

The Jewish calendar is comprised of a nineteen-year cycle where 7 of the years in the cycle are leap years, adding an extra month, the second Adar. In those years the Parasha preceding Purim is Vayikra. That week we also read the section of Zachor, as we fulfill the Biblical obligation to remember the vicious, unprovoked attack by Amalek against the Jews shortly after they left Egypt and the events at the Reed Sea. The Torah tells us (דברים י"ז-י"ח):

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּזְנֹב בְּךָ כְּלִי־הַנְּחָשִׁים אַחֲרֶיךָ
וְאַתָּה עֵיף וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים

Unkelos translates the word קָרָךְ to mean to chance upon, to meet. The encounter between Amalek and the Jews was unplanned as far as the Jews were concerned. Amalek on the other hand sought out the Jewish People and attacked. We find the same term in reference to Balaam (במדבר כ"ד)

וַיִּקָּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־בָּלַעַם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֶת־שִׁבְעַת הַמִּזְבְּחֹת עָרַכְתִּי וְאַעַל פֶּה וְאֵיל בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ

Gd appeared to Balaam in a gruff way, indicating that Balaam was not as popular or welcome as he described himself to his prospective customers, according to Chazal. The haughtiness of the wicked, like Balaam, stands in stark contrast to the humility displayed by those that Gd chose to communicate with. While they were clearly righteous and worthy of prophecy, they self-deprecated, always concerned that they were unworthy of their relationship with Gd.

My father, Rabbi Moshe Rapps ZT"l explained this by examining a line in Psalms we recite frequently but may not pay appropriate attention to (תהילים צ"ו):

מִנְשָׁה וְאַהֲרֹן בְּכֹהֲנָיו וְשִׁמְשׁוֹאֵל בְּקֹרְאֵי שְׁמוֹ קֹרְאִים אֶל־יְהוָה וְהוּא יַעֲנֵם:

The vocalization of the word קֹרְאִים is interesting. The word is usually translated to mean call out to. However that translation requires there be a שווא under the letter Resh and a חיריק under the Aleph. However there is only a חיריק under the Resh. Moses, Aaron and Samuel were indeed worthy of prophecy, their close relationship with Gd and His hearkening to their prayers and requests. Yet their humility precluded them from promoting their position. They would describe their communication with Gd as a one-off occurrence and that they were not truly worthy to communicate with Gd. The point made is self-deprecating and righteous individuals will claim that Gd appeared to them in a passing way, while the haughty claim that Gd calls to them and seeks a relationship with them.

The first word in Parashat Vayikra has a small Aleph. Rashi explains that this is the way of the righteous, like Moses, who are worthy yet downplay their importance lest they be viewed negatively. Their approach should be compared to the ways of the haughty, such as Balaam, who are unworthy yet claim an unfounded relationship with Gd. Where Moses' described his relationship with Gd as one of קרה that was really קרא, a language of love, Gd's relationship with Balaam's was one where Balaam claimed the closeness of קרא but was really קרה.

While the Book of Leviticus deals with the sacrifices brought under various conditions, people often misunderstand the emphasis placed by Judaism on sacrifices. Sacrifices are to be brought by those who are worthy. If they live a life according to the Torah and faithfully follow Gd's commandments, sacrifices can then be brought. Even by a repentant sinner. Where Balaam emphasized the 7 altars he erected and the sacrifices he offered upon them, the Torah teaches us that is the wrong approach to take: (תהילים נא יח-יט)

כי לא־תחפץ זבח ואתנה עולה לא תרצה זבחי אלהים רוח נשברה לב־נשבר ונדכה אלהים לא תבזה

Gd prefers introspection to sacrifice. Indeed, the perfect sacrifice is not the animal variety, but the submission of man to the will of Gd. Chazal interpret the verse (ויקרא א ב):

דבר אל־בני ישראל ואמרת אלהם אדם כִּי־יקריב מכם קרבן ליהוה מן־הבהמה מן־הבקר ומן־הצאן תקריבו את־קרבנכם

Gd wants man to sacrifice himself, to recognize the depths he sank to or to thank Gd for the kindness Gd has shown him and only then should he offer a sacrifice which can now be accepted.

With this background, we can now examine the events in Megillat Esther. After leaving the first party given by Esther where he and the king were guests of honor, Haman grows angry at Mordecai who again refuses to bow before him. After controlling his anger, he assembles his advisers and states his perception of his importance as a justification for his grievance against Mordecai (אסתר ד יב):

ויאמר המן אף לא־הביאה אסתר המלכה עם־המלך אל־המשתה אשר־עשתה כי אם־אותי וגם־למחר אני קרוא־לה עם־המלך

Haman justified his sense of importance by being called to appear with the king before the queen. He used this level of access as an indicator and springboard to hatch his evil plans against Mordecai and the Jews. After the king's dream, he

arrives at the palace on his own, without an invite, to tell the king to hang Mordecai. His petty sense of self worth has already moved him to convince the king to decree a genocide against the Jews throughout the kingdom. When the king asks his opinion as to how to reward someone who has found favor in the king's eyes, he immediately assumes that he is the recipient of the king's thanks. He suggests the individual be dressed in royal garments and paraded through the streets with servants calling out before him (אסתר ו י) וקראו לפניו ככה יעשה לאיש אשר (אסתר ו י) המלך חפץ ביקרו Haman desires accolades, he views himself as worthy of a close relationship with the king as indicated by the word קרא. He is only satisfied if all validate his sense of self-importance based on his perception of the king calling regularly for him.

On the other hand, when informed by Mordecai of Haman's decree to murder all the Jews in the kingdom, Esther's initial reaction is one of humility (אסתר ד יא)

כל-עבדי המלך ועם-מדינות המלך ידעים אשר כל-איש ואשה אשר יבוא-אל-המלך אל-החצר הפנימית אשר לא-יקרא אחת דתו להמית לבד מאשר יושיט-לו המלך את-שרביט הזהב וחיה ואני לא נקראתי לבוא אל-המלך זה שלושים יום

Esther's initial reaction is that she is unworthy of such a task. To be successful in this endeavor she requires a close relationship with the king. She offered proof of her unworthiness in that she had not been called before the king for 30 days. Esther thought that being influential required that she be called by the king and granted access. Only someone who has been called, קרא, meets that standard.

Mordecai's responds and tells her that she is mistaken (אסתר ד יד):

כי אם-החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר ואת ובית-אביך תאבדו ומי יודע אם-לעת כזאת הגעת למלכות

Mordecai told Esther that perhaps she was chosen as queen for this very task, to approach the king and plead for her people. She must be proactive and not wait for an invitation. True access and impact depend on the intent and sense of purpose. The claims of access by those who seek to destroy the Jews, like Balaam and Haman, can be thwarted by those who are sincere and act out of modesty, like Moses did as indicated by the small Aleph in the first word of Leviticus. Esther, your opportunity to attain your place in Jewish legacy has arrived, Seize it!

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