

Shalom aleichem!

This greeting is used in the plural and means to bestow the *shalom* on everyone listening or reading.

Last week, while looking at *hei*, we touched briefly on the letter *vav*, the sixth letter of the Hebrew *alephbet*, and also the letter we will be studying today. The ancient rendering of this letter on parchment looked like a nail or a hook, even a peg on which something can be hung. This brings us to a point which may need some explanation.

Everyone familiar with English translations, would have noticed many chapters and sentences starting with the word 'and'. In English, the word 'and', as well as its counterparts in other languages, is used to connect two sentences or thoughts. Hebrew is no different, but while other languages do not paint a picture of the connection, Hebrew does it by means of the *vav*. When a hook is fixed to a post, maybe even something like a cupboard, another item can be hung on or from that hook, therefore connecting one item to whatever the hook is fixed on.

One of the best examples in Scripture, is the construction of the tabernacle:

Sh'mot 27⁹ "And you shall make the courtyard of the Dwelling Place: for the south side screens for the courtyard made of fine woven linen, one hundred cubits long for one side, ¹⁰and its twenty columns and their twenty sockets of bronze, **the hooks of the columns** and their bands of silver, [emphasis added]

Here the emphasised section reads: וְנִי הָעֲמֻדִים. While the standard plural of *vav* would be *vavim*, we find a technical derivation in the plural *vavei*, which simply translates as 'hooks'. The word translated as 'column', is עֲמֻד, *amud*, which is the same word used for 'pillar' or 'post'. Here column could also refer to the columns of text in which the *Torah* scroll was originally written by scribes, as we will learn shortly. *Torah* scribes were extremely careful when writing down the words of *YAH* onto the parchment scrolls. They would plan well, by leaving specific margins at the top and the sides. When parchment skins were to be stitched together, an extra finger width was allowed for this.

Before writing anything, the scribes would lineate the sheet of parchment to ensure equal spacing of lines. From the text quoted from *Sh'mot*, certain rules were established to maintain uniformity from generation to generation of scribes. We get insightful information from the book, "This is the Torah", in which Alfred J Kolatch writes the following, found on p. 109:

"The Torah uses the term *vavay ha-amudim*, meaning "hooks of the posts", in describing the hardware upon which the curtains of the Tabernacle were hung. Scribes, upon discovering this reference, believed it was a signal to start each column (*amud*) in a scroll with a *vav*, thus, in a manner of speaking, suspending each Torah column on a *vav*, just as the curtains of the Tabernacle were suspended on *vavim*."

In a footnote to this, Kolatch mentions the following:

"There are many similarities between the terminology as applied to the Torah and the Tabernacle. The Hebrew word for curtain is *yeria* (Exodus 26:1), and the Hebrew word for a sheet of parchment is *yeria*. The Hebrew word for a column is *amud*, and the curtains of the Tabernacle were supported by *amudim*."

After all this information, we now have a good understanding behind every column of text in *Torah* starting with a *vav*, as it also symbolises all the words of *YAH* being connected to one another. This is done by using the *vav*, the letter with a numeric value of 6, also the number of man. Since the *vav* depicts a hook fastened to a post, starting each column with *vav* would symbolise a curtain of the tabernacle, while the *vav* then hooks a column to a sheet of parchment.

As we found with *hei* last week, using the *vav* as a prefix for the word ‘and’, it also becomes part of the word in question and would never stand on its own. If we were to take אִישׁ (*man*), a word you already know, and were to add *vav* as a prefix, we would get וְאִישׁ (*ve-Ish*), and [a] man. This will literally ‘hook’ man to whatever word was before it, one of the main purposes of *vav*, to hook things together. It was the letter *vav*, used multiple times, that hooked our Messiah, *Yeshua*, to the execution stake. More on this shortly.

It is not by chance that the first occurrence of the letter *vav* is to be found in the sixth word of Scripture:

B'reisheet 1 ¹In the beginning *Elohim* created the heavens and the earth. [emphasis added for explanation]

The emphasised text here reads: הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ (*ha-sha-Ma-yim v'et ha-A-retz*). We notice the word אֶת (*et*), which is never translated, as it is merely used to point out the object of a verb (or preposition) more definitely. Some scholars believe the *aleph* and *tav* could refer to *Yeshua* as “the beginning and the end” that we see in Revelation and hinted at in *Yeshu'Yahu*. However, there is no Scriptural evidence for this, as there are many other instances where this theory is refuted.

In previous studies we've looked at abnormal letters, some being smaller and others larger. Last week we encountered a *hei* standing on its own. In the Masoretic text of Scripture we find close to 100 of these letters, which have been carefully copied by סוֹפְרִים (*sô-fê-Rim*), the early Sages. This word translates as “those who count”, as it was part of their duty to count the words in order to determine whether anything had been skipped or added by mistake.

In the case of *vav*, we find it smack centre of the letters of *Torah*. This *vav* is elongated to the top to show that it actually hooks the first half of *Torah* onto the second half. We see this in the word גָּחוֹן (*ga-Chon*), which translates as ‘belly’ or ‘stomach’. For those who haven't yet guessed it, this is the first section of two where *YAH* gives instructions for what we are to eat and what to refrain from eating – the *tahor* (clean) and (*tamei*) unclean foods. The second section is found in *D'varim* 14, as a matter of interest. In this specific section, containing this word, we see:

Vayiqra 11 ⁴²Whatever crawls on its stomach, and whatever goes on *all* fours, and whatever has many feet among all swarming *creatures* – the ones swarming on the earth, these you do not eat, for they are an abomination.

As a matter of interest, for those taking notes, the centre of *Torah*, when looking at words, can be found at *Vayiqra* 10:16, where we read in the first part:

Vayiqra 10 ¹⁶And *Mosheh* diligently looked for the goat of the sin offering... [emphasis added]

The words referred to here are דָּרַשׁ דָּרַשׁ (*da-Rosh da-Rash*), which translate as “diligently inquired”, even “diligently looked” as in the text above.

While discussing centres, the last centre for now, is the centre of *Torah* regarding verses. This is also found in the middle book, a verse we studied while studying *gimel*, seeing it enlarged:

Vayiqra 13 ^{33a}then he shall shave himself, but the eruption he does not shave. [emphasis added]

Getting back to the *vav*, we have seen letters both smaller and larger than the norm. Having just seen the enlarged *vav*, here is a first in *Torah*: the broken *vav*. Having just learned that the *soferim* count letters, words and verses, we should take it for granted that everything they do would only be perfect, nothing less. There are many rules regarding writing *Torah* scrolls, such as letters not touching, they may not be malformed, broken or illegible in any way. In a case where letters are not perfect, they are considered to be not part of the word, giving the word a different meaning. However, looking at a verse in a *Torah* scroll, we find a broken *vav*! It resembles a *yud* and short, thin vertical line below it, which, in Hebrew, is known as *vav k'tia*. The text reads:

*B'midbar 25*¹² "Therefore say, 'See, I am giving him My covenant of peace,

The Hebrew of this text reads: לָכֵן אָמַר הַנְּנִי נָתַן לוֹ אֶת-בְּרִיתִי שָׁלוֹם. We assume that most listeners and readers would by now know the word *shalom*, as we use it every week. The spelling in Hebrew is *shin*, *lamed*, *vav* and the sofit or final form of the letter *mem*. There are many opinions as to why this *vav* in the word *shalom* would be broken, but we will look at three.

For those who study the weekly prescribed portions from Scripture, known as a *parashah*, it should be no surprise to learn that this specific verse is taken from *parashat Pinchas*, known as Phinehas in some translations. The narrative of *Pinchas*' heroic deed can be read in *B'midbar 25:6-12*. As it will be studied in a few weeks from now, it would be unnecessary to go into the entire story at this stage. Suffice to say that *Pinchas* stabbed a sinning couple to death with a spear. The *yud* represents a hand and here we see the hand of *Pinchas* holding a spear. This is the first possibility for the reason of the broken *vav*, but even though it forms an acceptable picture of the incident, the two other possibilities weigh heavier and should be tested.

The second opinion is to ensure that we keep the pictogram of *vav* in mind, being a hook or nail, and having the value of six. However, *vav* also represents man, and this is given to us at the end of Scripture, where we see what the identifier of the anti-Messiah is:

*Hazon 13*¹⁸ Here is the wisdom! He who has understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is six hundred and sixty six.

These words were penned by *Yochanan*, the *talmid* that was more loved by *Yeshua* than any of the other. As mentioned before, he would certainly not have written this revelation to Hebrew readers in the Greek vernacular, but in Hebrew. The readers had known for centuries that the number six represents man, for the following reasons:

1. man was created on the sixth day;
2. man is limited to six degrees of freedom: forward, backward, left, right, up, down;
3. man is to work for six days a week;
4. man was to reign on earth for six millennia.

This last point possibly needs a bit of explanation, as there is no part of Scripture that refers to this directly. When we studied *aleph*, we also learned that the same spelling would give us the word *aluf*. When read in context and without the *niqudot* (punctuation marks, something we will study later), the letter א can also be pronounced *elef*, which translates as thousand. At the beginning of Scripture, in the original text we read:

*B'reisheet 1*¹ בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

We notice six occurrences of א, and this is where the sages believe that *YAH* is telling us what the duration of man's reign on earth will be: six times one thousand = 6 000. Nevertheless, there is a third opinion we should consider.

Many Scriptural examples can be seen which closely link man with the number six. The hook, the 'and', as well as the six are all brought together in *vav*, because this letter represents the essence of mankind. One good example is by looking at the nature of 'and', where it is brilliantly illustrated in man, because man is the 'and' of *YAH*'s Creation, being made of spirit and flesh. Through *Yeshua*, the Son of Man, we see the spiritual and physical dimensions hooked together in an eternal bond.

With this information, especially the last two opinions, we can now look at the broken *vav* once again. We have just shown that *vav* represents man. We should now be asking ourselves: who can this broken man be, represented by the broken *vav*? We may have one clue, given to us by one of the major prophets:

Yeshua'yahu 53 ⁵But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our crookednesses.
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. [emphasis added]

From this we learn that one man had to be broken to restore our peace with YAH. Unlike *Pinchas* who ran his spear through two people at once, YAH didn't run His spear through all of sinful mankind, but allowed His son, *Yeshua*, to take our punishment upon himself. Messiah was broken so that we could be made whole; a spear was driven into his side to prevent us from receiving the punishment we deserve and thereby redeem mankind, past, present and future.

Digging a little deeper into the broken *vav*, we find even a more profound explanation of brokenness. In mainly the Sephardic *Torah* scrolls, many letters used to be written with elaborate crowns, known as *tagin*. In many translations these are known as 'tittles':

Luqas 16 ¹⁷"And it is easier for the heaven and the earth to pass away than for one **tittle** of the *Torah* to fall. [emphasis added for explanation]

Nowadays, because of the printing press, these *tagin* are faithfully reproduced as done by the *soferim*, the scribes, of old. The letter *vav* has one such *tagin* at the top left, and in the case of the broken *vav*, it now comprises three parts: the *tagin* or tittle, the top part before the break and the thin vertical stroke below the break. In this way the three components of man are illustrated perfectly.

The middle section, above the break, which resembles a *yud*, corresponds to man's soul – essentially man's entire being. The soul contains three components that form our personality: our mind, will and emotion. Most translations refer to this as 'heart'. The thin, single line, below the break, connects man's soul to earth and represents man's body. This illustration of man is a clear indication of how fragile man is, easily snapped from this world. The *tagin*, the crown, that protrudes from the top of the *yud*, represents man's spirit, an extension of the soul reaching out to YAH. Through this we learn that a broken man's soul doesn't find identity in the flesh, but in the 'crown' of his spirit, that which yearns for YAH. Only when man becomes broken, can he come into YAH's covenant of peace and experience true *shalom*. In the words of Grant Lutton:

"Through brokenness do we change from a Jacob ('supplanter') to an Israel ("prince of God")."

Before looking at some other meanings of *vav*, we find another mystery in Scripture regarding five *vavs*. The last prophet before *Yeshua* was *Mal'achi*. He prophesied that *Eliyahu* would return immediately before our Messiah arrives. In a previous study we learned that *Yochanan haMatbiel*, John the Immerser, is the fulfillment for now, but the literal fulfillment still has to take place. The name *Eliyahu* occurs at least 63 times in the *TaNakh*, and it is normally written as אֱלִיָּהוּ. The *vav* at the end has a *dagesh* for punctuation and is therefore pronounced 'oo' as in boot. However, we find five occurrences where the *vav* is omitted from his name: *M'lakhim Bet* 1:3, 4, 8, 12 and *Mal'achi* 3:23. Please note that this last reference may show up as chapter 4:5, depending on your translation.

In most cases in the *TaNakh* we see the name of *Ya'aqov* with the spelling יַעֲקֹב. This appears a total of 319 times, but 5 times we see a different spelling: יַעֲקֹבִי. Here a *vav* is added, the *vav* that was taken from *Eliyahu*, and we see these in *Vayiqra* 26:42, as well as *Yirmeyahu* 30:18, 33:26; 46:27; 51:19. Recalling our study of last week, when we looked at *hei*, the fifth letter, we found it to be the breath of YAH. Five times *Eliyahu* needs to help *Ya'aqov* with something the latter doesn't have: the breath of YAH. It is therefore possible that the same spirit that moved *Eliyahu*, could be used to move in *Ya'aqov*, also known as the nation of *Yisra'el*. We find this possibility from one of the great prophets:

Yechezq'el 11 ¹⁹"And I shall give them one heart, and put a new spirit within you. And I shall take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, [emphasis added]

At this stage the physical descendants of *Ya'aqov* is veiled, as *Sha'ul* tells us in 2 Corinthians 3. We can only pray that the day comes quickly when that, which belonged to *Eliyahu*, will be given to *Ya'aqov*, in essence to those born from him as *Yisra'el*. That is when our Messiah will come back on the clouds and raise up all those who trusted in him. Praise YAH!

This broken *vav* teaches us that peace was brought about through killing. That killing, dear brother and sister in *Yeshua*, is the dying to self – killing all things that cause egotism, self-justification and the like. Without any form of self-love, we can become the person that YAH wants us to be.

In addition to *vav* being used as a connector through the word 'and', using it as a prefix also has other functions. The Hebrew word for 'or', used to differentiate between two or more things, is או. It is pronounced simply as 'ô', as in morning. In *Vayiqra* 21 YAH tells *Mosheh* what type of woman a high priest may marry and in v. 14 we see two types that are not acceptable: אֵלְמָנָה (*al-ma-Nah*), a widow, and גֵּרֶשׁ (*ga-Rash*), a divorced (defiled) woman. This latter word is prefixed by *vav* and changes to וְגֵרֶשָׁה (*u-ge-ru-Shah*), which simply translates as "or one put away or a defiled woman or a whore".

In the very first verse from the pen of *Yeshe'yahu*, we find the prefixed *vav* to mean 'particularly'. The text reads:

Yeshua'yahu 1 ¹The vision of *Yeshayahu* son of *Amots*, which he saw concerning *Yehudah* and *Yerushalayim* in the days of *Uzziyahu*, *Yotham*, *Ahaz*, *Hizqiyahu* – sovereigns of *Yehudah*. [emphasis added for explanation]

In the original text, the emphasised section reads: עַל יְהוּדָה וְיִרוּשָׁלַם. This, in effect, translates as "concerning *Y'hudah* and particularly *Yerushalayim*".

These are but two of the many ways that *vav* is used as a prefix to highlight words, events or even people. According to rabbi Yonah Janach there are seventeen different applications, but Radak counts only thirteen. Irrespective of who may be right or wrong, the letter *vav*, the number for man, clearly teaches us from Scripture that man is the crown of YAH's Creation.

While the *vav* would normally carry the sound of the 'v' when used as a connector, and apart from all these functions mentioned up to now, it can take the vowel sound of 'u', as we pointed out in the name of *Eliyahu*. The final sound provided by *vav* would be a simple 'ô'-sound, as we learnt in previous studies, such as *boqer*, the word for morning and also pronounced as in morning. Apart from having different vowel sounds connected to it, *vav* also inverts the tense of a verb to its opposite: from past to future or from future to past. The first time we encounter this in Scripture, is the twenty-second word of the Creation account in the original Hebrew:

B'reisheet 1 ³ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר:

In English we see this as:

B'reisheet 1 ³ And *Elohim* said, "Let light come to be," and light came to be.

The first word in Hebrew is וַיֹּאמֶר (*va-Yo-mer*), which translates as 'said'. This is repeated nine more times, after which *Elohim* had completed Creation.

We should also be completing this study, and for that we will look at one word that contains a *vav*, the word קָוָה (*qa-Vah*), which means to bind together. We find this once again from our famous poet and musician:

Mizmor 27 ¹⁴ Wait on יְהוָה, be strong, And let Him strengthen your heart! Wait, I say, on יְהוָה!

Here we notice 'wait' being used a second time, as the original uses וְקַוָּה (v'qa-Veh), an inflection of qa-vah. In some translations, this word has also been rendered as "put your hope", as this is what it means to wait. YAH has His own time of doing things. One translation puts it unambiguously as "assured expectation".

This is then where we have to drop the curtain until next week. We trust that everyone will have a better understanding of the letter that represents man, even though we sometimes fail to understand the ways of man. Having failed YAH so many times, to the extent that He had to have them exiled from the promised land, may we now learn from Scripture what YAH desires from all of us, how to connect to Him with the vav, in order to do what the poet teaches us: Wait on יְהוָה!

May you have a blessed week and in the will of YAH, we will be back next week with the seventh letter, zayin. *Shalom!*