

Dvar for Brotherhood Shabbat Temple Emanuel, Newton

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Parashat Va-yikra Steven Broder, PhD

Until I went to kindergarten, I did not fully realize that my name was Steven. Growing up in a home where English was the main language but Yiddish was code, my Mother called me “Tattele.” And when my parents spoke about their children, I was referred to as “der klayne” (the little one) to distinguish me from my older brother, der groysser.

Similarly, Ismar Schorsch, the former Chancellor of JTS wrote that it was only when he came to the Seminary as a student in the 50’s that he learned that his mother’s pet name for his father, Schatzi, treasure, was common among Germans. Attending the classes of the renowned Prof. Louis Ginzberg, Schorsch and other students delighted in hearing the Professor’s wife, Adele, who sat in on his Talmud classes, interrupt her husband to make a point, referring to him as Schatzi.

Closer to home, you probably have seen a convertible sports car in Newton with the license plate “Yingele” (“boy”) that belongs to Gary Orren, who says that his father never called him Gary.

Special family names are not limited to Jews of course. Many of you know Ketty Rosenfeld, the exuberant instructor of Zumba at the JCC and for our own Zumba Gold. Ketty, whose family comes from the Indonesian island of Sumatra is the oldest child of five and oldest daughter. For as long as we have been friends, I have appreciated how she is called in her family Matuo, a title of respect, reflecting her family status and wisdom.

So, if Cheers is the place where everybody knows your name, then families and intimates take this one step further, with special names denoting special relationships.

This idea is a hidden gem in this morning's Parasha, Vayikra, the opening to the book of Leviticus. The very first line is "Vayikra El Moshe Vayidaber HaShem eilav mei ohel moed laimor. God called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting."

In the sparse language of the Torah, where less is more, the Rabbis and commentators pounce on this line. They ask why does the Torah say that God called **and** spoke to Moses? Wouldn't either verb be enough to convey the meaning?

Rashi writes that God calling to Moses individually is an expression of affection, a reflection of their close relationship. It is akin to the calling of the Angels to each other in Isaiah.

Our own teacher, Lynne Heller, suggests that the "double call" to Moses is an invitation to him to enter God's House, that is, the Tabernacle, which has just been completed. The word "Vayikra" also indicates a call to attention. We see this in Genesis in the Akedah story where it is used twice. First, to get Abraham's attention by the angel to stop him from sacrificing Isaac. Then, "Vayikra" is repeated a few sentences later to focus Abraham's attention as he is about to receive the blessing of becoming a father to a great nation.

Ramban adds another dimension, encouragement, to these ideas of affection, invitation, and attention reflected in God's call to Moses. He writes that:

"all communications [that came to Moses], whether they are introduced by the word *dabeir* (speak), or by *emor* (say), or *tzav* (command), were preceded by a call," that is to say, G-d said to him, 'Moses, Moses' and he answered, 'Here am I.'⁴² *Exodus 3:4*." This was a way of expressing God's encouragement to, and support of, Moses.

So what can we learn from this? Four take-aways:

1. Affection. Expressing our affection and having close relationships are still key, especially in these times of uncertainty, fear, and conflict. It is easy to get lost in all the sacrificial rituals in Leviticus so that we forget that the root of Korban (sacrifice) is Likrov-- to become close or connected to another.

In psychotherapy, there has been a long debate as to what is responsible for its effectiveness. While being trained well in special techniques cannot be overemphasized, it turns out that a more general factor, the nature of the relationship between therapist and patient or client, is just as important. This is true across all types of therapy.

2. Invitation. Seven days a week, Temple Emanuel extends an invitation to all of us, whether through services, classes, programs, or volunteer opportunities. Accept the invitation to enter the house and you will be welcomed.

3. Attention. Anxiety and trauma make people become preoccupied with their own inner reality and concerns so that we don't pay attention to the many blessings all around us. We don't want to miss those.

4. Encouragement. Alfred Adler, a contemporary of Freud, wrote that psychological troubles often are manifestations of people being discouraged. Finding ways to encourage and support the people around us, especially in these troubled times, is something that each of us can do.

Since it's Brotherhood Shabbat, I want to invite all men to come to a Brotherhood meeting or event. You will find a place where people will get to know you and encourage you.

I look forward to seeing you at Kiddush. You can even call me Tattele.
Shabbat Shalom.