

Fascinating INSIGHTS

יב' תמוז תשפ"ו
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Final opportunity!

A book about languages

Special dedication opportunity. As we have arrived at the final stages before publication, this is the final opportunity for contributions or dedications for the book titled "Powerful Torah Insights about Languages." Don't miss out on the Dedication Opportunities, which can be given from Maisei money (and can be paid out over time in payments). It can be L'Ilui Nishmas, L'Refuah Shleima, an advertisement for a business, in honor of a special occasion or any other dedication that your heart desires. This is in addition to sharing in the merit of the life-changing Torah learned by each reader. For more information or if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at yalt3285@gmail.com or send a WhatsApp to +972 54 849 5217. Donations can also be given via Zelle with the email address parshadt28@gmail.com or by credit card at <https://tinyurl.com/yf86j8ft>. Any amount is welcome.



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insights weekly, please contact the author, Rabbi Yehoshua Alt, at yalt3285@gmail.com or WhatsApp +972 54 849 5217. Thank you.

The weekly Fascinating Insights sheet is also available in FRENCH, HEBREW and YIDDISH. To view or download them in these languages, send an email to yalt3285@gmail.com.

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Life Expectancy

Life expectancy today is significantly longer than in previous generations. R' Aharon Leib Steinman offered a profound insight: Hashem extended human lifespan in our era because now we are in Galus EDOM (Esav). We know that Esav's defining merit is *kibud av va'em*. By making people live longer, it now provides greater opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of *kibbud av va'em*. In this way they can counter Esav's merit of *kibbud av va'em*, thereby bringing the geula closer. In this way, the increased longevity of generations becomes not merely a biological or historical development, but part of a larger Divine design in which we are given additional time to strengthen this mitzvah and, through it, remove the spiritual claim of Esav.

Washing Hands Coordination

R' Akiva was very careful with *netilas yadayim*, washing his hands. The gemara tells us the extent to which this went, as even when he was in prison, he wouldn't taste anything until they brought him water so he could wash his hands.¹

What was the cause of such adherence? R' Akiva was a gilgul of Zimri and Chazal² say that whoever eats bread without first doing *netilas yadayim*, it's as if he cohabited with a harlot. Since R' Akiva stumbled in this area in a previous gilgul when he was Zimri,³ he now stayed far away from anything like that.⁴

A Daughter. A Dynasty. A Yeshiva

In the late 16th century, the Jewish communities of Northern Iraq⁵ were experiencing a decline in Torah education. In response to the spiritual crisis, R' Shmuel Barzani devoted himself to building a Yeshiva in Mosul. Students came from everywhere, but his greatest student was his own daughter, Osnat

(1590-1670), whom he personally taught Tanach, gemara, and likely even Kabbalah.⁶

Having no sons, he taught his daughter Torah and gemara. Osnat herself later testified that she never learned any other trade or craft, as she spent all her time learning Torah. In a letter, she described her upbringing: "I never left the entrance to my house or went outside; I was like a princess of Israel... I grew up on the laps of scholars, anchored to my father. I was never taught any work but sacred study."

When the time came for her to marry, her father did something extraordinary. He required her prospective husband, her cousin R' Yaakov Mizrahi who learned in the Yeshiva in Mosul, to promise to excuse her from doing household responsibilities so she could focus on learning Torah.

Osnat wrote: "My father made my husband swear that he would not require me to perform work, and he did as he had commanded him. From the beginning, Rabbi Mizrahi was busy with his studies and had no time to teach the students; I taught them in his stead, I was a helpmate for him..."

After R' Shmuel's father passed away, Osnat's husband, R' Yaakov Mizrahi, became the head of the Yeshiva in Mosul. However, he was so consumed by his studies that it was Osnat who took the time to teach the Yeshiva students and provide them with rabbinical training. Upon her husband's death, the Yeshiva formally passed down to her. She was then known as the "chief teacher of Torah."⁷ Left with two young sons and the full weight of responsibility for the Yeshiva. A fundraising appeal that she wrote to local communities displays a beautiful, poetic Hebrew rich with learned references.

Osnat was deeply revered among the Jews of Kurdistan, who titled her with the female version of the Aramaic title for teacher: תנאית, Tannait (the male version is תנא, Tanna). When the community in Baghdad requested that she send her most successful student for a Rabbinic position, she sent her own son Shmuel. Thanks to her, the Barzani family counts 22 generations of rabbis, shochtim and judges.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of Rabbi Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years and received semichah from Rabbi Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written thousands of Torah articles on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of eleven fascinating and popular books. His writings, many of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German, Spanish and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. His shiurim can be found on various websites including Kol Halashon's. Rabbi Alt lectures, writes and teaches, and is passionate about inspiring Jews of all levels of observance. He can be reached at yalt3285@gmail.com or on WhatsApp at +972 54 849 5217.

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¹ Eruvin 21b.

² Sota 4b.

³ See Bamidbar, Chapter 25.

⁴ Otzar Hagilgulim, Tannaim, p. 477.

⁵ The Jews living alongside the Kurdish people maintained a parallel tradition to the Arabic-speaking Jews of Baghdad,

continuing to use the Aramaic of the Gemara for their everyday language.

⁶ He personally corresponded with the great Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital.

⁷ There is a letter written by R' Pinchas Hariri to Osnat, beginning with the salutation, "My Mother, my Rabbi."