



SHOSHANA JUDELMAN

TORAH TIDBITS CONTRIBUTOR

Opening the Door to the Light of the Aleph-Bet

On our trips to Poland, we usually begin at the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery. When I call this cemetery one of my favorite places in the world, people give me strange looks. But I am a historian and a person who is constantly seeking connection with Am Yisrael and, with that goal in mind, the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery is almost unparalleled. You can walk in any direction and find a treasure trove of great personalities and stories going back almost 10 generations. Communal leaders, artists, teachers, writers, Rebbes and many many more. It is awesome and inspiring.

On my last journey, we entered a recently renovated ohel. Since I had never been in it, I was very curious.

When we got there, we saw that there was a keypad lock on the door. As in many places across Europe, the code for the lock was a Hebrew word that had to be converted to its numerical counterpart using gematria.

I love these locks.

Whenever I encounter them, it touches something very deep inside of me. I feel like an explorer receiving a secret handshake from another Jew across space and time. It gives me a sense of belonging and heritage. The feeling of being part of something bigger than myself.

And huge gratitude for my Jewish education.

Aside from the “codebreaker” aspect, the force of the Hebrew letters is what makes this experience so powerful.

Kabbalah understands the Hebrew letters as portals of connection and channels of energy. Aside from the sound associated with each letter, there are countless layers to engage with – physical shape, numerical value, name, and so on. Each facet is a lens to deeper understanding of words, concepts, personal names, pesukim, etc.

Chazal teach us that through 10 Utterances the world was created and the Baal Shem Tov explains that those same words are still being “said” by Hashem to continue bringing the world into existence. In other words, the Aleph-Bet letters are the building blocks of Creation and powerful tools of attachment to Hashem.

In a talk from 1992, the Lubavitcher Rebbe said that the Hebrew letters are the

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mechanism through which Bnei Yisrael receives the flow of blessings from Hashem. He references a pasuk in Parashat VaYechi in which Yaakov Avinu blesses Ephraim and Menashe. The Torah says:

וַיְבָרֶכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לְאִמּוֹר בְּכֶּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל

And he blessed them that day saying, “through **you** will Israel be blessed”

The Rebbe points out that בך has the gematria of 22, referring to the 22 letters of the Aleph-Bet. And he makes the point even stronger by citing the Zohar that אור־יִתָּא וְקוּדְשָׁא אור־יִתָּא וְקוּדְשָׁא, Hashem and His Torah are one. In other words, the very essence of Hashem shines through the Hebrew letters of the Torah into Am Yisrael whenever we engage with them.

Entering that ohel shifted the energy of the group.

The code, after all, was ישועה.

A small word charged with many connotations: salvation, rescue, help, and Geulah.

Using the Hebrew letters didn't only enable us to open a door in Warsaw, they empowered us to open a channel in our hearts. Hashem's light shining through the letters effected an atmosphere of possibility, hope, and love. And our davening in that ohel was a gateway for the whole journey.

This Shavuot, may we be blessed to recognize the precious gift Hashem is giving us, to meet the Torah with renewed love, and to open our hearts to His healing light shining through every letter. ■

Shoshana Judelman is passionate about learning and growing through Chassidus. She gives shiurim to women in many communities around Israel, including Efrat, Elazar, Raanana and Jerusalem as well as at Midreshet Rachel V'Chaya. Shoshana also guides groups at Yad Vashem and leads journeys to Poland and other countries around Europe for JRoots.

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