

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה *And he called to Moshe*..There is something slightly odd about the words that open the third and central book of the Torah. Normally, when God speaks, or calls, or does anything, the text explicitly mentions God's name, as in the third paragraph of the Sh'ma¹, or the verse prior to the Ten Commandments.² But here it just uses a pronoun. Why? According to one explanation, we have to connect this verse to the end of the last chapter of Exodus. What happened there? God's cloud fills the tent, and Moses is standing outside the tent,³ and a voice from that cloud calls out to Moses and gives him the instructions for all the sacrifices. Rashi takes us into this moment. He says that the sound emanates from inside the tent but only Moses can hear it.⁴ This is

וַיִּקְרָא ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר	¹ <i>And God spoke to Moses, saying...</i>
וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים	² <i>And God spoke these things,</i>
אֵת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאֹמֶר.	<i>saying...</i>


וַיִּכַס הָעָנָן (ויקרא מ:לד-לה) אֶת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְכְבוֹד ה' מָלָא אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן. וְלֹא יָכַל מֹשֶׁה לְבוֹא אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד כִּי שָׁכַן עָלָיו הָעָנָן וְכְבוֹד ה' מָלָא אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן.	³ <i>Now the cloud covered (Exod. 40:34-35) the Tent of Appointment, and the Glory of YHWH filled the Dwelling. Moshe was not able to come into the Tent of Appointment, for the cloud took-up-dwelling on it, and the Glory of God filled the Dwelling.</i>
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וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁמְעוּ;	⁴ <i>Rashi on Lev. 1:1</i>
וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה	<i>And He called to Moses</i>
הַקּוֹל הוֹלֵךְ	<i>The Voice goes</i>
וּמִגִּיעַ לְאָזְנוֹ	<i>and reaches his ears</i>
וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל	<i>but all of Israel</i>
לֹא שָׁמְעוּ;	<i>did not hear it.</i>

like radio signals. Ordinary radios can receive signals from a certain defined spectrum of frequencies. But only very precise, specialized receivers can receive very precise, specialized frequencies. In this moment, according to Rashi, only Moses is receiving the specific "frequency" and the rest of Israel is not. And Rashi also explains that God's *call* to Moses consists of

sounds and silences.⁵ There are words, *dibburim* דיבורים, and there are pauses, *hafsakot* הפסקות, that is, pauses between the words, or pauses between the phrases, sentences or paragraphs. Were these *hafsakot* also part of God's *call* to Moses? Rashi says they weren't. And then he goes on to explain what the purpose

וַיִּמְחַה הָיוּ הַפְּסָקוֹת מִשְׁמֹשׁוֹת?	⁵ <i>And what was the purpose of the pauses?</i>
לְמַד רְחוּ לְמֹשֶׁה לְהִתְבּוֹן	<i>To give Moses an interval for reflection</i>
בֵּין פְּרָשָׁה לְפְרָשָׁה	<i>between one section and another,</i>
וּבֵין עֲנָן לְעֲנָן;	<i>between one subject to another.</i>

of the pauses was. We can make an analogy with a symphony. In a symphony, there is a momentary pause between movements. It is designated by a symbol like this:  The duration of the pause is at the conductor's discretion, but the purpose of

the pause is to allow the audience to process the musical experience that they just had and anticipate the new content that follows. The richness of the audience's experience is dependent on how deeply we are attentive to the similarities and contrasts of the movements. Likewise, what Rashi is presenting is a process whereby Moses is trying to grasp the intricacies of the sacrificial system and the various modalities that are employed in each type of sacrifice. And the reason for that is that sacrifices are, as strange as this might sound to us, a kind of symphony of different expressions of different human experiences and emotional states. To understand the sacrificial system in this parasha, we have to appreciate that "each sacrifice is a completely different world. A different spiritual world, a different sensory world, a different procedural world, a different set of formalities."⁶ But there Rashi says there is another way to understand this *calling and speaking*. In his first comment on this verse, he says:

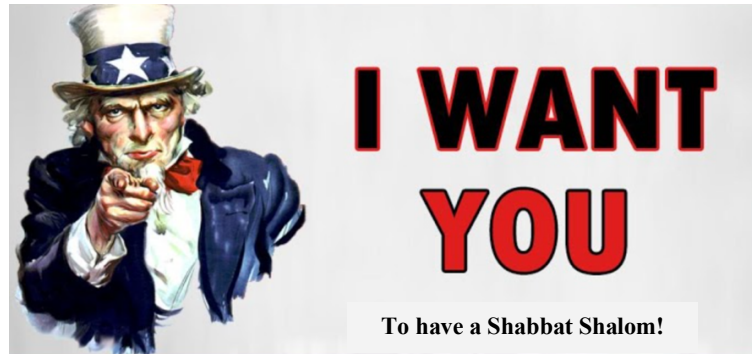
לְכָל דְּבָרֹת וּלְכָל אֲמִירוֹת וּלְכָל צְוִיִּים קִדְמָה קִרְיָאָה, לְשׁוֹן חֶבֶד, לְשׁוֹן שְׂמֵלֵאכֵי הַשָּׂרֵת מִשְׁתַּמְשָׁיוּ בּוֹ,	(When God speaks) all words (of God) and all statements and all commands are preceded by a call. And this is a form of endearment, this is the way of speech that the ministering angels use when they speak to one another,	שְׁנֹאמֶר (ישעיהו ו'). וַיִּקְרָא זֶה אֵל זֶה (קדוש קדוש קדוש...), אֶבֶל לְקִבְיָאֵי אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם נִגְלָה עֲלֵיהֶן בְּלִשׁוֹן עֲרָאִי וְשִׁמְאָה. שְׁנֹאמֶר: וַיִּקְרָ אֱלֹהִים אֶל בִּלְעָם (במדבר כ"א):	as it is written, (Isa. 6:3) And one would call to the other, (Holy, Holy, Holy...), but to the prophets of the nations of the world, God revealed himself in language of banality and impurity. As it is written: God happened to meet Bil'am. (Num. 23:4)
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The Torah makes it clear that Moses and God have a special relationship. This relationship is bound by terms of endearment and a heightened degree of etiquette. God doesn't *accidentally* appear to Moses just on a whim. God gives Moses a chance to get ready, an opportunity to prepare for something extraordinary.

⁶ Yonatan Grossman, Vayikra Lecture on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/0z-S6p2N1RU> פרשת ויקרא, translated from Hebrew.

God and Moses: The King and His Beloved Servant		
ויקרא רבה א:ז	Vayikra Rabbah 1:7	Comment
<p>משל למלך שצוה את עבדו ואמר לו: בנה לי פלטין, על כל דבר ודבר שהנה בוזה הנה כותב עליו שמו של מלך, פתלים...עמודים...קורות. לימים נכנס המלך לתוך פלטין. על כל דבר ודבר שהנה מביט הנה מוצא שמו כתוב עליו. אמר: כל הכבוד הזה עשה לי עבדי ואני מבקנים והוא מבחוץ? קראו לו שיכנס לקני ולפנים.</p>	<p>We can compare this to a king who commanded his servant and told: Build me a palace. On everything that he built he wrote on the name of the king the walls...the pillars...the beams. After several days the king entered the midst of the palace. Everywhere he looked he saw his name written. He said: All of this honor my servant did for me and I am inside and he is outside? Call him so that he can enter before me and be inside.</p>	<p>In the imaginative world of the rabbis, Moses is the beloved servant, and God is the benevolent king. Moses has been entrusted with building the <i>mishkan</i> which the rabbis construe as the divine palace. In the parable, the servant engraves the king's name on everything. To the rabbis, Moses <i>metaphorically</i> imprints God's name on the <i>mishkan</i>, rendering it the <i>place where God's name resides</i>. God's response to Moses is one of joy and gratitude. And also indebtedness. <i>How can I leave him outside? He did so much for me? He orchestrated this entire project.</i> The call to Moses in the first verse of Vayikra, is, according to the rabbis, God's invitation to Moses, in gratitude for having built the <i>mishkan</i>, and in honor of the intimacy of their relationship.</p>

Moses: The Able Yet Humble Reluctant Prophet that God Has Chosen		
ויקרא רבה א:ט	Vayikra Rabbah 1:9	Comment
<p>אתה מוצא בשעה שנגלה הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה מתוך הסנה, הנה מסתיר פניו ממנו, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא: לכה ואשלחה אל פרעה וגו', אמר רבי אלעזר: ה"א בסוף תיבותא, לומר שאם אין אתה גואלם אין אחר גואלם. ביום עמד לו מן הצד. אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא ואתה הרים את משך ובקעהו, לומר שאם אין אתה בוקעו אין אחר בוקעו. בסיני עמד לו מן הצד. אמר לו: עלה אל ה', לומר שאם אין אתה עולה אין אחר עולה. באהל מועד עמד לו מן הצד, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא: עד מתי אתה משפיל עצמך? אין השעה מצפה אלא לה! מדע לה שהיא בן שמפיל לא קרא הדבור אלא למשה, ויקרא אל משה.</p>	<p>You find that when the Holy One Blessed be he revealed himself to Moses from the bush Moses hid his face from him... When the Holy One blessed be He said to him: You go and I will send you to Pharaoh... (Moses hesitated). R. Elazar said: the extra HEH at the end of the word (which means YOU!) indicates that if you didn't redeem them no-one else was going to redeem them. At the sea, Moses stood to the side. The Holy One Blessed be He said: You! You raise your staff and split it! As if to say to him that if you don't split it no-one else is going to split it. At Sinai, Moses stood to the side. He said to him: You go up to the Lord. As if to say to him that if you don't go up, no-one else will go up. At the Tent of Meeting, he stood to the side. The Holy One Blessed be He said to him: For how long are you going to humble yourself?! This urgency of this hour demands only you! You should know that this is the case, for the <i>dibbur</i> - the spoken word of God, is only calling to you, Moses. That is why the text says, <i>The word called to Moses.</i></p>	<p>This midrash focuses on Moses' humility. The rabbis find a pattern in Moses' behavior. At every critical moment in the Exodus story, he is self-effacing. He doesn't believe that he is worthy, and yet, in the end, he always takes up the challenge. Moses is a character study of humility blended with self-assuredness. As self-effacing as he is, he knows deep down that he is meant to lead the people through the desert. When he <i>turns his face away</i> at the Burning Bush, he displays his humility before God's message. Yet he agrees. Similarly, when God orders him to appear before Pharaoh, the emphatic tone of the order, (expressed in the extra HEH in לכה to signify I WANT YOU!), is an implicit response to his self-perceived unworthiness for the mission. And yet, he agrees to go. Likewise at the sea, and Mount Sinai. In all of these places, God sees Moses as the indispensable person, the one, the only one, that could be entrusted with the message (of the bush), the mission (to Pharaoh), the miracle (at the Sea) and the missive (from Mount Sinai, ie. the covenant). So now, here we are, at the beginning of a new book, with the gleaming Tent of Meeting complete and ready to be put into service. Rather than saying, <i>I, and I alone am the one</i>, Moses is saying, <i>Am I, am I the one?</i> And rather than the above story about God's close king/servant relationship with Moses, here we have a story about God and the able, yet humble, reluctant prophet. It is precisely because of this paradox that God chooses Moses: someone who is supremely humble yet someone who is also resilient and self-assured.</p>



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