

There's a teeny tiny aleph in the first word of the Book of Leviticus, or in Hebrew, Vayikra, which is where we are in the Torah this Shabbat. This little aleph is very small, but his importance is quite outsized. This aleph is the last letter in the word Vayikra, a word which means "And God called."

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־מֹשֶׁה

And God called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting:

So why the tiny aleph in the word Vayikra, and God called? There's a midrash that says that as Moses thought about the people's reactions to God calling to him, he became full of humility. He didn't want the people to think he thought he was so special or worthy of their attention. He didn't want to come off as taking up a lot of space or as self-important. So he asked God if instead of writing the word "Vayikra," and God called to Moses, he could drop the aleph completely, and instead just write the word "Vayikar" - which would mean "And God accidentally happened upon some guy named Moses, who happened to be standing in the right place at the right time."

Now God had a deep love for Moses and so we can imagine God rolling God's eyes just a little bit and agreeing - fine Moses, we'll split the difference. Just make the aleph little.

Moses found it hard to accept this experience in his life as anything more than a *vayikar* moment. It just happened to him. It's fine. But God knows that the aleph belongs there, God knows this is not just a passing happenstance, that this IS a big deal, that this was a Vayikra moment, and that Moses is worthy of the people paying attention to him.

Tonight, we have gathered to mark a Shabbat on which we engage in a conversation about pregnancy loss. To honor those who have gone through it. To learn how to talk about it, and to think about it through the lens of Jewish tradition and Jewish community. Because quite often, we as a community, with no ill intention, and no desire to cause pain, we treat a person who experiences this kind of loss as if it were just a Vayikar experience. It happened, it happens. And then life moves on. But for many many people, this loss of a life that didn't get a chance to become a life - the loss of a potential life - is a Vayikra experience. It is big and weighty and very real and the person going through it - is often in great need of being called out to, called in toward. Because of so many societal norms and a general discomfort with vulnerability, a person who has experienced pregnancy loss, much like our tiny aleph, might shrink away, just at the time when they need their community to see them the most.

So what does this have to do with Jewish community anyway? Jewish community, sacred community, is about knowing the contours of each other's lives, celebrating and grieving with one another. Earlier tonight, we shared our simchas, big and small. And all week long this week, we've had members sitting shiva, their homes full of CBE members. Why? Because to be in Jewish community is to journey together, to hold each other up when we are weeping, and to lift each other up on chairs when we can.

But very often, pregnancy loss goes completely unknown, sometimes happening before anyone else even knew that we had something to lose. And so many members of our own community who we see every day and sit next to on Shabbat and who we are on teams with . . . are going through a devastating loss right in front of our eyes and we don't even know. And that, which is no one's fault, is a breakdown of sacred community. To treat what is a Vayikra moment as merely a Vayikar moment.

So tonight - is a tikkun, a repair of a crack in our community, which exists in most communities. It's a casting of light into the overlooked corners, where so many souls dwell from time to time. It is the restoring of a shrinking aleph to a full sized aleph.

I want to share with you three avenues that we'll experience tonight as we weave our way toward this repair:

The first is in the telling of stories. It's hard to care for one another in the theoretical. To know a person's story is to be able to see them clearly, to understand them, to care for them. Tonight, members of CBE's Pregnancy Loss Small Group will grow our aleph by courageously sharing their experiences into this space. To help us practice becoming a community that is more and more comfortable with sharing and receiving each other's stories about pregnancy loss. As we become visible to one another.

The second is through community support. CBE strives to be a place where people can feel less alone. We do that through the extraordinary community of our Small Group, through making sure that you know that your whole clergy team, every one of us, is here to support you and walk with you. We do that through our Chesed Team offering care for a person facing pregnancy loss, the same way they offer all kinds of care here.

And finally, through the creation of new ritual and the drawing on of old ritual. Rituals build scaffolding around a person's grief, to hold us, even when that grief is for someone that no one else has ever met. In fact, our ancestors crafted many rituals around these parts of life, because before there was modern medicine, pregnancy loss was even more common and was probably easier to talk about. So the leaders of the Pregnancy Loss Small Group, Lisbeth Kaiser and Nicole Nemetz, are crafting a mourning ritual, getting training in leading communal prayer, reflective of the traditional practices of shiva.

And they discovered a Talmudic tradition that speaks of an *even tekumah*, a stone of assurance, a red stone that women in community would share among one another as they experienced pregnancy loss, or infertility, or often both. This stone was not magic. It was meant as comfort, that a person holding that stone would know that she was not alone, that many had held it before her, that her story was not invisible or just some small thing that happened and is now over. But that she was living through something real and that others were walking with her, praying with her, grieving and even healing with her.

They now have such a stone for anyone experiencing pregnancy loss who might find comfort in holding it, keeping it with you over time, as you walk this same path through the stages of grief or hope or both.

Telling our stories, being in deliberate community, and creating rituals where we currently don't have them - makes us visible to one another so we don't confuse a Vayikar moment with a Vayikra moment, that we might learn to call out toward one another, and so we can care for one another as sacred community does.