Jewish Tribune – Vayilkra

**Humility and History**

Professor David Easty was quite literally a medical visionary. Dismissed as a schoolboy dunce, he developed the first UK nationwide eye bank, creating the template for a service now transplanting 4,000 sight preserving corneas a year.

Professor Easty died a few weeks ago, aged 89. What struck me when I read a brief obituary, was not his significant life accomplishments (saving the sight of thousands of people a year because of his pioneering work) but his humility. Apparently, he was renowned for his patience and humility. His secretary for 40 years said: “I never heard him utter a cross word.”

She recalled the day she sent him to London on the wrong day. “Never mind,” he said, adding, in reference to his daughters, “I will go and see the girls.”

This brings us to the small aleph of the word **ויקרא**, the first word and indeed name of our parsha and the whole sefer. It is a matter of note and discussion amongst many meforshim, and is seen by many to allude to the humility of Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Ba’al Haturim says that in his humility, Moshe Rabbeinu wanted the word to read “Vayokor”, an expression of chance encounter and not a calling of Hashem. HKBH wanted “Vayikra” to express the fact that He called Moshe and was an expression of the love He felt towards him. A compromise was agreed, and the aleph was made smaller.

Interestingly, the word “keri”, a derivative of the word “mikreh”, appears at the very end of sefer Vayikra, when we read the frightening tochacha; the chilling prediction of punishment to Klal Yisroel if we fall short of our national expectations.

“Keri” is a key word in the tochacha, appearing no less than seven times. The Rambam in Mishna Torah (Ta’aniyos 1:1-3) explains that this refers to attributing tragedy to chance and that it is simply the way of the world.

Rather, we should cry out to HKBH. The Rambam says that responding to tragic events by shrugging our shoulders and saying: “such is life”, is cruel. Moreover, he applies the possuk as follows: “If you continue to be *keri* towards Me, then in My anger I will be *keri* towards you.”

In other words, it will not be HKBH who makes us suffer but applying middah k’neged middah, if we fail to see Hashem’s hand in history, He withdraws His protection and we will simply be left to chance, which as a small and vulnerable nation, is very dangerous.

This, says Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, is the connection between the beginning of Vayikra and the end. The difference between “mikrah” and “mikreh” is almost imperceptible. But in fact, it is an enormous and profound difference. It is the difference between history as Hashem’s call and seeing history as one random event after another with no underlying purpose or meaning.

And perhaps that there is a connection between “Vayikra”, the call of G-d and humility. Humility is often misunderstood to mean lowlines and meekness. That is not what **ענוה** is. **ענוה** is knowing your abilities and talents and recognising that they are G-d given. As the Mesilas Yeshorim says, just as a bird should not feel arrogant for having the ability to fly, so too, we should not feel arrogant in utilising whatever gifts we have from Hashem.

A humble person realises he has a role to play in Hashem’s world. He has been given unique abilities and opportunities and has been put in this world to play a role in the symphony of creation. A unique role that no one else can play and a keen awareness of seeing history as Hashem’s masterplan.

Seeing history as a series of random events - or a “trash-bag of random coincidences blow open by the wind” as one writer put it – is the opposite of humility, because it denies each person’s role in a bigger picture and as a piece in G-d’s master jigsaw.

May we all merit to humbly go about our lives, to use the blessings and opportunities we are given, to create a beautiful symphony of Hashem’s world.

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