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CHAPTER ONE

VAYIKRA

LEVITICUS

“He called (va-yikra) to Moses. G•d spoke to him (alone) from (within) the Tent of the Meeting saying: “ *Vayikra 1:1*

Moses was very humble. Therefore he did not want to write the word va-yikra in the Torah with an aleph as the last letter. In this form, va-yikra means “calling” with the connotation of high status and love. Instead, Moses wanted to write va-yikar which means calling in the language used for a commoner. G•d told Moses to write with the aleph because “you have great status before me.” Moses had to write va-yikra with an aleph because G•d commanded him to do so but he wrote it with a small aleph. And so we find in every Torah scroll the aleph of va-yikra is small. *MeAm Lo'ez*

THE HUMBLE HEALER

AND then there was the time that a poor couple had a daughter who suddenly became paralyzed, G•d forbid. They took her to a few local doctors but none could diagnose what was wrong much less suggest a cure. Having no choice left, they decided to take her to the Rabbi Yisrael Baal

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Shem Tov, the legendary holy man, miracle worker and healer. True, they really didn't believe in the bubba maisses²² about the Rabbi being able to perform miracles, but what else could they do?

Shortly thereafter, the couple learned that the Baal Shem HaKodesh happened to be visiting a nearby town. Placing their paralyzed daughter in the back of their wagon, they traveled to the town. Their hearts were heavy as their hopes had been dashed before, so they didn't say much to each other.

Upon their arrival at the inn where they planned to spend the night, they learned that the Baal Shem Tov was staying in a room on the second floor. Of course, there was a long line of people winding up the stairs waiting to meet with the Baal Shem Tov in order to get a blessing.

Finally, it was their turn. They carried their paralyzed daughter into the room. They handed the Baal Shem Tov a kvitel²³ asking for a complete healing for their daughter.

The Baal Shem Tov took the note and said, "Before I give a blessing for your daughter's healing, I expect to receive one ruble (equal to 100 kopkes)."

²² Old wife tales.

²³ Written petitions for blessings and prayers placed on a piece of paper.

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The couple looked at each other and reached into their pockets. All they could find was 27 kopkes. “Rabbi, here are 27 kopkes. We are very poor and that’s all we have.”

The Baal Shem Tov took the 27 kopkes and put them on the table. Then he said, “I’m sorry, but I really can’t help you unless I receive one ruble.”

So the couple searched through all their pockets and found another 12 kopkes bringing the total to 39. “Rabbi, please take these. But it is really all that we have,” said the husband.

The Baal Shem Tov reached out and took the 12 kopkes and put them on the table with the other 27 kopkes. Then he said, “As I said, I really can’t help you unless I receive one ruble.”

“But Rabbi,” pleaded the wife, “it’s all we have. Please give her a blessing. We’re desperate with worry about our daughter.”

The Baal Shem Tov looked at them and said, “I’m really sorry, but I can’t help you. And as for these 39 kopkes, it’s just not enough.” Then he picked up the kopkes from the table and threw them out the window into the courtyard.

Just then, the daughter jumped up and ran down the stairs and out into the courtyard collecting the scattered kopkes as she went. The husband and wife looked at each other with

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amazement. Then, they looked at the Baal Shem Tov and he had a big smile on his face.

The couple quickly turned around and rushed down the stairs yelling to each other, “Let’s get out of here before the Holy Rabbi actually thinks he healed her.”

And so it was.

LEVITICUS

“If an individual person from among the people of the land unintentionally sins by violating any of G•d’s commandments which are prohibited, (thereby) incurring guilt, (then) when the sin that he has committed becomes known to him”
VaYikra 4:27

THE REVOLVING WHEEL

AND then there was the time that a stranger came to have yichidus²⁴ with the Baal Shem Tov.

When they met the, stranger said, “Shalom Aleichem holy Rebbe.”

“Aleichem Shalom Reb Yid,” answered the Baal Shem Tov, “what can I do for you?”

“Thank G•d, I require nothing. I earn a comfortable living and the members of my family are all well. I was just passing through Mezibush and said to myself that it was only proper for me to come and pay my respects to the famous Baal Shem Tov. So thank G•d, I really don’t have need for your advice or help.”

The Baal Shem Tov looked at his visitor with a strange expression. “If you really don’t require

²⁴ A private encounter.

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anything of me, let me at least tell you a story.” The Baal Shem Tov began speaking to his spell bound guest and told him the following story.

Once, in a distant Polish city, there lived two close friends. When they were young, the two boys studied together in cheder and later continued studying Talmud together in the Beis Medrash. When they were older, they made a solemn promise to each other that their friendship would last forever.

In time, the two young men were married. One married a girl from his own city in Poland and remained there, while the other found his mate in Berditchev and went there to live. Before parting, they promised each other to correspond. But as time went by, and they each became busy with their new lives, the correspondence slowed down and finally stopped.

As “luck” would have it, the wheel of fortune turned in favor of the friend who had remained in his childhood Polish city, while it turned against his friend in Berditchev. The latter lost all his property and possessions and was reduced to begging. He then remembered his loyal friend and decided to turn to him for aid.

When the poor friend arrived at his friend’s house he was greeted warmly. The two sat over a

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pipe reminiscing about the good old days. Then the guest stated his reason for coming. When the host heard of the misfortune that had befallen his friend he announced decisively, "Are we not true friends? We made a promise that our friendship would remain forever. Not only will I help you now but I will share my whole fortune with you equally."

The poor man gratefully accepted his friend's generous gesture and returned to Berditchev with a substantial amount of money. He was able to pay back all his debts and to invest in a business. This time luck was with him and he prospered. Meanwhile his friend back in Poland did not fare so well. Now it was he who lost his entire fortune, incurring heavy debts. Finally in desperation, he decided to go to his friend in Berditchev whom he had helped in his hour of need. When he arrived in Berditchev, he heard that his friend had prospered and was exceedingly wealthy.

The poor friend confidently went to his wealthy friend's home to ask for his help.

"I will never forget how you helped me when I was in similar circumstances," said the wealthy friend from Berditchev. "However, my conscience will not permit me to help you!"

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The now poor friend was shocked at these words and waited for some sort of logical explanation.

The wealthy friend went on to explain. "No, I'm afraid that I cannot help you at all. Don't you see, when you were fortunate, then I suffered, and now that I'm the fortunate one, you are impoverished. If I were to help you, then our positions would be reversed again. You would become wealthy while I would lose all of my riches. I'm very sorry, but even a close friend cannot be expected to dig his own grave."

The poor man was forced to return as he had come. But his spirits did not fail him. There were good men in his city that came to his aid and their loans soon put him back on his feet. He was soon able to pay them back and he continued to prosper.

His hard-hearted friend in Berdichev fared poorly, however. His turn now came to again suffer poverty and deprivation. Having no one to turn to, he remembered his childhood friend and went to beg for help. The rich friend bore his impoverished comrade no ill will. On the contrary, he again bestowed upon him half of his wealth, assuring him that he had forgiven him the ungratefulness he had shown when he had approached him in Berdichev.

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Since he had trusted in G•d, he said his help had come from other sources.

The two friends died on the very same day. They were both summoned simultaneously to the Heavenly Court. The two cases were carefully tried. The resulting verdict announced that the generous friend was to proceed to Gan Eden while the ungrateful friend was to go to Gehennom. When the generous friend heard this decree, he refused to go to Gan Eden without his childhood friend.

The Heavenly Court reviewed the two judgments and came up with a solution. Both souls would again descend to earth. The generous friend would be a pauper in his next life while the ungrateful friend would be a rich man. If the latter succeeded in correcting the faults of his previous life he would be pardoned, but this would be his only chance for salvation.

Time passed and as decreed in Heaven, the pauper appeared at the wealthy man's home to beg for a donation. He found a watchman posted by the door who refused to let him in. He pleaded loudly just to be admitted for an audience with the master of the house. The wealthy man heard the commotion and came out. When he saw the beggar on his doorstep he commanded his servant to push

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him out the door. The poor man, weakened by his many hardships, tumbled down the stairs and died.

The Baal Shem Tov's visitor listened to the story with mounting interest, and when the Rebbe reached this point the man exclaimed: "Oh my G•d, I'm the wicked man who hardened his heart to the beggar. It was I who ordered the man thrown down the stairs. Oy vey! What is to become of me?"

The Baal Shem Tov gazed at the man and said: "Didn't you say to me, not twenty minutes ago, that you were not in need of help? Does there exist a person in the world who does not require any help or advice whatsoever?"

The man looked shamefacedly through his tears at the holy Rebbe Baal Shem Tov and pleaded, "Rebbe, is there any hope for me at all? Can I still mend my ways?"

"Yes, you still can," answered the Baal Shem Tov. "Go and find the man's orphaned children and widowed wife. Care for them, support them, and distribute large sums of money to charity. For repentance, prayer and charity can alter unfavorable decrees."

And so it was.