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Dvar Torah Parshat Vayikra What Happened to the Alef?

At first glance, the small alef in the first word in this week's parsha, Vayikra, seems like a typo. However, upon further analysis there is much to learn from this small letter.

The Ohr HaChaim (Shemot 34:29) quotes a peculiar Medrash which says that when Moshe finished writing the Torah, there was a drop of ink left over in his inkwell. Moshe placed the ink on his face which led to the glow on his face described in Shemot. The Ohr HaChaim comments that Moshe, the most humble of all people on the face of the Earth, was uncomfortable describing himself as such and so when commanded to write that he was an עֲנִי, or humble, he wrote עֲנֹ without a yud, to minimize Hashem's praise. That missing yud accounted for the extra ink.

The Baal Haturim, writes similarly, that at the start of our parsha, Moshe was commanded to write ויקרא, and He called, a phrase which connotes love honor and respect. Moshe wanted to write ויקר which connoted impurity and that Hashem merely "happened" upon him. In order to acquiesce to Hashem's command Moshe compromised and wrote a small alef. This too can account for the ink left over in Moshe's inkwell.

The true meaning of the cited Medrash and commentary is hard to comprehend. Its lesson, however, is obvious. Moshe, who came closer to Hashem than any other Jew and reached unparalleled heights in his mastery of Torah, was the most humble of all. Not only did he not desire honor; he ran away from it and avoided it at all costs. Moshe teaches us that in order to learn, we need to be humble. Only with humility can one learn from others, see things from a different perspective, and recognize mistakes and the need for self-improvement. Focus on humility can put us on a path to greatness.

Shabbat Shalom!
Rabbi Yaacov Feit