

Dear Chavraya,

At my Bar Mitzvah I chanted from the prophet Micah. The closing words of my *haftarah* offer a challenge and a beacon for whomever would walk with God, *It has been told to you, mortal, what is good and what God seeks of you, only to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.* Standing afterward before the Holy Ark with my parents, I offered prayerful reflection upon what I had chanted. At my mother's urging, as I repeated Micah's words, *and to walk humbly with your God*, I added "and with people."

Micah began with God. My mother, of blessed memory, began with people. Each ended up in the same place. To walk humbly with God means necessarily to walk humbly with people. To claim humble standing before God while displaying arrogance before people means that one does not really know the One before whom they stand. A person who displays humility in all manner of relationship with others will never walk alone. Even if they do not actively call upon God, the humble will always find God to be a ready walking partner.

Humility is the first teaching, expressed in the very first word, of the third book of the Torah, the book of *Vayikra/Leviticus*. That first word is the name of the book itself, *vayikra/and God called* - - to Moses, and therefore also the first word of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayikra*. The last letter of the word *vayikra* is the letter *aleph*. In the Torah that aleph is writ small, smaller than all the other letters. And of Moses, it is written later in the Book of Numbers, *and the man Moses was most humble, more than all the people who live on the face of the earth*. It was Moses' own decision we are told, to write that little *aleph*. That God called to him directly and spoke "face to face," as one speaks with a friend, was an entirely unique honor. Moses wanted only to convey and to teach God's word and not to draw attention to his own special standing and relationship with God.

In Moses' selfless act we are given by example a way to fulfill the essential purpose of the entire book of Leviticus. That purpose is the building of bridges between people and people and between people and God. When the holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the making of offerings to God, both of field and flock, was a primary medium by which people could draw near to each other. The word for offering is *korban*, whose root means *near* or *close*. Most offerings were not consumed upon the altar, but provided the food for a shared meal among people that continued the intent of the offering itself. As a golden thread woven throughout this book, so foreign to us in specific content, the humility expressed in that very first word of God's calling to Moshe, *vayikra*, is the underlying value, timeless in its challenge, that is addressed to us as fully as to our ancestors. As my mother and the prophet Micah would agree, only by walking humbly with people can we walk humbly with God.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Victor