



Finding Your Calling • Parshat Vayikra

“Strangely,” Dr. Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg notes, Leviticus “begins with an unnamed subject of revelation” (*The Hidden Order of Intimacy*). “And He called to Moses” (Lev. 1:1) doesn’t directly identify who is doing the initial calling. While it is safe to conclude from the following clause, “And God spoke to him,” that it was indeed God in the beginning clause as well, that fact is left implicit.

This unnamed calling, states the Lubavitcher Rebbe, points to a deep mystical teaching. The calling transcends standard dialogical contact and emanates from God’s Essence. Taking this idea one step further, the Lubavitcher Rebbe relates that this elusive and mysterious Divine voice did not just call out to Moses at one particular point in history but does so continually and constantly to each and every individual in each and every moment.

The meaning attained through hearing your personal call from God is powerful and palpable. Also building off the call of *Vayikra*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks describes the ideal of how it feels when you merit finding your calling in life. You act upon the call from God “because you feel summoned to it. You feel this is your meaning and mission in life. This is what you were placed on earth to do” (“The Pursuit of Meaning,” *Covenant & Conversation*).

Yet, for many, finding their calling, purpose, or personal mission, is beset with confusion and frustration. How does one identify this call and answer it affirmatively?

Finding your calling, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm suggests, requires a mindset that searches for God’s messages, and interprets life through the lens of Divine Providence. Rashi, quoting a *Midrash*, notes that word *Vayikra*, “And he called” (Lev. 1:1), connotes an affectionate, dignified and intentional appeal. In contrast, the similar word *Vayakar*, which is used to describe God’s encounter with Balaam, denotes a casual, happenstance, and shameful call.

God’s calls to both Moses and Balaam were not dissimilar, Rabbi Lamm contends. It was their responses to the calls that were inherently different. Moses was attuned to the signals and messages God was discreetly sending. This type of person “will view all of life as a divinely given opportunity for self-development and service. He will view the great events of existence as a challenge to which he must respond, a call to which he must answer. All of life becomes an active inspiring series of opportunities which can be seized and developed” (“Chance or Providence?,” *Derashot Ledorot*).

Another strategy to attune oneself to a calling is to be self-aware of one’s own internal desires, drives, and strengths. After the implicit call to Moses, God explicitly delineates the intricate details of the sacrificial services. The verse states that the sacrifice should be offered at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, “*lirtzono*,” before God (Lev. 1:3). Most translations assume *lirtzono* indicates that God will be pleased with a sacrifice. In

an alternative explanation, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg suggests that the subject of the word *lirtzono* is not God, but the provider of the sacrifice. The person should offer the sacrifice with a strong *ratzon*, desire, and his actions should reflect and incorporate all the strengths embedded in his soul and personality.

Following this explanation, the ideal sacrifice requires self-awareness of one's strengths, the deep, inner convictions that determine character, and the commitment of those skills and aptitudes towards the service of God. Perhaps it is the merging of one's internal capabilities and will with

God's Will, identified through external spiritual and moral opportunities, that offers a path towards one's calling.

Even with these suggestions, identifying one's calling can still be a struggle. After all, God's call is not explicit. A personalized Divine revelation with a clearly articulated mission is not common; it's rare. Yet, if we strive to match our Divinely inspired internal gifts with the Divinely orchestrated external challenges and opportunities in our lives, we may indeed merit to hear and heed our own personalized Divine calling.

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Character Challenge: To explore your personal calling, be attuned to the spiritual and ethical gaps in your surroundings. How can your own strengths, aptitudes, and desires be used to address these needs?

Quote from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l: "There are things only we can do, we who are what we are, in this time, this place, and these circumstances. For each of us God has a task: work to perform, a kindness to show, a gift to give, love to share, loneliness to ease, pain to heal, or broken lives to help mend. Discerning that task, hearing Vayikra, God's call, is one of the great spiritual challenges for each of us" ("Where God Wants Us To Be," *Covenant & Conversation*)