

Learning Hebrew via the GLObal aLphabet.¹

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As a materials developer and teacher trainer in English (to speakers of other languages) and Hebrew, I often have to point out that the alphabet, even as a song, gives almost no actual language abilities: you can't order a meal with it, or exchange pleasantries with a new acquaintance. (The handful of memorized sentences in typical modern language courses do a little more; similarly for the dozen or two words in a typical first lesson in an academic course. One main point is that the alphabet contains no meaning in itself. You have to confront the thousands of words in any language: arbitrary sequence of sounds or letters, with an equally arbitrary meaning. How can **anyone** learn thousands of words? The teacher's advice to "guess from context" won't work until you already know a few thousand words—an almost impossible task, especially in a language as difficult as Hebrew. Little wonder that the common conversation among Jews is:

—Can you read Hebrew?

—Of course! I went to Hebrew school for many years!

—And can you understand what you read?

—Of course not! I'm not a rabbi.

Small wonder that most of those who can say the *motzi* (the 'grace before meals') in a split second don't know what the word *motzi* itself actually means. (Typical incorrect guesses are 'thanks' and 'bread,' answers which do show some actual knowledge. Similarly for *Kaddish* (*Qadish*): Allen Ginsberg wrote a famous poem with this name, but apparently knew only that it's a "prayer for the dead," knowing nothing (like most) of the meaning of the word, or the actual content of this prayer. (The word *Qadish* means 'holy,' so is the prayer praising the holiness of one's dead relatives? Knowing what's really going on is arguably more important to an understanding of Judaism than what order to light Hanukkah candles in.)




Nor is this lack of specific knowledge of Hebrew at all surprising, given the typical sequence of a year or more of grammar and vocabulary study, followed by "wilderness" of dictionaries—if indeed meaning is learned at all—many who learn a few words with their meanings at the start eventually succumb to the "serious business" of reciting, in which meaning seems to be a distraction. The whole approach is "anti-semantic"—pun intended. Only occasionally will a rabbi dare even to discuss the specific meaning of words, and he'd better have a really deep point to make, to risk so boring the congregation, **some** of whom love *Adón Olám* **because** it signals the end of services, without knowing anything of the meaning of this rollicking (but profound) song. Don't embarrass religious

¹ The "Global Alphabet" is the latest development of my "Sheltered Initiation Language Learning" Method, written up in the *Jewish Journal of San Diego*, April 2014 as "the Best in Hebrew Education." In the present article and in all things, I am grateful to my "Silent Aleph," Shoshana.

Jews by asking what the song itself means (or even its name²)! Is there a better way, given that Americans are (supposedly) such weak language learners, even with a cognate language like Spanish? **The Global Alphabet** (aka Key-letter theory or nanosemantics) embodies the claim that alphabetic letters,³ (abstract phonemes) act as "**Key-letters**," having **UNIVERSAL MEANINGS, from which all word-meanings derive**⁴. It is well-known that all alphabets derived from the original Canaanit (aka Paleo-Hebrew or Phoenician) alphabet, deriving their shapes and sounds from the Semitic original—as Herodotus knew. But the surprising new discovery is that these letters came fitted with their own individual meanings, which apply as well in all languages using alphabets.

For example, the Key-letter **L** means '**Lift**,' and explains the meanings of English *Lift*, *eLevator*, *eLysium*, Spanish, *Levantarse*, the Polish and Israeli airlines *Lót,eL-aL* (whose names mean 'flight' and 'up-to-above' respectively).

So Many Words, So Little Time!

 <i>Ida Noh</i>	She crosses her arms *looking like <i>LÓ</i> , the Hebrew word for "no," with a perplexed frown. She says:	"Only geniuses can learn foreign languages."
 <i>Reese Issterman</i> ⁵	He waves his arms in the air, forming the Arabic spelling for <i>Laa</i> 'no' He says:	"Language is so boring that is doesn't allow me to think! "Read the Bible in Hebrew? I can't even get anywhere with Spanish! In fact, I need help with English!"
 But <i>Yogi Wolf</i> says:	"My job as mystic is to find the hidden unities behind the seeming chaos of the world we see.	"The Global Alphabet makes languages easy, fun, ...and interesting!

A small sample of seeming Hebrew-English. coincidences is given here for fun:

<i>Hebrew:</i>	<i>Kalkalah</i>	<i>Qaw</i> ⁶	<i>Qoweh</i>	<i>èRetz</i>	<i>Bosh</i>	<i>Atah</i> ^a	<i>anu</i> ^à
<i>Translation</i>	Economy	Line	Hopes	land	Be shamed	You	We, us
<i>IE:</i>	<i>Calculus</i>	<i>Queue</i>	<i>Quest</i>	<i>eaRth</i>	<i>Bashful. aBash</i>	<i>Sp Tú</i>	<i>Sp Nos</i>

The Sound of Meaning: You Lift your tongue (Lingua) to say *L*, and **L** means '**Lift**.'

² Although usually translated as "Lord of the Universe," *adón olám* also means "Lord of Time." *oLam*, meaning 'ever, universe' may have inspired Einstein's insight of the 'Space-Time Continuum' and time as the Fourth Dimension.

³ apparently derived from "Old Onomatopoeia" (c.3000 BCE),—partly "conventionalized" in the fixed main vocabulary but even now **reasserting itself in "lexical creativity": Booyah, Boy oh Boy, &c.**

⁴If my initial claim sounds grandiose, think what "cracking the code of language" might mean. (Of course languages are not codes: there are thousands of words in the lexicon of any language.) But 40 years of intensive research, teaching, and publication on the simple idea—that **SINGLE LETTERS** have **INDIVIDUAL MEANINGS**—has reduced these many thousands of words in dozens of languages to just the 20 Key-letters of the Global Alphabet.

⁵ These fictional names represent real people.

⁶ *W*, pronounced *V*, is an important abstract phoneme, e.g. in {*W-Waw-huW*^a [uvavó] 'and-his hook.'


L = ‘Lift, Lofty.’ *Lift, eLevate, Learn, Love.*

Hebrew *aLlelu-yah, °aLiyah, °aL, °eL, °eLyón, Lashón* ‘praise-God, going-up, up/on, God, on-high.tongue/language.

Einstein. It is probable, that Einstein came to his great discovery of the Fourth Dimension and the Space-Time Continuum from the Hebrew word *°oLam*, which actually means ‘space-time continuum,’ that is, it means both ‘ever’ and ‘universe.’ This is a common word in both sub-meanings in the Hebrew prayerbook that Einstein knew as a child. It is based on the “Lofty” meaning of *L* as in *English Love* and Hebrew *Lev* ‘heart.’

NB: initial vowels, h/y, w/v,^{oa}...& prefixes⁷ must be ignored.

The Shape of Meaning: Over centuries, the shapes of the letters assimilated to their meanings!

□□□□H□□□ ‘spin’ >  , Roman Σ > S (2 circles):	K ‘catch, collect’ > C (in Hebrew. “backwards C”)
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So meanings jump up from the page! *Sov Sevivon, Sovev* Sepher ‘Spin, Dreidel, Spin a Scroll!’


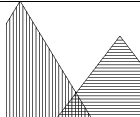

.... giving the “Hebrew-English mirror:

Hebrew *Kipah, Kós, Kise^a, Knesiyah* Eng. *Skull-Cap, Cup, Church, Chair.*⁸

The mirror exemplified with Hebrew *Kipah* ‘skull-cap’ and English *Cap*:



Alliterative “Pictories” for learning.

			
The eLevator takes eLephants	to the aLps	bB	
	Bless Bread as your Bottom Bulges & Bumps like a Bunch of Boisterous Boys; Bless Beef and Build a Big Building!	Bneh w’ Bharekh °eL	Bayyit
L	Lift your Lips to Learn a Lovely Language & Lift the Leve of your Leadership!	“Build a Building with-Blessing God.”	
Hebrew:	ha°aLLeLú Lashón w’-Lmad Lashón “Lift a Lingua With-Learning a Lingua.”	“Lift your tongue to Learn a Language”	

Deep meanings.

Sometimes rabbinic interpretations of the biblical text are simple explanations of real lexical relationships implicit in the Hebrew. Such is the familiar interpretation that the matriarch Sarah wants to be “sonned up” as well as “built up” by Hagar having a child with her husband, since the Hebrew root *Bn*-incorporates the pun, meaning both ‘build’ and ‘son.’ (A similar pun is involved in the Hanukah oil miraculously lasting for just eight days, since the root of ‘oil’ and ‘eight’ are identical: *Shemmen* vs. *Shmoneh*.)

⁷ Prefixes should be initially ignored, e.g. *He mo-Tzi*; but they also have their own Key-letters, e.g. *Pro-Pel*. In English, *S* can be a meaningless prefix (*sCathing*) or a Key-letter (*Spin*).

⁸ So these are Key-letters, not Key-sounds.

But my favorite example of “deeper meanings” is the traditional interpretation (*Rashi*) of “In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth” as God created the universe “with wisdom.” This is not only a traditional interpretation, based on sophisticated textual comparison.

More relevant to our topic here, it is also an answer to a question on the **final quiz in my 15-class-hour “Hebrew Alphabet” course**. The answer was given not by students who had previously studied Hebrew: these students gave the literal translation. The innovative answer was given by Korean students, who had never studied Hebrew before (or perhaps had never read the Bible, even in English), on the basis of the Key-letter *R* in *Reshit* “beginning” whose second main meaning is “enlightenment,” as in *Rosh, Rav, toRah, moReh, oR, neR, RuaH* “head, rabbi, teaching, teacher, light, candle, spirit.” The Korean students, using the Key-letter meanings, translated “God created with enlightenment.”

The forms of the Hebrew letters are also not such a challenge. For example, Hebrew *L* is just English *L* with an arc added below. But the important point is that Hebrew letters can be taught with their meanings, as opposed to the reigning “anti-semantic” (meaning-less) approach!

The Key-letter system is based on an old idea in Hebrew linguistics: that letters have meanings. The first mention of this idea is in the *Sepher Yetzirah* ‘Book of Creation,’ originally “published” (by hand) with commentary by Sa’adiyah Ga’on.

This insight was expressed in the very first dictionary of Hebrew by Gesenius, but this insight was dismissed, with the advent of the supposedly more “scientific” tri-literal roots theory, as “Kabbalah,” relegated to sermons and coffee-table books on the “mystic meanings” and spiritual significance of the Hebrew letters.

But these books, and Hebrew teaching generally, take an anti-semantic approach (pun intended), mistakenly identifying the names of the letters as meanings. So *Shin* is thought to **mean ‘tooth.’** But in fact its meaning is easily seen as being ‘peace & quiet.’ In fact, it is a visual representation of a mouth and finger signing *Sh!*, as found in the Hebrew words *Sheqquet, Shalom, Shtoq*, and even *Shoftim, Shotrim* ‘silence, peace, Shut up!’, judges, police officers.’ Even *Shem* ‘name’ fits the broad meaning because names bring order to the Universe. Obviously the *Shin* on the mezuzah is appropriate not only because it stands for *Shadayy* ‘God Almighty’ and *haShem* ‘the Name, i.e. God’) but even more because it stands for the content of the mezuzah: *Shma YiΣra^aeL... ‘Sh! Shut up and listen, Israel...’*

In English too, *Sh* (without a separate letter) is found in *Shut up, Shelter*, and also words for clothing, which provide shelter: *Shoe, Shirt*. In Russian *Shinel’*, *Shuba, Shapka, Sherst’* ‘overcoat, fur coat, cap, wool’ similarly mean ‘shelter,’ not to mention the onomapoetic *Shopot* ‘whisper.’ (The Russian *Sh*, with three prongs, is actually borrowed from the Hebrew letter.)

The Global Alphabet consists of just 20 Key-letters, from which the meaning of any word in many languages can be ‘tweaked’ in the same way as we cut through ambiguities by tweaking words in context, e.g. in *Oversight prevents oversights*. The 20 Key-letters provide the platform for a SOLE—a “Self-Organized Learning Experience,” whereby, for example, anyone can quickly learn to study and interpret the Bible in Hebrew with little more than a facing translation.

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