

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

ה' סיון תשפ"ו

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### Echoes in East Africa

John Henry Patterson (1867–1947) was a devout Christian Zionist, raised on biblical prophecy and deeply aware of the promise, אברכה מברך ומקללך אאר, I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse.<sup>1</sup>

In 1898, as a young British officer, Patterson was sent to East Africa (modern-day Kenya), to oversee construction of a railway bridge across the Tsavo River. When two lions<sup>2</sup> terrorized the camps and killed over 140 workers, Patterson hunted them for weeks and eventually killed them, saving the project. His book "The Man-Eaters of Tsavo" became a bestseller and inspired films.



During World War I, Patterson partnered with Joseph Trumpeldor, a decorated Russian Jewish soldier and passionate Zionist. Together they organized Jewish refugees into the Zion Mule Corps—the first Jewish military unit in nearly two millennia.<sup>3</sup> Patterson embraced the role, even learning Hebrew and Yiddish to communicate with his men, and ensured they had kosher food and time for Jewish holidays.

After the Corps disbanded in 1916, he formed in 1917 a Jewish fighting force to battle the Ottomans in the Land of Israel itself. Patterson fought for kosher food, Shabbat observance, and even the right to fly a flag bearing the Star of David. Patterson died in 1947, just before the birth of the State of Israel he so strongly supported. He was buried in Netanya.<sup>4</sup>

Ben-Zion Netanyahu,<sup>5</sup> the father of Prime Minister of Israel Binyomin Netanyahu, named his son, Yonatan (known as Yoni), after John Patterson, who was his godfather. Patterson attended Yonatan Netanyahu's circumcision in 1946 and gave him a silver cup engraved with the words "To my beloved godson Yonatan from Lt.-Col. John Henry Patterson."

In a striking turn of history, Operation Entebbe—carried out in Uganda in 1976, near the region where Patterson once faced the lions—claimed a single Israeli military casualty: Yonatan Netanyahu. The one named after Patterson fell in that same East African setting, an uncanny echo that invites deeper reflection. Was this a mere coincidence or does it hint at a deeper connection between their souls? Were there *nitzotzos*, holy sparks of Divine light that were elevated?

<sup>1</sup> Breishis 12:3.

<sup>2</sup> Tangentially, we know that a lion is defined by gevura. Indeed, the gematria of אריה is the same as גבורה, 216. An additional point is that we know Dovid Hamleech was a redhead, and red represents gevura. What is Dovid called? כלב האריה, lionhearted (Shmuel 2, 17:10).

<sup>3</sup> Patterson wrote in his book "With the Zionists in Gallipoli": "It was strange...that I, so imbued with the Jewish traditions, should have arrived in Egypt at the psychological moment when the British Army was looking for a suitable officer to recruit a Jewish unit. A Jewish unit had been unknown for

### White Hair

Why does hair turn white as a person grows older?

It is a reminder that we are not here forever. Life is not about settling into this world, but about using it to reach spiritual perfection. Rav Avigdor Miller explains that the whitening of hair is not just a biological process; it is a message from Hashem. When a person is young, they feel strong, permanent, almost invincible. As the hair begins to lose its color, it becomes a visible sign that time is passing, and that one must begin to take life more seriously. The white hair reminds a person that his stay in this world is temporary. We are meant to use our time wisely, with purpose, growth and Torah, preparing ourselves for the next world.



Why specifically the color white?

White is the color of purity.<sup>6</sup> As a person's hair turns white, it hints that one's actions should also become purified. It also reflects the next world, a realm of purity—urging a person to refine himself here in this world in order to be fitting for that higher existence.

There is a powerful allusion to this in the Torah's description of *tzaraas* where it says נהפך שער לבן, the hair has turned white.<sup>7</sup> The change of the hair color to white (שער לבן) is a signal that something deeper requires attention. It calls out to a person: turn around (נהפך), reflect, and do teshuvah. Change your ways. Refine who you are.

The whitening of hair, then, is not a sign of decline. It is an invitation to elevation.

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](mailto:yalt3285@gmail.com) or on WhatsApp at +972 54 849 5217.

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2,000 years, since the day of the Maccabees, those heroic sons of Israel who fought so valiantly, and for a time so successfully, to wrest Jerusalem from the Roman Legions."

<sup>4</sup> This article mostly comes from the article "The Israeli Army's Irish Christian Godfather" by Dr. Yvette Alt Miller.

<sup>5</sup> He was a journalist and academic who befriended John Patterson when they were both advocating for a Jewish state.

<sup>6</sup> As we see in אם יהיו חטאיכם כשנים כשלג ילבנו, if your sins are like scarlet they will become white as snow (Yeshaya 1:18).

<sup>7</sup> Vayikra 13:25.