace-of-silence-parshat-vayikra)**

*…*וַיִּקְרָ֖א אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֑ה וַיְדַבֵּ֤ר יְהוָה֙ אֵלָ֔יו
*And called to Moses, and the Divine spoke to him…*

Recently I saw a video piece about the daily routine of an old man. I don’t know who the man was or even what I was watching; I must have been in an airport or doctor’s office, somewhere that had a television on. It showed the old man’s daily routine, from the moment he woke up in the morning. He could hardly do anything for himself, but he had an attendant who helped him sit up, helped him use the bathroom, have him a sponge bath, dressed him up in nice clothes, helped him to the kitchen, gave him coffee and breakfast, then took him out into the world.

That’s about all I saw, but it filled me with a feeling of deep joy to watch. I asked myself, why am I so happy seeing this old man that can hardly do anything? Then I realized – it’s because even though he wasn’t able to do much for himself, he didn’t let that stop him. He could have been resigned to just lie in front of the television all day; he could have had his attendant bring him breakfast in bed. But no! He dressed up real nice, real snazzy. He ate at the kitchen table, he went out into the world and did things. He had a routine, a practice, and through that practice he continued to live a life.

There is such a crucial lesson here for our spiritual lives, especially in these times.

It is very common for people to be unintentional and somewhat unconscious about their routines, about how they spend their days. We can spend years having our schedules dictated by a set of responsibilities, and besides those responsibilities, without much intention or decision about how to spend one’s time, aside from those responsibilities.

*…*וַיִּקְרָ֖א אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֑ה וַיְדַבֵּ֤ר יְהוָה֙ אֵלָ֔יו
*And called to Moses, and the Divine spoke to him…*

The Divine is calling, but it can be challenging to wake up and truly listen.

There is an unusual phrasing in this first *pasuk*: *Vayikra el Mosheh – And called to Moses.* God is calling to Moses, but unlike other times when the Divine speaks, it doesn’t mention a Divine Name; it is as if to say that the deepest level of the Divine that “calls” to us is beyond all names, beyond words, beyond thought.

In other words, it is the call of silence.

It is much easier to hear all the other calls – the call of our mundane responsibilities, the call of the news, the call of entertainment and social media. But if you want to hear the Call of the Divine, you’ve got to get up in the morning with God in mind, even if you can barely move. You’ve got to put on your special clothes – your *tallit,* your *tefillin,* or whatever signifies to you that you are going out to meet the Divine, even if nothing is making you do it.

This can be difficult if we are used to having our responsibilities dictated to us. Like the teenager who stays in bed until 2 pm on the weekends or in the summer, the downward unconscious pull of purposelessness will take hold if we don’t intentionally decide, like that old man, to get up and meet the Divine on purpose.

Today, perhaps more than any other time in our lives, this lesson is key.

With our ordinary routines to which we are so accustomed torn from our lives, it is more important than ever to *decide;* from the formlessness of long days at home, we must take this precious gift of existence seriously and *carve out a new routine* within which can consciously learn, grow, and contribute. And, at the core of our new conscious routine, there is the most precious opportunity: to show up for our daily date with *Hashem*, to faithfully and consistently enter that Palace of Silence from which the Divine constantly calls to us…

***More on Parshat Vayikra...***

[**Self Recognition – Parshat Vayikra**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/parshat-vayikra)

וַיִּקְרָ֖א אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֑ה וַיְדַבֵּ֤ר יְהוָה֙ אֵלָ֔יו מֵאֹ֥הֶל מוֹעֵ֖ד לֵאמֹֽר׃ דַּבֵּ֞ר אֶל־בְּנֵ֤י יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ וְאָמַרְתָּ֣ אֲלֵהֶ֔ם אדָ֗ם כִּֽי־יַקְרִ֥יב מִכֶּ֛ם קָרְבָּ֖ן
*The Divine called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: “Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘when one of you draws close with an offering…’”*
*– Leviticus 1:1, 2*

​
Rabbi Yehiel Mikhal of Zlotchov taught on the verse, Deuteronomy 5:5 –

אָ֠נֹכִי עֹמֵ֨ד בֵּין־יְהוָ֤ה וּבֵֽינֵיכֶם֙
*I stood between the Divine and you…*

"It is the 'I' that stands between the Divine and us. When a person says 'I' and asserts oneself, a wall is placed between oneself and the Divine. But for one who offers the 'I' – there is no barrier. It is to this person that the words in *Shir Hashirim* refer:

אֲנִ֣י לְדוֹדִ֔י וְעָלַ֖י תְּשׁוּקָתֽוֹ – *I am my beloved’s and His desire is toward me… "*

*To be a someone* – to assemble one’s thoughts, feelings and experiences into a sense of “me” – takes energy. Ordinarily we don’t even realize how much energy is being expended maintaining this ego. But in offering our “I” to the Mystery from which we emerge and to which we will eventually return, there can be a great inner surrendering to that Mystery, a great falling into the Beloved.

But how do we do that?

Rabbi David Lelov taught that there can be no experience of the Divine without first recognizing ourselves. When Joseph’s brothers came to him in Egypt and said, “We are upright men!” Joseph accused them: “You are spies!” But when they admitted they had sinned against their brother, it was then that Joseph wept and revealed himself to them.

Similarly, if we want the Divine to reveal Itself to us, we must first learn to fully be with ourselves. Free of self-assertion and self-justification, just being open and vulnerable with our actual experience, without distractions, can itself be an offering; then the inner barrier of the “I” can relax into the Divine Presence that we are beyond the “I” – and that is meditation.

Good Shabbos!

[**The Cow and the Sheep – Parshat Vayikra**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-cow-and-the-sheep-parshat-vayikra)

Pirkei Avot 3:8 says, *"Give to the Divine from the Divine, for you and all you have are nothing but the Divine..."*

​Freedom means, no more burden, no more worry, no more tension with What Is.

​The devotional path of spiritual freedom is a path of offering one's self to the Divine moment by moment, so that your whole life has the quality of openness, of living not for "me" but for Reality Itself. In that total offering is the realization that "I" am also the Divine; "I" am also Reality. In this way, all of life can be realized as an expression of the Divine.

​But to practice this moment by moment means embodying a paradoxical confluence of opposing qualities: Strength and Surrender.

This week's Torah reading begins:

**א**וַיִּקְרָ֖א אֶל־משֶׁ֑ה וַיְדַבֵּ֤ר יְהֹוָה֙ אֵלָ֔יו מֵאֹ֥הֶל מוֹעֵ֖ד לֵאמֹֽר

**1.***And (the Divine) called to Moses, and the Divine spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying,*

**ב**דַּבֵּ֞ר אֶל־בְּנֵ֤י יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ וְאָֽמַרְתָּ֣ אֲלֵהֶ֔ם אָדָ֗ם כִּי־יַקְרִ֥יב מִכֶּ֛ם קָרְבָּ֖ן לַֽיהֹוָ֑ה מִן־הַבְּהֵמָ֗ה מִן־הַבָּקָר֙ וּמִן־הַצֹּ֔אן תַּקְרִ֖יבוּ אֶת־קָרְבַּנְכֶֽם:

**2.***Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When a person from [among] you brings an offering to the Divine; from animals, from cattle or from the flock you shall bring your offering.*

In order to make yourself into an offering, you need the "cattle" and the "flock" – meaning, you need to be bold and strong like a bull, but also submissive and passive like a lamb. That's because you need strength to stand up to the forces of resistance within, (that's the "bull,") and once you do that, what's left is open acceptance of Reality as it presents Itself. (That's the "lamb.")

Ordinarily, we may associate resistance with strength. But the impulse to resist is spontaneous and seductive; the real strength is in knowing that your impulses aren't you. Acceptance takes tremendous strength, courage and faith to be present with whatever impulses arise and not be seduced.

Then, from that place of acceptance of whatever is arising now, you can ask the question: How am I been called? Like Moses at the "burning bush," your calling might be to stand up for what is right, to stand against oppression, for example. This kind of political or social "resistance" is not the same as spiritual resistance. Being "called" can stem from an acceptance of what is, and then from embracing your calling to try and change things for the better...

[**What is Humility? Parshat Vayikra**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/what-is-humility-parshat-vayikra)

***"Vayikra el Moshe, vay’daber Hashem Eilav-
"Hashem called to Moses, and spoke to him..."***

The word *Vayikra* means, “called.” The 14th century Rabbi, Ya’akov ben Ra’ash, known as the Baal Haturim, pointed out that the letter *alef* at the end of the word *Vayikra* is written really tiny. He explains that Moses, in his humility, wanted to write it without the *alef* all together, so that it would spell *Vayikar*instead of *Vayikra,* implying that God didn’t call to Moses, but simply happened upon Moses by accident. God said no, I am calling to you Moses, you have to put the alef in there, so Moses wrote it small, as an expression of his humility.

So why is a small *alef* a symbol of humility? Ordinarily, there’s that sense of the separate “me”- that’s the ego- the sense of self that’s made out of our thoughts and feelings. This egoic self-sense tends to get inflated- puffed up like a big *alef.* But when you become aware of your thoughts and feelings rather than get absorbed and identified with them, that inner “me” seems tiny compared to the vastness of your awareness. And that vastness isn’t ego because it doesn’t have any content- it’s not based on thoughts or judgments about “me” and “my story,” it’s just aware. It’s literally nothing, called *ayin* in Kabbalah, because it’s not a thing. It’s the space within which everything is perceived.

So on this *Shabbat Vayikra,* the Sabbath of Calling, may we hear the Divine call to be aware of our thoughts feelings, sensations and everything that arises in this moment, as part of the tapestry of Reality, the Oneness that manifests in all forms. And as we come to know that Oneness more deeply, may we also see that Oneness in each other and be motivated by genuineness and love in all our relations. Good Shabbos!!

[**Call For Help! Parshat Vayikra**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/call-for-help-parshat-vayikra)

This morning, I had yet another computer and IPhone breakdown- the latest in a string of digital *tzures*that has plagued me for the last few weeks. Thank God for my friend Ben! He figured it out and got me my back on my virtual feet- I'm so grateful for his expertise! I really needed his help.

Some kinds of help, however, are the opposite of help.

Take my friend Josh, for example, who is blind. When he walks around in public, it’s not uncommon for someone to grab his arm aggressively and say, “Here let me help you!” and try to force him in a certain direction.

No thanks!

There are folks who psychologically *need*to help others. Their kind of help is often not really help- it’s simply food for their self image.

It reminds me of an old Sesame Street episode, where Grover is straining to carry a really heavy brick. The brick has the word “HELP” carved into it. As he moans and groans trying not to drop the brick, he keeps yelling, “Help! Help!”

The great trickster Ernie walks up and says, “Oh, Grover, you need some help? I’ve got some help for you, hold on just a minute.” He bends down and picks up another big heavy brick, also with the word “HELP” carved into it, and piles it on top of the first brick, increasing Grover’s burden.

“HELP! HELP!” Grover yells louder.

“Oh, you want *more* help??” says Ernie. Ernie then picks up yet another big heavy “HELP” brick and piles it on top of the two that Grover is already holding.

This goes on a few more times- Grover yelling “Help!” and Ernie just making it worse and worse by piling on more and more HELP bricks. Finally, Grover just screams and falls backwards, all the bricks falling on top of him.

Have you ever noticed a strong desire in yourself be the helper?

Or, instead of needing to be the helper, have you felt that you needed to achieve something, or experience something, or be right about something?

If you so feel strongly, you’ve got to check in with yourself- are you seeing clearly what’s needed, or are you unconsciously trying to satisfy your own need to be a certain way, achieve a certain goal or have a certain experience?

The root of the problem is not helping or achieving or having. It’s *identifying with what you’re doing.* It’s seeing your “self” as the “doer.”

When my daughter was three, she liked “helping” me cook in the kitchen. The “help” usually entailed holding my wrist while I stirred something in a hot pan, or holding my arm while I lifted something much too heavy and dangerous for her to lift. She felt like she was helping, but she wasn’t really the doer.

That’s actually our situation.

We go through motions, thinking “I am doing such-and-such,” but actually the act is being done by Everything- we’re only apparently doing it.

When you turn on the car, it may seem like the key is turning it on. But is it the key? Is it the starter? Is it the spark plug? *There’s no single thing doing anything;* Everything is doing everything all the time.

Yet we tend to think, “I am doing it”.

In thinking of ourselves as doers, we take on the most profound burden of all. Like Grover, we strain and moan under the burden of life, yelling, “Help! Help!”

But when it comes to the burden of being the doer, any “help” you get is ultimately like Ernie’s help. You don’t need that kind of help! You just need to drop the burden.

But, you can’t “try” to drop the burden. That’s just more burden! The “me” that tries to drop the burden *is itself the burden.*

So how do you drop the burden?

This week’s reading, *Parshat Vayikra,*talks about how the various sacrificial offerings were performed. When bringing a sacrifice, it says that one should bring it-

*“… el petakh ohel mo’ed… yakriv oto lirtzono-*
*“… to the opening of the Tent of Meeting… bring it close, willingly.”*

The word for “bring it close”- *“yakriv”-* is the same root as *“korban”-*the word for the sacrificial offerings.  So the meaning of the offerings is not actually “sacrifice,” but “drawing close.”

What is the Tent of Meeting?

The “Tent of Meeting” is the place we *meet* *Reality.*

Where is that?

It’s always only where you are!

But, just because you’re here now, doesn’t mean you’re connected to the Here and Now. You need to willingly come to this moment-

*“...el petakh ohel mo'ed yakriv oto lirtzono-
     "...draw near willingly and meet the openness of this moment.”*

Draw your attention willingly into the *petakh-*the "openness" that is the present. Don’t hold it as a burden that you need to change or control; offer yourself to it. That’s the key.

There’s also a hint of this practice in the next verse-

*“V’samakh yado el rosh ha’olah-*
*“One should lean one’s hand on the head of the burnt offering.”*

“Leaning” is the exact opposite of "carrying."

To carry a burden, you have to put your hands *under* it. Here it says to lean *on* the *​korban-*rest in the "drawing near." There's a quality of surrender, not an effortful quality-

*"...draw near willingly and meet the openness of this moment.”*

Let your awareness simply dwell with Reality as it’s appearing now. That’s letting go.

As long as you don't let go, the message will continue to come. It will come in the form of whatever situations arise, over and over again. As it says in the first verse of our *parshah-*

*“Vayikra el Moshe-*
*“Called to Moses.”*

It doesn’t say *who* called to Moses, it just says “called”.

The last letter of the word *Vayikra-*“Called”- is the letter *Alef. Alef*has the numerical value of one, and in Kabbalah, it’s also a symbol of the Divine Oneness. On a Torah scroll, this particular *Alef*is written smaller than all the other letters, hinting that the “Oneness” is hidden within everything, calling to us from everything, nudging you to see- it's not you who acts.

When you can see that it’s not you who acts, but the Divine Oneness that is Everything, you can let go of your burden. Then, the help you offer is also not a burden- it doesn’t demand anything in return, or push anybody around. It becomes a true gift- a Divine gift- with no strings attached…

There’s a story of Rabbi Baruch of Mezbizh, that once he was saying the blessing after his meal. When he got to the following passage, he repeated it three times with great fervor-

*“V’na al tatzrikheinu, Adonai Eloheinu, lo lidei matnat basar v’dam, v’lo lidei halvatam, ki im* *l’yadkha hameleiah hap’tukha kak’dosha v’harkhavah…*

*“Please let us not need the the gifts of flesh and blood, nor their loans, but only your full, open, holy and generous hand…”*

When he finished, his daughter asked- “Abba, why did you pray so hard that you should not need the gifts of people? Your only livelihood comes from the gifts people bring you out of gratitude!”

“My daughter,” he replied, “You must know that there are three ways of bringing gifts to the *tzaddik.*The first way is when a person thinks, ‘I’m a generous person, so I’ll bring a gift.’ This way is referred to by the words, *‘let us not need the gifts of flesh and blood.’*

“The second way is when a person thinks, ‘I’ll give something now, and then I’ll get some reward in the future.’ Those people want heaven to pay them interest- that’s the *‘loan.’*

“But there are some who know- ‘God has put this money in my hand to give, and I’m just the messenger.’ These are the *‘full, open, holy and generous hand...’”*

On this *Shabbat Vayikra,*The Sabbath of Calling, may we hear message of Oneness that calls from all things, urging us to drop the burden of separateness and be messengers of the Divine compassion and generosity in this world...

Good Shabbos!!!

[**Five Windows to This- Parshat Vayikra**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/five-windows-to-this-parshat-vayikra)

This week begins the first parsha of the book of Leviticus, *Vayikra-* “He called”. It gives instructions about five different kinds of sacrifices which the Israelites were to offer. These five sacrifices can be seen as a paradigm of life, each one a symbol for a particular way of approaching this moment.

The first is the *Olah,*or “Elevation” offering. This offering was unique in that it was burned completely on the altar, with nothing left over. This hints at giving ourselves entirely to the task of this moment. We tend to see this moment as a mere stepping-stone to another moment, and we are often doing one thing while our minds are somewhere else. The *Olah*hints that if we wish to live in an “elevated” way- that is, free from mundane stresses and worries, we paradoxically need to completely bring ourselves to the mundane. We need to “burn ourselves” completely in this moment, without leaving over part of our minds to dwell on something else.

The second is the *Minkha,*or “gift” offering. This was a grain offering, brought by those who were not wealthy enough to bring animal offerings. This hints at the wisdom of humility and the willingness to offer of ourselves what we can, even if we think it is inadequate, or that the work required is “below” us. It is the willingness to serve the needs of this moment, without imposing our own preconceptions.

The third is the *Shlamim,*or “Peace” offering. This offering was brought out of gratitude and praise. It brought peace partially because the priests and the offerer both enjoyed it as food, and partially because it was supposed to have a peaceful effect on the world in general. This hints at dedicating our actions toward universal benefit for all. When we act, we do so because we have some particular motivation. If we take a moment to dedicate our actions to universal benefit, this will give our actions and even our decision-making process a special quality of openness and generosity.

The fourth and fifth are the *Hatat*and the *Asham-*the “Sin” offering and the “Guilt” offering. Their purpose was to correct and make healing for wrongs committed. It is good to remember that we have not always been perfect. Whenever we do anything, we are not acting from a clean slate, but rather we act against a hidden karmic background. Keeping this in mind will allow us to approach this moment with humility and the intention for healing whatever negativity lingers from the past. It will also help us accept what happens to us moment by moment, cleansing us from the arrogance of resisting things we don’t like- “How could this happen to me?” Instead, let us accept what is, and offer ourselves to this moment as a force of healing.

May these five offerings manifest themselves in our lives toward greater awakening to the spiritual potential of this moment, always.

Good Shaaabbiiiiss!