

*Shalom* once again and welcome to this series with some wonderful insights into the Hebrew language.

Let's do a quick recap of last week. Hebrew has 22 letters, but five of these letters are written differently at the end of a word. The word *sofit* (pronounced sô-feet) is used for these, where *sofit* simply means 'end'. All Hebrew letters are consonants, as vowels are implied, both when written and spoken. Around the 10<sup>th</sup> century after *Yeshua*, a group of Hebrew scribes, known as the Masorites, created a system of dots and dashes to place above, inside or below the original characters to indicate vowels. These vowel indicators are known as *niqdot*, plural or *niqud*, singular. More about these in a later teaching.

Each letter, including the *sofit* letters, also has a numeric value. Hebrew does not use the Roman digits we are used to when writing numbers and therefore doesn't even have a zero! However, it has now been adopted from the West into the modern Hebrew lifestyle. Hebrew is written and read from right to left, contrary to what we are used to. At our introduction last week, we promised to bring you more information regarding the letters of the *alephbet* and trying to keep to that promise, we will look at the first letter, the *aleph*, without delay.

In ancient times Hebrew did not have the characters as we know it today. Being more of a picture language, like most nations of the middle east had adopted, the original pictogram of the letter *aleph* resembled an ox. Everyone knows the strength of an ox and it is not by chance that this letter is associated with an ox. Even though Hebrew has no relation to any other languages of the near middle east, it is remarkable to find that the language from *Mitzrayim*, the Sumerians and the Chinese show the image of the first letter as an ox – something that is strong and relentless.

While the alphabet of most western languages is only indicated with one symbol, the letters of the Hebrew *alephbet* can also be expressed as a word. We therefore see the letter א (aleph) written as אֶלֶף (*aleph*, *lamed* and the final form [*sofit*] of the letter *fei* or *pei*). We will discuss these final forms at a later stage.

Derived from the spelling of *aleph*, we get the word אֶלּוּף (*aluf* – pronounced ah-loof), which is *aleph*, *lamed*, *vav* and the *fei sofit* – the final form. This word *aluf* may translate as gentle or tame, an ox and can also be seen as the leader of a family or tribe. The prophet *Z'charyah* (Zechariah) teaches us the following:

*Z'charyah 12* <sup>5</sup> "And the leaders of *Yehudah* shall say in their heart, 'The inhabitants of *Yerushalayim* are a strength to me, through יהוה of hosts, their *Elohim*.'

The original Hebrew reads in the first part of the verse: וְאֶמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם יְהוּדָה בְּלָבָם (ve'ameRu 'alufei *Yehudah beliBam*), where we see the word leaders translated as *alufei* – one leader will be *aluf*. We find a similar text in *Torah*:

*Sh'mot 15* <sup>15</sup> "Then the chiefs of *Egom* were troubled, the mighty men of *Mo'ab*, trembling grips them, all the inhabitants of *Kena'an* melted.

The original text contains the plural, *alufei*, once again, in the first part of the verse: אֶזְנֵי נְבִיאֵי אֱלֹהֵי אֶדֹם (az niv-ha-Lu 'alufei *Egom*), where we see the word 'alufei translated as chiefs. This means that one chief will be called *aluf*. With this bit of knowledge, I would like you to think what a general is called in the Israeli Defence force – I will give you the answer at the end, but don't cheat and look it up on the internet!

King *Dawid*, the best known poet and composer ever, gives us even more information:

*Mizmor 144* <sup>14</sup> Our cattle well-laden; No breaking in, no going out; And no crying in our streets.

The original Hebrew text here reads: אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְסֻבִּים ('*a-lu-Fei-nu me-su-Ba-Lim*) which translates as "our cattle well-laden". Once again the word *aluf* is used for ox, with the slight twist at the end, the '*ei-nu*', which indicates plural and possession, something we will also get to at a much later teaching.

In Hebrew the *aleph* has no actual sound, but is silent. In the case where one would make a sound, it would rather be heard as a very soft and short guttural sound, uh. It would therefore not be wrong to pronounce *aleph* as 'uh-lef'. The shape of the Hebrew-Phoenician letter evolved into the Greek letter alpha, no longer being a picture. It was also given the sound 'ah'. Here it is important to note that the first letter of the modern Roman alphabet should actually be pronounced 'ah', like the Afrikaans and German letter, rather than the 'ay' taught in schools. This pronunciation stays true for Hebrew, where the Western vowels, a, e, i, o and u should be pronounced as ah, ê (*béd*), ee (*seem*), ô (*mörning*) and oo (*too*).

Back to the *aleph*, we find the ancient picture of the ox in the original *k'tav ivriy*, the Hebrew script, used by *Mosheh* and *Dawid*. Being the first letter, it was also designated as the first digit. In the original Hebrew text of the *TaNakh* we will never see any Roman digits. The first verse of a chapter will be indicated by the letter *aleph*, and it will be likewise for the first chapter of a book. Counting higher, two letters will be used, but there are certain exception. We will get to that during this series.

The writings of the sages acknowledge that the printed form of the letter *aleph* currently in use, consists of three parts, each of which is yet another letter of the *alephbet*. The top right and the bottom left parts would be the letter י (*yud*), while the middle section is the letter ו (*vav*). As we will learn later, the value of *yud* is 10 and the value of *vav* is 6. Adding these three numbers together, gives us a total of 26. Last week we said that the tetragrammaton, the actual full Name of *YAH* we encounter many times in Scripture, is יהוה (*yud, hei, vav, hei*). We already know that *yud* is 10 and *vav* is 6. The numeric value for *hei* is 5 and when we calculate the *gematria* of the tetragrammaton we end up with 26 once again! This is not a coincidence, as there are no coincidences in the life of a believer, neither are there any coincidences in Scripture. Everything is a very smart development by a Creator Who knows the end from the beginning as the prophet *Yasha'yahu* teaches us in chapter 46:10.

Most scholars agree that the garden of *'Eden* was part of heaven and that sinful man caused a division, resulting in earth breaking away from heaven. When *Ya'aqov* (Jacob) fled the home of his parents in fear of what his brother *'Esav* (Esau) would do to him, he didn't have the luxury of a hotel or fancy guest house. At the end of the day, tired after his long journey, he rested his head on a stone and had a dream. In his dream he saw a ladder with messengers moving up and down, while there was an image of the Creator at the top of the ladder. What he actually saw, was a vision of earth being reunited with heaven. The ladder represents *Yeshua*, our salvation, uniting heaven and earth, while the messengers come down and bring the *b'sorah*, the good news. They also take the prayers of believers back up to heaven, which we see in Revelation 5:8. You may also compare this to *Mizmor* 141:2. Those who believe in *Yeshua* and follow him, will eventually be reunited with *YAH* in the Kingdom to come. In the *aleph* we can therefore see *Yeshua* as the *vav*, which in many cases translates as 'and', with the top *yud* representing heaven and the bottom *yud* representing earth. We literally see "heaven and earth" all being reunited by the son of *YAH*. In a future teaching we will also learn that the word picture for *yud* is a hand, whereby the *aleph* can represent man's hand reaching out to *YAH*, and *YAH* reaching out to man. All of this is accomplished by our salvation, *Yeshua*. We see his words penned by the most loved *talmid* (disciple):

*Yochanan* 1<sup>51</sup> And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, from now on you shall see the heaven opened, and the messengers of *Elohim* ascending and descending upon the Son of *Adam*."

Talking about אָדָם (*'Adam*), we see his name using the letters *aleph*, *dalet* and *mem*, actually *mem sofit*. Reading from *Torah*, we see the following shortly after Creation:

*B'reisheet 1* <sup>27</sup> And *Elohim* created the man in His image, in the image of *Elohim* He created him – male and female He created them.

The last two letters in the word *`Adam*, the *dalet* and *mem*, spell the Hebrew word **דָּם** (*dam*), which translates as blood. Without blood, man simply can't exist. When we put the *aleph* and *dam*, the blood together, we realise how man is made in the image of *YAH*, since the *aleph* represents *YAH*. Without either the *aleph* or the blood, man would not exist.

We also see a common Hebrew word used for man: **אִישׁ** (*ish*), using the letters *aleph*, *yud* and *shin*. Removing the *aleph* we get the word **יֵשׁ** (*yish*), which translates as “mere substance”. This teaches us that man without *YAH* is worth nothing, he is mere substance. This is the person who only focuses on the material things in life, and therefore has an emptiness in his soul. Only when he invites *YAH* into his life, can he once again become someone to be **טוֹב** (*tov*), the Hebrew word for ‘good’, but in reality someone who can live a purposeful life and complete the mission on earth that *YAH* had placed him here for, something we should all strive to do.

In Scripture we find many acrostic poems and other passages. Acrostics are not hidden codes, but simply literary compositions in which the writer uses the letters of the *alephbet* as the initial letter for a line or sometimes a sequence of verses, a stanza. In his book, “The New International Dictionary of the Bible”, J A Motyer describes this as follows:

“In the common form of acrostics found in Old Testament poetry, each line or stanza begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order. This literary form may have been intended as an aid to memory, but more likely it was a poetic way of saying that a total coverage of the subject was being offered – as we would say, ‘from A to Z’.”

An excellent example is the last 22 verses of *Mishle* 31, describing the woman of valour, where every verse starts with a letter of the *alephbet*, from *aleph* to *tav*. *Dawid* summarises *Torah* in a brilliant way which we see in *Mizmor* 119. This poem has 22 stanzas comprising of 8 verses each; every stanza starts with a different letter of the *alephbet*, obviously starting at *aleph* for the first 8, the next eight would start with *bet*, and so forth. Since *aleph* symbolises what is first or strong, the first eight verses of *Mizmor* 119 teach us that blessing and happiness belong to the person who puts *YAH* first in their life, turning to *YAH* and His Word for strength.

A study like this will never be exhaustive, as each letter would probably take a week and more than 30 minutes per session to fully examine. To end this session, we should look at some words in Scripture that start with the letter *aleph*, as well as their meaning:

- 🏆 putting the first two letters together, the *aleph*, as well as the *bet* we will be studying next week in the will of *YAH*, we get the word **אָב** (*Av*). This translates as ‘father’. It can also be pronounced *ab* and all children growing up in the Hebrew vernacular, call their father ‘*abba*’ or ‘*av*’. It tells us that the father is a leader in his home, the strength of the family:

*Mishle 4* <sup>1</sup>Children, listen to the discipline of a father, And give attention to know understanding;

In Hebrew we will hear the first part as **שְׁמַעְנוּ בְּנֵי אָב מוֹסֵר אֶבְיָט** (*shim-U Va-nim mu-Sar av*)

- 🏆 Moving the letters *aleph* and *bet* apart, and filling the gap with the letter *hei*, we get the word **אָהַב** (*ahav*), consisting of the *aleph*, *hei* and *bet* or *vet*. *Ahav* translates as ‘love’. The letter *hei* has a numeric value of 5, which is also the number of favour (grace), denoting our heavenly Father’s love. The letter *hei* may also be seen as ‘behold’, as we will learn when we study the *hei*.

This means that YAH reveals His heart to us, something any parent can associate with. Take the following as an example:

*B'reisheet 22*<sup>2a</sup> And He said, "Take your son, now, your only son *Yitsḥaq* (Isaac), whom you love (*ahav*),

In the earthly realm, except for the love between a husband and wife, there is nothing greater than the love of a parent for a child. If we, as humans, can experience this, how much more our heavenly Father for His son who had to die on our behalf. Imagine what *Avraham* had to go through when he was commanded to bring his son as a sacrifice, yet he was prepared to do it in order to prove his love for YAH.

Another word in Scripture, starting with *aleph*, is the word **אֵשׁ** (*esh*), fire. A short word of only two letters, *aleph* and *shin*, this word picture tells us that fire is stronger than the enemy, the devourer. Hear what the most clever man on earth, *Shlomo* (Solomon), teaches us:

**הִיחַתָּה אִישׁ אֵשׁ בְּחִיקוֹ וַיִּבְגְּדוּ לֹא תִשְׂרַפְנָה** (*ha-yach-Teh 'ish 'esh be-chei-Ko; uv-ga-Dav, lo ti-sa-Raf-nah*).

This translates to:

*Mishle 6*<sup>27</sup> Would a man take fire to his bosom, And his garments not be burned?

The fire that would consume the body of *Yitz'chaq*, would also consume the spirit of *Avraham*, yet he was prepared to go through with it, to prove his allegiance to YAH, his love for a Creator Who had called him out of pagan rituals and traditions, into a world where the One and Only YAH is honoured, exalted and praised.

We'd like to conclude this teaching on a positive note by teaching listeners the word **אַשֶׁר** (*a-shêr*). Keep in mind that this was the name of one of the children of *Ya'aqov*, from the mother *Zilpah*, the female servant of *Le'ah*. When he was born, it was as if he was the son of *Le'ah* and not *Ya'aqov's* concubine:

*B'reisheet 30*<sup>13</sup> And *Lě'ah* said, "I am happy, for the daughters shall call me happy." So she called his name *Ashêr*.

The word *asher* indeed means to be happy, to be blessed. We referred earlier to *Mizmor 119*, which starts with the words: **אַשְׁרֵי תְּמִימִי** (*'ash-Rei te-mi-mei*), which translates as "blessed are the undefiled", meaning those pure of heart (*cf.* Revelation 14:4). The second verse in this poem seems to confirm this when it reads: **אַשְׁרֵי נֹצְרֵי עֲדוּתָיו** (*'Ash-rei no-tze-Rei 'e-do-Tav*), which translates as "blessed are those who keep His testimonies." This reminds us of the words of *Yeshua* when he brought the only sermon of his entire ministry, the sermon on the mount, and he blessed many types of people: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger, the compassionate, the clean in heart, the peacemakers, those persecuted for the sake of righteousness and people who are reproached and persecuted by false and wicked words. (*cf. Mattityahu 5:3-11*).

We trust that this titbit of information has truly inspired you to diligently study Scripture yourself, do more research from reliable sources and find your true vocation to fulfil the reason why YAH placed you on this earth at this time and the place you find yourself. Trust me when I say that what we have done now, is not even the proverbial tip of the iceberg, as there is so much more to discover.

Before we finish this teaching, let me relieve those who are anxiously waiting for the answer to the question we asked earlier: what is a general called in *Ivriyt*? I'm sure everybody had the correct answer: *aluf*.

Congratulations to those who didn't look it up and still knew what the answer would be. As a matter of interest: a lieutenant general is called **רַב־אַלּוּף** (*rav aluf*), which simply translates as "great general".

This is all we have time for today and I am very happy for your company. Keep in mind that this study runs for the entire week, helping those who need to catch up or take additional notes. Next week, in the will of Yah, we start a new study at the same time, same place. *Shalom!*