



The Power of Invitation • Parshat Vayikra

Sometimes we wait for a formal invitation only to be told, “You don’t need to be invited. You’re always welcome.” But we don’t necessarily feel welcome until someone extends a real invitation to us. This is the way we open the very first chapter of *Vayikra*, Leviticus.

Our sedra and our book commences with the power of an invitation: “And God called...” (Lev. 1:1). The “and” connects this Torah reading to that which preceded it. When we turn back to the last chapter of Exodus, we find Moses in a flurry of activity to complete the Mishkan. It’s the way the last chapter begins: “On the first day of the first month you shall set up the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. Place there the Ark of the Pact, and screen off the ark with the curtain” (Ex. 40:1-2). And it’s the way the chapter continues: “In the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, the Tabernacle was set up. Moses set up the Tabernacle, placing its sockets, setting up its planks, inserting its bars, and erecting its posts” (Ex. 40:17-18). This was hard physical labor, and Moses executed it alone.

Fifteen chapters of Exodus are filled with the vision and action necessary to build the Mishkan. Many commentaries ponder the need for such detailed instructions and the repetition that these instructions were carried out. There is an important leadership lesson embedded in this structure. You can have a vision, an architectural rendering or a strategic plan, but your ideas are only as good as your follow-through. Your actions reflect your accountability. And if you’re the leader,

your actions matter most.

Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan, in their best-selling leadership book, *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, write about the importance of leaders having a granular understanding of the personnel, activities, and directions of their organizations. This is the job. When this kind of close monitoring for accountability is absent, visions fall flat. Strategies die. Results tank. “Execution has to be a part of a company’s strategy and its goals,” they write. “It is the missing link between aspirations and results. As such, it is a major—indeed, the major—job of a business leader. If you don’t know how to execute, the whole of your effort as a leader will always be less than the sum of its parts.” Talk can only get you so far. Only clear goals, measurable performance, and tight operations bring results.

The entire close of the book of Exodus reflects this intense concern for details and execution. Holiness, like love, resides not only in the amorphous cloud but in the small things, the sockets and the planks. Leaders must care about the minutiae of the work because that creates the foundation for everything else, especially when there is much to do and little time to do it in. Bossidy and Charan continue the theme:

Follow-through is a constant and sequential part of execution. It ensures that you have established closure in the dialogue about who will be responsible for what and the specific milestones for measurement. The failure to

establish this closure leaves the people who execute a decision or strategy without a clear picture of their role. As events unfold rapidly amid much uncertainty, follow-through becomes a much more intense process.

Milestones need to be placed closer together so there is less room for slippage, and information needs to flow faster and in more detail so that everyone knows how the strategy is evolving.

Finally, in the very last verses of Exodus, the *Mishkan* was complete. Herein lies the irony. The very leader who ensured the instructions were carried out precisely was then forbidden to enter the space: “Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of God filled the Tabernacle” (Ex. 40:35). God filled the entire *Mishkan* and there was no room for human beings.

This is why the word “*Vayikra*” – and He called – is so essential to understanding the entire book. God formally invited Moses back into the space after it was infused with the Divine Presence. Only then would the activities taking place there be full of vitality and purpose. Without God’s presence, the walls would have been just walls. God’s presence made the space a sanctuary. But not until Moses re-entered the space did it become a true covenantal center, a meeting place where God and human dwelt together in holy partnership. Without God’s invitation, Moses would never have re-entered the *Mishkan*. He would have created it and remained outside its boundaries.

An ancient rabbinic text celebrates the importance of invitation (*Kallah Rabbati* 8:11). God called (*vayikra*) to Moses from the Mount Sinai: “God called to him from the mountain...” (Ex. 19:3). Just like our opening verse in *Vayikra*, a momentous occasion calls for a formal invitation. God calls out to Moses, reflecting His active engagement with humanity, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes in his book *The Great Partnership*: “Far from being timeless and immutable, God in the Hebrew Bible

is active, engaged, in constant dialogue with his people, calling, urging, warning, challenging and forgiving.” Calling is part of this essential, Divine dialogue. Moses, in turn, called out to other leader at the foot of the mountain: “Moses called (*vayikra*) the elders of the people and put before them all that God had commanded him.” (Ex. 19:7). Later, in prophetic literature, Isaiah calls the people to attention: “When I call (*ekra*) to them, they stand up together (Is. 48:13). There is a reason we have a term for professions and obsessions that speak to the most alive part of us: a calling. We feel called.

Leaders grow people by inviting them to a task, to a project, or to a new level of service. Calling matters because it lets people know that they matter. “You’re always welcome” is not the same invitation as “I was thinking about you. I’d like to invite you...” Think of a time you were not invited to take on a leadership responsibility. You felt excluded, unimportant, or even rejected. Now think of a time you were invited to assume a significant role. Whether or not you said ‘yes,’ you still felt special and included. You can gift that gift to others.

What invitation can you extend right now that would grow someone else’s leadership?