

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

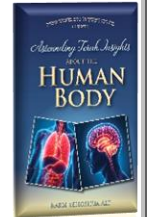
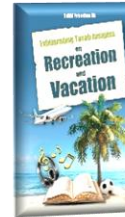
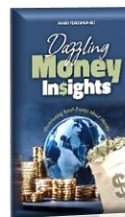
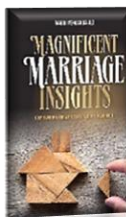
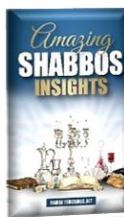
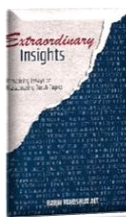
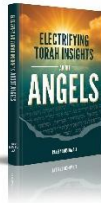
כט' כסלו תשפ"ו

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L'Refuah Shleima Gutzya Bryna bas Perel Chaya, Danielle bat Lucie and Rafael ben Danielle

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### Meeting the President at the Kosel

The first U.S. president to visit Yerushalayim was Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885). His visit took place in 1878. During his visit, an elderly Jew greeted him by kissing his hand. Years earlier, this man had written a letter in Yiddish asking Grant if the "king of the United States" would like the merit of contributing to his daughter's dowry.



Grant sent twenty-five dollars, which was a very large sum at the time. When Grant later visited the Kosel, the man met him there and expressed his profound thanks to the former president.<sup>1</sup>

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### Letters of Light

The word for "letter" is אות. Let's break down this word and see what we get.

The letter *alef* represents godliness and the highest level of spirituality. We see this from the fact that the letter א has a gematria of one, and He is called ה' אחד, Hashem the **One** (and Only). Also, the first letter of אחד is an *alef*.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, many names and descriptions of Hashem begin with א: אלהים, אדיר, אחד, אדני, אהיה, אלה.

The Ben Yehoyada<sup>3</sup> teaches that the letter א is formed from a ו and two י's. Adding these letters up, we get a sum of 26, the gematria of יהוה.

If the *alef* symbolizes the highest level of spirituality, then the furthest letter from *alef* symbolizes the lowest point—*tav*. Just as the farther you move from the sun the colder it becomes, so too the distance from *alef* reflects spiritual descent. Fittingly, the first time the letter *tav* appears in the Torah is in the word תהו,<sup>4</sup> the realm of chaos.

Now, let's move onto the letter *vav*. The letter ו is a connector as it means "and." Additionally when ו is spelled out it spells וו which means a hook,<sup>5</sup> that which connects.

We know that Hashem brought existence into being through the letters of lashon hakodesh when He spoke as it says בעשרה מאמרות ברא העולם, Hashem created

the world with ten utterances.<sup>6</sup> In similar vein, we say in shacharis ברוך שאמר והיה העולם, Blessed is He Who spoke, and the world came into being.

With all that we mentioned we can now explain in a deeper way the word אות, letter. A letter is a spiritual force (א) that Hashem bound (ו) to form the physical (ת). This is what the lashon hakodesh letters did, as they brought the different parts of the physical world into existence.

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### Camels

The letter ג spelled out is גמל. Here are four interpretations of this word.

- 1) To give as in גומל חסדים, one who does acts of kindness.
- 2) To wean or make someone independent as in ויגדל הילד ויגמל.<sup>7</sup>
- 3) To ripen and bring to completion as in ויגמל, it produced ripe almonds.<sup>8</sup>
- 4) The word גמל means a camel.

What is the underlying theme behind these disparate meanings?

The greatest act of giving is when you make a person self-sufficient, as the Rambam tells us that the highest level of *tzedakah* is enabling the recipient to become self-sufficient.<sup>9</sup> This explains why the root גמל means to give and to wean as the greatest giving is making a person self-sufficient. This brings to completion so that meaning fits with this root.<sup>10</sup>



Where does a camel come into this picture?

Camels can survive long stretches of time without water. In this way they are "self-sufficient." This embodies the meaning of the root גמל.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years and received semichah from R' 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 ten books including the recently released "Astounding Torah Insights about the Human Body." 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.

You can now download the weekly Fascinating Insights Torah sheet from the following websites: Dirshu, Torah Lectures, Torah Table, Ladaat, Chidush, Kol Halashon, Gilyonos, Din Online, Alon Olam, Parsha Sheets, Yiddishe Vinkel, and more.

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sarna, *When Grant Expelled the Jews*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the letter א is the only silent letter, and regarding Hashem, it says לך דמיה תהלה, of You silence is praise (Tehillim 65:2). This is because Hashem is beyond praise.

<sup>3</sup> Kidushin 30b, s.v. *Tanu Rabbanan*.

<sup>4</sup> Breishis 1:2.

<sup>5</sup> See Shemos 36:36.

<sup>6</sup> Avos 5:1

<sup>7</sup> Breishis 21:8.

<sup>8</sup> Bamidbar 17:23.

<sup>9</sup> Rambam, Matnas Aniyim 10:7 and Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah, 249:6.

<sup>10</sup> This idea is actually shown in גמל, as the letter ג spelled out (as in גומל) means to give while גמל and מל means to cut (as in *bris milah*). Meaning giving to the point where the other person is cut off from you, independent.