

VaYikra Becoming Fundamentalists for Justice and Compassion ויקרא

Something very profound about what's happening in this week's Torah portion and how it relates to our lives. I'll tell you, I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like I build my life and then I'm not in it when I'm done building. Anybody ever get that? I don't know. Sometimes I feel like that when life gets so intense where the stimuli are coming so quickly that you don't have time to work with them, you know? That the compassion screen that we need in order to be able to receive things and then soften them before they penetrate too deeply throw us off kilter, off balance, lose our equilibrium. Sometimes life is like that. Anybody ever have that? So this theme of building your life, yeah, sure. Absolutely. The feeling that you're on the outside looking in at something that you yearn to participate in but somehow you are left out. It belongs to you.

It's a profound moment in this week's Torah portion. Often in the Torah when God speaks to Moses there's no mention that God calls Moses first. And God called to Moses and spoke. Usually, v'idaver adonai el moshe leimor. God just begins as if there's a kind of running conversation. That running conversation that we have with ourselves, with God. Hey, you remember where we were, right? You kept that. So this calling to Moses prior to speaking to Moses is a very powerful beginning of this week's Torah portion. v'ikra el moshe and unnamed subject and called to Moses. This word is the first word in the chapter and it represents the very essence of this week's Torah portion and the essence of the entire book of Leviticus which is named v'ikra; and was called.

So in order to understand deeply what is going on in the book of Leviticus it would behoove us to understand this moment. This anomaly in the biblical text. What is significant about this week that the speech that happens between Moses and God so automatically and so naturally significantly this week is precipitated by a call. A separate call. So the commentators beautifully paint a picture for us. Let me paint it for you as well. At the end of last week's Torah portion, parashat Pekudei the last of the portions in the book of Exodus we're told Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting because the cloud rested therein. And even after some time had passed the commentators say Moses restrained himself from approaching the holy place based on his previous experience. God therefore had to call Moses and tell him that he was once more able to enter. The call this week the rabbis teach us the wisdom masters teach us is a specific noticing that takes place between God and Moses.

Last week Moses finished the completion. He completed the Mishkan. And the Torah tells us very beautifully that Moses couldn't enter the Mishkan. He built the Mishkan. He built it with his own hands. Well everybody built it, right? But Moses? Bezalel designed it, but Moses received the directions, the instructions and then Moses couldn't enter that place. And so in that place of being left out the tradition tells us God whispered to Moses lashon chiba a language of devotion and love that only the angels speak in. God speaks to Moses in a whisper and says what are you doing on the outside? Why don't you come in? That sense of I want so badly to participate I want so badly to belong, I want so badly.

I was in Montreal this past weekend and I was brought in by a group of young, hip cool, snarky ambivalent Jews in Montreal. Young, did I say young? Hip, with it snarky. So we did Friday night services and Saturday morning services and then the real fun began. Here I was preaching to them and teaching them and I had all these texts together and I prepared for weeks on end and I was going to impress them with the rabbi from New York and teach them, you know, all that stuff. And the best part of the weekend began on Saturday evening when we sat down and I said, you know how about I don't say anything and you just say what you want to say. Ask me your questions, make your statements. Let's see if we can have a conversation. And one girl stood up and she said, you know I feel so left out. I come to shul, or I look to go to shul, but everywhere I go I feel as though there is a bar so high to jump over. Another woman stood up and said, no I'm not Jewish but I've been going to shul now for five years, my husband is Jewish. And every time I come to shul I feel like the first thing I have to tell people is I'm not Jewish. And after a while of this the accruing of these experiences of feeling like one can't participate one doesn't have a place, we don't feel welcome.

We forget to even listen. We don't listen for the whisper any longer. So while we were in Montreal I was thinking a lot of you here know my son, Bear, is 19 months and we were staying in the home of a woman who had a cat and the first experience with the cat was not great. It didn't go very well for both of them. It just didn't go well, but what my wife and I were amazed by was how often my son kept coming back to see if it could work. He just kept thinking, wow, it hadn't yet accrued yet you know what I mean, as scar tissue. He kept coming back and petting the cat and hoping that it wouldn't snap at him. And by the end of the trip they had such a wonderful relationship. Her name was Honey, and he kept saying, Honey. And his name is Bear, so it felt really so.

The Torah tells us this week that God speaks to Moses, and what's really profound is that no subject is mentioned. It doesn't say, and God spoke. It says, and speaking happened to Moses. So many, many interpretations are offered but I would like to offer mine. I think that the meaning of the call not having any particular subject was that often when we don't feel as though we're being held, that's when we find a way in.

I told this story three, two Rosh Hashanahs ago on the first night of Rosh Hashanah. There was a great Hasidic Rebbe named Rabbi Yisrael. I think it was actually Naftali of Rapshitz, I think it was the Rapshitzer. I'm not sure, I can check one of the Hasidic Rebbes, the Rapshitzer Rebbe. It couldn't have been the Rapshitzer, anyway there was a great Hasidic Rebbe that was that was in the ghetto, one of the ghettos during World War II We know the story because his shamash, his sexton his assistant told the story. It was very dangerous for Jews to leave after curfew to leave their safe spaces, but even the high holidays were fast approaching. And one day a young boy came running into into the house where the Rebbe was, where this great teacher was, and said Rebbe, we found a mikveh. We found a ritual bath, and it's very dangerous. But we can bring you there. And the Rebbe said, it's two days before before Rosh Hashana, can't go into the Yamin, can't go into the high holidays without going to the mikveh, to the ritual bath. So by cover of night they they made their way out, it's quite dangerous, and they knock on the door and they were let in. And the Rebbe couldn't believe his eyes. There in this in hall there was a stone wall, and there were hundreds of people lined up. And they had pierced a little hole in the wall and each person

was turning to the next person and lifting them up and trying to squeeze them through quickly enough so they could get into the mikveh. And the Rebbe turned to the shamash, to the sexton and he said, the most important thing when things are dark, when we feel like we have no place to go is to pierce a small hole in that which blocks. Even in hell we can break through to find purity, to find something compassionate, something beautiful.

And I really, this story it speaks so deeply to me of what's going on here with Moshe Rabbeinu. Moses, our teacher, is left out of the life he built, but he listens. Even though God is not clearly present, he listens to hear and in that deep listening he hears a beckoning and saying, come in come in.

I wish, I pray that we can build a world where it's that message that is our bottom line. That our bottom lines shift towards compassion and finding a way out that is love. Where we ask ourselves fundamental questions not about numbers but about hearts. And about really what is at stake, what will it take to help purify this world. That's the question that's our question every day how can we create a world where justice and compassion are the most important features where we are fundamentalists for justice and compassion. It begins especially in moments when we feel we have been left out, where we reach an ear in and try to hear the world welcoming us and inviting us to a deeper embrace.

Minks writes, come and join in the heartbeat of the world. Allow the pulse of primal sound to ground you and elevate your soul. Come and drum yourself into being whole. And holy come now and leave your words and worries behind. Allow your body to speak and sway and dance and pound out your message of love your yearning to belong, your joy, your sadness your hope and your humanity. Surrender yourself into being part of the magical circle of tones and rhythms as your hands and heart become entrained with the great cacophony of community spirit. Amen