

VAYIKRA (LEVITICUS 1:1-5:26)

Hey, YOU!

2004 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

The Book of Leviticus picks up where the Book of Exodus left off:

... Moses could not come into the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had rested on it, and G-d's glory filled the Tabernacle. (Exodus, 40:35)

Moses was afraid to enter the Tabernacle due to the intense holiness that permeated the building. Midrash Tanchuma tells us that G-d saw this, and felt that it would be inappropriate to make Moses stand outside. After all of Moses' efforts in the construction of the Tabernacle, he was entitled to an invitation:

G-d called to Moses, speaking to him from the Tent of Meeting... (Leviticus, 1:1)

Now that Moses was comfortably situated in the Tent, it would seem obvious that it was no longer necessary for G-d to summon him. Especially in view of the fact that Moses always felt himself in G-d's Presence, (See Exodus 12:6-8) all G-d needed to do was to begin speaking.

Rashi points out, however, that each time G-d had a new Commandment or statement, He called him again. The Hebrew word, "*Vayikra -- He called*," is an endearing term. (See "Little Big Man" for an alternative, non-endearing phrase that G-d chose NOT use.) Each statement was preceded with a loving summons, "*Moses, Moses.*" (Exodus, 3:4)

When you address someone by name, you are indicating your recognition of that person's worth. You are saying, "Excuse me for interrupting. Could you perhaps spare a few moments of your precious time?"

On the other hand, when we walk up to someone and just start talking, we are focusing on ourselves. "**I** have arrived, and **I** have something to say! Stop what you are doing, and listen to **ME!!**"

Sometimes we tend to be so caught up in our own problems that we don't stop to recognize that others have issues and interests of their own. We butt into their conversations or interrupt their silent train of thought, demanding instant attention to our needs. G-d didn't act that way. Neither should we.

By addressing our fellow man directly, we acknowledge and respect his individuality.

Did you ever send someone a well thought-out message by email? A little while later, you receive the response – a short, terse, copy of our comments with a two-or-three word response. No “hello,” no “good-bye,” just the proclamation from on high!

Such a communication implies that I really don’t have the time to waste being courteous. Just listen to my message and leave me alone!

Email may be an efficient way to communicate, but it does not necessarily engender feelings of warmth or mutual respect.

G-d was not interested in being efficient; He was interested in teaching us a bit of etiquette and common courtesy.

The above-quoted Rashi cites a verse that indicates the affection that the angels display toward each other. In the *Kedushah* – “*Sanctification*” prayer we make reference to the songs of praise that the angels sing in Heaven:

... They call to one another and say, “Holy, Holy, Holy is G-d, Master of the Legions (of angels). The whole world is filled with His glory.” (Isaiah, 6:3)

They call to one another. They operate as a team. They don’t praise G-d independently. They defer to each other, summoning each other to join collectively in honor of their Creator.

You don’t have to be an angel to respect your fellow. You only need to be a *Mentch*.

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz