

He called to Moshe. (1:1)

Ostensibly, the call to Moshe *Rabbeinu* emanated from Hashem. Was it only to Moshe? What about *Klal Yisrael*? *Chazal* teach (*Tanchuma* 2) that the call to Moshe came in a loud, thunderous voice, but only he heard it. Hashem's voice is meant for those who are worthy of hearing it. Indeed, Hashem is constantly calling out to us with subtle messages, incidents which are meant to get our attention, to wake us up from our deep slumber and get our act together. We do not always recognize these incidents as being messages. We are so involved with our everyday, mundane lives, that we have become spiritually obtuse. We require less subtle, more blatant, incidents to awaken us. The summons to Moshe, *vayikra*, is spelled with a diminutive aleph which (from afar) gives the appearance of *vayikar*, "And he chanced upon." *Chazal* give background for the alternative spelling. The sound of Hashem calling Moshe was quite prominent, as he had "travelled" all the way from within the Holy of Holies to the outside of the *Ohel Moed*. Such a loud sound should have been heard by the entire nation. Yet, no one but Moshe heard – not even Aharon *HaKohen*. Indeed, this was the same sound that everyone heard at *Har Sinai*. Moshe knew this and, because of his extreme humility, he asked Hashem not to write *vayikra*, but rather, *vayikar*, which would indicate subtly and happenstance. Hashem disagreed, and the sound went forth loud and clear. Yet, only Moshe heard. Why? He was the only one who was listening.

Hashem is always calling out to us, but we are too busy or too distracted to listen. We often mistake the *vayikra* for the *vayikar*. Listening to the messages of life, imparted through life's incidents – both positive and (what appears on the surface to be) negative often serve as mirrors reflecting our own fears and inadequacies. When we examine these incidents, we gain insight into our characters, values and beliefs. This encourages personal growth. Every incident carries with it a lesson to be learned and implemented into our lives. These incidents, among other things, provide us with a sense of meaning and purpose. They guide us to what is really important: our spiritual connection with Hashem. The road map for the journey called life is illustrated by these incidents, which are actually Hashem's *vayikra* to us. If we would only listen.

Perhaps, the problem lies not in a lack of listening, but in an inability to interpret the message properly. I will begin with a classic story concerning the saintly *Berditchever*, *zl*. It was *Rosh Hashanah* morning, and the *shul* was filled to capacity. For some reason, the *Rebbe* was not yet ready to begin the *Shacharis* service. When asked the reason for the delay, the *Rebbe* answered, "I am waiting for Yossele the tailor." Well, when the *Rebbe* said that, his students immediately made an effort to locate Yossele. They ran to his house, knocked and knocked for what seemed like an eternity before Yossele opened the door. They relayed the *Rebbe's* message. This did not seem to move him: "I am not attending services!" The *gabbai*, *Rebbe's* aide, was not taking "no" for an answer. "What do you mean you are not attending? The *Rebbe* sent for you! He refuses to begin *davening* until you come to *shul*." Yossele said, "I will come under one condition – you bring me a *Machzor* (special prayer book reserved for the Festivals)." "Fine," said the *gabbai*. "Get ready. I will return with a *Machzor*."

The *gabbai* returned to *shul* and relayed Yossele's message. The *Rebbe* replied, "Go bring him a *Machzor*." The *gabbai* returned to Yossele with a *Machzor*, handed it to him as he had asked, and they sprinted off to *shul*. The *davening* was unusually inspiring that night. The *Berditchiver* led the service in what was a beautiful uplifting experience for everyone. One issue needed to be resolved: What was so important about a *Machzor* that Yossele refused to go to *shul* unless someone provided it for him?

The *Rebbe* called Yossele over and asked straight out what had happened. Since the *Rebbe* himself was getting involved, the entire congregation refused to leave. This was not something that they were prepared to miss.

Yossele began his tale of woe, "As you know, I have been in Berditchev my entire life. You all know that I have been a successful tailor, working day and night to provide for my family, so that they would have it easier than I had. I apprenticed my two sons to tradesmen out of town, so that they, too, would do well. Why should they have to rely on me to support them? Everything went according to plan. My boys did well. I was able to purchase a nice home, with my tailor shop beneath it, and my wife and I were ready to settle down and enjoy our twilight years together. Then, tragedy struck. A few years ago, my wife suddenly became ill. She died shortly thereafter. I was devastated, but, after the dust settled, I realized that Hashem had been good to me. I still had my business. Then arthritis set in, and I was no longer able to produce excellent products in a timely fashion. Every stitch was slow and painful. My customers were patient – at first – but, after a while, they went elsewhere.

"Well, I still had my savings to carry me through – or so I thought. My eyesight began to become weak. I could no longer even thread a needle. I had clothes to repair and could not fill the orders. To add insult to misery, a few weeks ago, my house and tailor shop burned to the ground. I had always been an honest merchant. I paid every customer who lost clothes for their loss. There went my savings. No wife – no health – no business – no home – no money. I moved into an old shack outside of town. Nonetheless, I realized that, after all was said and done, Hashem had been good to me all my life. I invited a few poor people who were in worse shape than I, and we had a *Rosh Hashanah* meal together. The next morning, I arose early and prepared to go to *shul*, when I realized that my *Machzor* had burned in the fire. This was the last straw. I did not even have a *Machzor*! Finished! I was not attending *shul*. No *Machzor* – no *shul*! So, when the *Rebbe* sent me a *Machzor*, I changed my mind and came to *shul*."

It was a sad, moving story. Indeed, the people who listened were visibly moved; many shed a tear for this poor man who had suffered so much. Suddenly, the *Berditchiver* gave a deep sigh. He began to moan and said, "Yossele! Yossele! You had Hashem at your mercy and all you asked for was a *Machzor*?! You could have asked for *Moshiach*, and you would have prevailed! Why would you just ask for a *Machzor*?"

The messages are powerful; they are profound. Hashem wants us to respond; to think big; to ask –

demand big. What do we do? We ask Him for a nice house, a fancy car, a vacation. *Klal Yisrael* has sustained so many *tzaros*, troubles. Each one is a powerful message, an opportunity to end this miserable *galus* once and for all. We are too concerned, however, with asking for a *Machzor*. The voice is present; we are listening. We just do not know how to interpret it.