


Our parasha starts with the word, **וַיִּקְרָא**-*vayikra-and he called*. God speaks to human beings very frequently in the Bible, however, God rarely **calls** before speaking. Significantly, God only **calls** two people in the entire Torah before speaking to them: Adam and Moses. Here is a list of God's **calls** in the Torah, concluding with the **call** that we find at the beginning of our parasha:

1. God Calls Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:9)	
וַיִּקְרָא ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶל הָאָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אַיֶּכָּה.	When Adam ate from the fruit and hid from God, God calls him to initiate a dialogue and to get him to take responsibility for eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.
<i>God called to the human and said to him: Where are you?</i>	
2. God Calls Moses at the Burning Bush (Exod. 3:4)	
וַיֵּרָא ה' כִּי סָר לְרֹאשֵׁי וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּי וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִי.	When Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Yitro, he takes his flock to the edge of the grazing area. From a distance he sees a strange sight of a fire burning a bush without it being consumed. Moses decides to investigate further. That's when God calls him.
<i>God saw that he turned aside to see, so God called to him out of the midst of the bush; he said: Moses! Moses! He said: Here I am.</i>	
3. God Calls Moses at Sinai: First Time (Exod. 19:3)	
וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו ה' מִן הַהָר לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יִצְחָק וְתִגִּיד לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.	The people depart from Egypt and arrive at Mount Sinai after a three-month journey. They encamp there. Unprompted, Moses ascends the mountain although not to the top. God calls him from the mountain and instructs Moses to relay this message to the people on his behalf: <i>You will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</i>
<i>Now Moses went up to God, and God called out to him from the mountain, saying: Say thus to the House of Jacob, [yes,] tell the Children of Israel:</i>	
4. God Calls Moses at Sinai: Second Time (Exod. 19:20)	
וַיֵּרֶד ה' עַל הָר סִינַי אֶל רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיִּקְרָא ה' לְמֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה.	Having gone down from the mountain to deliver the message, Moses instructs the people to ready themselves, for God's revelation. God then calls Moses up to the top of the mountain a second time. It is unclear if he makes it to the top, because as he ascends God tells him to go back down to warn the people not to break through to the mountain.
<i>And God came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. God called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.</i>	
5. God Calls Moses at Sinai: Third Time (Exod. 24:15-16, 18)	
וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָהָר וַיְכַסּוּ הָעָנָן וַיִּשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹד ה' עַל הָהָר וַיְכַסְּהוּ הָעָנָן שְׁשֹׁת יָמִים וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה בַּיּוֹם	After the God declares the Ten Commandments, and after God issues the Covenant Code and after the people conduct the

<p>הַשְּׂבִיעִי מִתּוֹךְ הָעָנָן... וַיִּבֹּא מֹשֶׁה בְּתוֹךְ הָעָנָן וַיַּעַל אֶל הָהָר וַיְהִי מֹשֶׁה בְּהָר אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וָאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה.</p>	<p>covenant ceremony, Moses goes up the mountain a third time, but not to the top. There is a cloud covering the mountain, but Moses remains somewhere in middle of the mountain, in the non-cloud covered part. He stays there for seven days. Only when God calls Moses from the cloud on the top of the mountain, does Moses goes into the cloud and ascend to the top.</p>
<p><i>So Moses went up the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain; the Glory of God took up dwelling on Mount Sinai. The cloud covered it for six days, and he called to Moses on the seventh day from amidst the cloud... Moses came into the midst of the cloud, and he went up the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.</i></p>	
<p>6. God Calls Moses from the Completed Tent (Lev. 1:1)</p>	
<p>וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר.</p>	<p>Just as God's cloud covered Mount Sinai after the giving of the Ten Commandments, God's cloud filled the completed Tent of Meeting at the end of the book of Exodus. But unlike Sinai, Moses cannot enter the Tent because it is filled with God's cloud. It is from there that God calls Moses to issue the laws of sacrifices. While the Torah explicitly says that Moses went into the cloud on Mount Sinai, nowhere does it explicitly mention that he went into the cloud at the Tent.</p>
<p><i>And he called to Moses— God spoke to him from the Tent of Appointment, saying:</i></p>	

There are common elements to all of these **calls**.

1. **Distance and Impediments.** When God calls he is either perceived to be distant or there is some other kind of barrier, like a thick smoke-cloud, impeding his contact. While hiding from God, Adam conceals himself behind something, probably vegetation. At the Burning Bush, Moses is standing at a distance from where he perceives God to be. At the mountain also, Moses is distant from God, standing somewhere between the bottom, where the people are, and the top, where he perceives God to be. Even when Moses gets closer to the top of the mountain, God calls him from a distance, the top of the mountain, or from a barrier, the smoke-cloud on top. When we come to our parasha, Moses is not that far from the Tent of Meeting, but it is covered with the smoke-cloud. Even though he wants to enter it, the same way he wanted to go to the top of the smoke-covered mountain, he cannot.

2. **Spontaneity and Surprise.** When Adam hides from God it is after he hears **God's voice walking in the Garden** (Gen. 3:8). He is afraid because he is naked. God's one-word call, **אֵיכָה-ayeka-where are you**, comes unexpectedly. When Moses sees the Burning Bush, God's call is spontaneous. On all three times at Mount Sinai God's calls are surprises. When Moses goes up the first time, he is going on his own volition. We assume that he expects to encounter God on the top, but God surprisingly calls him before he gets there, stopping him from going further. The second time God calls him, he is expecting to go to the top, but it is at that moment that God surprisingly tells him to go to the bottom and warn the people not to come near the mountain. By the third time, Moses has learned not to go up to the top of the mountain unless he is called. He senses that he will go up there, but he does not know for sure if that will happen. He has been stopped on his two previous attempts. He is in a state of readiness and anticipation. But when he finally gets the call, it is a moment of awe and surprise. When the Mishkan is completed, and **God's glory fills the tent** (Exod. 40:34) God's call seems spontaneous.

3. **Test and Tension.** God tests Adam in the Garden by asking, **Where are you**. Similarly, God tests Moses when he calls his name, **Moses! Moses!** Each call at the mountain is a test of Moses' character as it increases the tension between him and God. Only on the third call is that tension resolved by Moses ascending into the cloud. However, when God calls him from the cloud-filled Tent, that tension returns. He is being called but he cannot enter the space, he must remain outside.

4. **Summons and Response.** God's call to Adam is a summons of responsibility for his actions, but he fails to do so, blaming Eve instead. When God calls Moses at the Burning Bush he is summoning him to a new purpose. Moses responds, **הֲנִי-Here I am**. God summons Moses up the mountain to give him the commandments and teach him the Torah. He responds by staying there for forty days and nights. When God calls Moses from the cloud-filled Tent, it is to give him the entire body of rules that will govern the worship in the sanctuary. It is a summons for Moses and all Israel to shape their collective life around service of God.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE: SAMUEL. God calls Samuel when he is still a young steward to Eli the High Priest. In that story, (1 Sam 3) God calls him three times and each time he runs to Eli thinking that it was he who called him. On the third calling, Eli figures out that it is actually God who is calling Samuel, and he tells Samuel what to answer. A divine call is an invitation to a relationship. When God calls Samuel a fourth time, the relationship begins.

וַיָּבֹא ה' וַיִּתְּצֵב וַיִּקְרָא כַּעֲשֶׂה כַּעֲשֶׂה שְׂמוּאֵל שְׂמוּאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל דְּבַר כִּי שָׁמַע עֲבָדְךָ.

*The LORD came, and stood there, and He **called** as before: "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." (1 Sam. 3:10)*

God calls Samuel under the cover of sleep. It is a total surprise. Samuel is a novice, and the tension of the story is resolved with Eli reassuring him and giving him what to say while feeling a little envious of his young steward. And finally, God summons Samuel into a relationship in which God will speak to him often.

THE CASE OF ABRAHAM: NO CALLS. We often describe God's first words to Abraham as a *call* but that is not correct since the word **וַיִּקְרָא-and he called**, does not occur there. Rather it says:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ
God said to Abram: Go-you-forth from your land...

No call. No distance. No spontaneity. No test or summons. No big, arresting, baritone voice. Just a few words, spoken as it were between God and Abraham not as a command per se, but as part of a long intimate conversation that they have been having for some time. To be sure, Abraham will be tested, and an angel of God will indeed **call** him at the critical moment of the Akedah. **But God himself does not call Abraham.** Abraham is so extraordinary, even a whisper would have sufficed.

THE HUMAN DIVINE RELATIONSHIP: WE CALL GOD AND GOD ANSWERS US.

Other than Adam, Moses, and Samuel, we have no other example in the Bible of God issuing a call to a person. However, the Bible is loaded with examples of human beings calling God, inviting God into a relationship with us and in the hope that God will answer us. For example, we recite this familiar verse constantly throughout the month of Elul and throughout the Tishri holidays:

שָׁמַע ה' קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא וַיִּחַנֵּי וַיִּשְׁמָע. (תה' כז:ז)
Hear, O LORD, my voice when I call; have mercy on me, answer me. (Psalm 27:7)

And these words, familiar to us from Psalm 91, which we recite on Shabbat and holidays:

יִקְרָאֵנִי וְאֶעֱנֶהוּ עִמּוֹ אֲנֹכִי בַצָּרָה. (תה' צא:טו)
When he calls on Me, I will answer him, I am with him in his distress; (Psalm 91:15)

And finally, a third example:

בְּיוֹם צָרָתִי אֶקְרָאָךְ כִּי תִשְׁמָעִנִי. (תה' פז:ז)
In my time of trouble I call You, for You will answer me. (Psalm 86:7)

A call implies an answer. When God calls an Adam or a Moses or a Samuel, he expects an answer like **הֲנִי-Here I am**. But by the end of the Bible, we have inverted the paradigm. **When we call God, we also expect an answer!** Isaiah expresses this in the most audacious way possible:

אֲזַי תִּקְרָא וְה' יַעֲנֶה תִשְׁוֹעַ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִי. (יש' נח:ט)
Then, when you call, GOD will answer; When you cry, [God] will say: Here I am. Isa. 58:9

Shabbat Shalom! Shabbat Shalom! Shabbat Shalom!

Today is Day 547. We continue to pray for the return of the hostages in Gaza. May God comfort the bereaved, protect the IDF, heal the wounded and shield Israel from continued terror. Amen!

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