



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

One, Two, Three, Four, Five

In the middle of this week's parsha, the Torah seems to make a detour into the backwaters of Canaanite political history. For an entire chapter of 25 verses the Torah describes a war between the "four kings" and the "five kings". Ostensibly, these events have little to do with the story of Abraham and the genesis of the Jewish People.

Or maybe there is more here than meets the eye...

The four kings and the five kings represent two opposing world views. The four kings represent a world-view where everything in creation is subsumed under the "forces of nature." This view holds that there is nothing else in this world — except this world. Four always denotes this-worldliness. The world is com-

posed of four elements: earth, wind, fire, and water. We speak of the "four winds." There are four points of the compass, and the letter *dalet*, which has the numerical value of four, consists of two lines at right angles to each other, suggesting the four points of the compass.

You can look at this world as being no more than what can be contained in this world — within the four elements, the four winds, and the four directions.

Or you can look deeper and see that that this world is focused on an Existence beyond this world. This is the world-view represented by the five kings.

Five in Hebrew is represented by the letter *heh*. If you look at the letter *heh*, you will see that it is composed of the letter *dalet* (which stands for four) plus the letter *yud*. *Yud* is a unique letter. It is the only letter which doesn't touch the line on which you write. It is no more than the smallest dot

floating above the line, representing intangible, spiritual existence. The written letter *heh*, then, is a pictogram of this world focused and revolving around that which is above this world — the *dalet* (the "four" of this world) with the *yud* of spirituality at its axis.

Abraham fought on behalf of the five kings against the four kings. Abraham was the first person to look at this world and see an Existence beyond. If there was a creation, there had to be a Creator.

After Abram fought the war against the four kings, G-d added a letter to his name. Not surprisingly, that letter was the letter *heh*. For Abraham stood for all that the *heh* represents — that this world revolves around a Higher Existence. Every word in the Torah is to teach us something. Why recount in detail the war of the four kings and the five kings? From it we can get a deeper understanding of the life of Abraham, his legacy, and our role as his descendants, the Jewish People.

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ETHICS of the FATHERS

*“Everything is in accordance
with the multitude of the deed.”*

Meaningful spiritual growth is not achieved by the greatness of any one particular deed but rather by the great number of repeated deeds, no matter how small. Repeated performance of good deeds affects a person's character in a more lasting and consistent manner than one tremendous deed alone can. A classic example would be one who gives a thousand dollars to one needy person but nothing to others in need. He will

not develop the characteristic of generosity to the extent that one who gives one dollar each to a thousand different poor people will. The latter's repeated acts of generosity gradually mold him into a giving person, while the former experienced an extraordinary moment of inspiration towards generosity, which when not reinforced, will evaporate.

We find a similar thing in regard to the Torah's reward for good deeds. The reward of one who redeemed one ransomed captive for a thousand dollars, or gave one poor man a thousand dollars is not as great as the reward of one who redeemed ten captives for one hundred dollars each, or gave ten poor people one hundred dollars on ten different occasions.

Response Line

Varying Vowels

Case E. Krell wrote:

Can you answer a question for me? Some friends and I were sitting around yesterday discussing...well, something, and I mentioned — I don't remember why — there were no vowels written down in the Torah. Yet, I was at a loss to explain why. This is something I probably knew at one time, but have forgotten.

So, why are there no vowels written down in the Torah?

Dear Case,

Your question has two answers: A simple one and a Kabbalistic one.

The simple reason that the Torah has no vowels is that the Hebrew alphabet doesn't have any. The vowel sounds are sometimes written

as dots under the letters. But they aren't necessary. Just as you can read tricky English words like 'psychic' and 'queue' without looking in a dictionary, Hebrew speakers can read Hebrew without the dots.

Hence, the entire Torah, Prophets, and Writings, the Mishna and Talmud, and all the classic commentaries were written without any vowels. Even today, Israelis read menus, soup cans and street signs with no vowels. That's just how Hebrew is.

But there is another answer to your question:

The Hebrew language is Holy, and the Hebrew alphabet is Holy. Even the shapes of the letters contain many lessons and mysteries. So too, the absence of the vowels has much to teach us. For example:

The letters of a word are like its

'body.' The vowels are like its 'soul.' Just as the soul is the life of the body, yet it is invisible, so the vowels remain unwritten and invisible, yet they breathe 'life' and meaning into every word.

The Torah is not just a book, but an interactive medium. The absence of vowels beckons us to become partners with the Torah; to breathe life into its letters. In return, the Torah breathes life into us, as it says "It is a Tree of Life to those who uphold it."

Just as one hammer blow shatters a rock into many fragments, so every word in the Torah has many meanings and secrets. Some of the hidden meanings of the Torah are derived by reading the words using various vowel combinations. For example, the words 'In the beginning' can be read to mean that G-d created a single 'stone' — the focal point from which the universe expanded.