

TORAH SPARKS

WHO CALLED

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Dvar Parashah

Israel sinned, God forgave, and Moses ascended again. **God** comes down in a cloud and stands there with Moses. **וַיִּקְרָא בַשֵּׁם ה'**, He called in the name of God. But who called? The verse will not say. Rashi says Moses, Sforno says God. **Ibn Ezra** suggests God is the caller, teaching Moses how to pray. The grammar floats without anchor, refusing to settle the question.

And then it happens again: “And the Lord passed before him, **וַיִּקְרָא**: Adonai, Adonai, God compassionate and gracious...” Again that verb, *called*, hanging without subject. The voice sounds, but the speaker vanishes.

This is dangerous territory. The verb **קרא** carries cosmic weight. In the beginning, God calls light and darkness into being, names the sky and the earth. God calls to Moses from the Tent of Meeting at the opening of the Book of Calling, **וַיִּקְרָא**. When Torah is read, **מִקְרָא**, the same word is used. To call is to name, to summon, to make present. To call God’s Name here is to step into the rhythm of creation itself, to join the recursive calling that spoke the world into being.

To call is, in truth, to conjure. Not simply to summon what already exists, but to create presence through the act of speech. To call the Name is to make God appear — not as description but as event. And this is the danger: the verse’s ambiguity refuses to say whether God is conjuring Himself into being or whether Moses dares to conjure God with the words given to him.

If it is indeed Moses speaking, how is this not the sin of the golden calf all over again? There too Israel tried to fashion the divine, to make God present through human effort.

Yet the **Talmud** risks an audacious image. R. Yochanan teaches: “Were it not written in Scripture, it would be impossible to say—the Holy One wrapped Himself like a prayer leader and showed Moses the order of prayer. He said to him: Whenever Israel sins, let them perform this order before Me, and I will forgive them.” God as shaliach tzibbur, tallit-wrapped, leading the congregation in the very words that summon Him. The ineffable becomes teachable. The Creator places the incantation in human mouths.

In Genesis, God had breathed life into clay and humanity appeared. Creation of humanity was an act of divine conjuring. Now the pattern is reversed: God gives human beings the words by which He is breathed back into presence. Creator and creature mirror each other, each calling the other into being.

The Name cannot be spoken, yet it sounds again and again. The Thirteen Attributes that follow, merciful, gracious, slow to anger, do not define God but circle God, tracing an outline around the unutterable center. They are not doctrine but conjuration: words that bring God into presence. To speak them is not to describe an essence but to perform an event. Presence emerges through rhythm and repetition, language itself becoming revelation.

Here, time itself begins to collapse. These words are not confined to Sinai. Each generation that recites them joins the same moment, voice interlaced with voice, until the question of when fades. God's call, Moses's call, today's call: all are one.

But still the shadow of the calf lingers. Israel's sin was the attempt to make God portable, predictable, graspable. Yet in its aftermath comes something more dangerous: God entrusting his Name to human lips, allowing himself to be summoned by human breath. What the calf perverted, these attributes redeem.

This is why they resound on Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot, as the gates of repentance are coming to a close. To call God's name now is to cry out at the edge of closure, to summon Presence even as the gates swing shut. To remember that Moses too ascended a second time after shattering the first tablets.

When the congregation cries these words, the ambiguity of *ויקרא* resolves not in grammar but in presence. God calls God's Name. Moses calls God's Name. Israel calls God's Name. Breath answers breath. Time folds, silence speaks, absence becomes outline, and Presence is conjured. Even as the gates close.

FROM THE RICHES OF THE SEA

Jonathan Lipnick

Exploring the Parashah



*In this video series, we will explore an often neglected aspect of the parashah: geography. Each week we will focus on a physical location mentioned in the parashah and examine its historical significance. Of course not every parashah contains a narrative situated in a place; for these weeks we will select a word from the parashah that relates to the material culture of ancient Israel.