

- Niggun
- Prayer
- I keep people on mute
- Everyone say Hi
- Workshops, practice sessions, courses
- Portal- all info
- Use chat to say you have a question
- Unmute yourself



## *Aleph*

“Awareness is the Unity of Joy and Sorrow”

### **Invocation Verse:**

אַרֹמִימְכָה אֱלֹהֵי הַמְּלֶכֶת וְאַבְרַכָּהּ שְׁמֶךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד  
*Aromimkha Elohai HaMelelekh, va'avarkha Shimkha le'olam Va'ed*  
*I will exalt You, my Divinity, the Sovereign, and I will bless Your Name*  
*forever and ever.*  
 (Psalm 145:1)

### **Meaning and Mystical Associations:**

*Alef* can mean “chief,” “guide,” “ox” and also “thousand.” In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, *Alef* is one of the three “mother letters,” and represents Air and Breath, the chest in the human body, and the temperate seasons in time.

Spelled out, *aleph* is אֵלֶף – *alef, lamed, pei (final fei)*. *Lamed* means “learn” and *pei* means, “mouth.” So, one way to understand *aleph* is, “The Breath of Life Guiding the Mouth to Speak Wisdom...”

### **Text Learning:**

**I Bereisheet 2:7**

וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפְחַח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגִפְשׁ חַיָּה:  
*Divine Being formed the human from the dust of the earth and blew into the*  
*human's nostrils the breath of life, and human became a living being.*

*Adam*, “the human,” begins with *aleph*, and is characterized by the *afar adamah*, “dust of the earth” (*adamah* begins with *aleph*) and also the *nishmat hayim*, the “breath of life,” which is represented by *aleph*.

## II Pirkei Avot 6:3:

הלומד מחברו פרק אחד או הלכה אחת או פסוק אחד או דבור אחד או אפלו אות אחת, צריך דברים בלבד, לנהוג בו כבוד, שפן מצינו בדרך מלך ישראל, שלא למד מאחיתפל אלא שני ואתה אנוש כערפי אלופי ומידעי. והלא דברים (תהלים נה) קראו רבו אלופו ומידעו, שנאמר קל וחמר, ומה דוד מלך ישראל, שלא למד מאחיתפל אלא שני דברים בלבד קראו רבו אלופו ומידעו, הלומד מחברו פרק אחד או הלכה אחת או פסוק אחד או דבור אחד או אפלו אות אחת, כבוד (משלי ג) ואין כבוד אלא תורה, שנאמר. על אחת כמה וכמה שצריך לנהוג בו כבוד פי לקח (משלי ד) ותמימים ינחלו טוב, ואין טוב אלא תורה, שנאמר (משלי כח), חכמים ינחלו טוב נתתי לכם תורת אל תעזבו:

*One who learns from their fellow one chapter, or one halakhah, or one verse, or one word, or even one letter, is obligated to treat them with honor; for so we find with David, king of Israel, who learned from Ahitophel no more than two things, yet called him his master, his guide (Alufo) and his beloved friend, as it is said, “But it was you, a man mine equal, my guide (Alufi) and my beloved friend” (Psalms 55:14). Is this not “from the less to the greater” (kal vehomer)? If David, king of Israel who learned from Ahitophel no more than two things, nevertheless called him his master, his guide (Alufo) and his beloved friend; then in the case of one who learns from their fellow one chapter, or one halakhah, or one verse, or one word, or even one letter, all the more so they are under obligation to treat them with honor. And “honor” means nothing but Torah, as it is said, “It is honor that sages inherit” (Proverbs 3:35). “And the perfect shall inherit good” (Proverbs 28:10), and “good” means nothing but Torah, as it is said, “For I give you good instruction; do not forsake my Torah” (Proverbs 4:2).*

Torah = Goodness = Learning = Honor. In this piece, we honor anyone we learn from, even the smallest amount. This expands even more in the next *mishna*...

## III Pirkei Avot 6:3:

בן זומא אומר, איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם, שנאמר מכל מלמדי השכלתי  
*Ben Zoma said, “Who is wise? One who learns (lomed) from everyone, as it is said, ‘From all my teachers (m’lamdai) I grew wise.’”*

Here we learn from everyone and everything... in other words, everything is potentially Torah, and everything becomes Torah through our relationship to

it. This hints at the statement in the Zohar that “Israel, Torah, and the Holy Blessed One are all One.” So how do we enter this unity consciousness? Read on...!

#### IV Talmud, *Hagiga* 14b:

*Four entered the Orchard (Pardes). They were Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher [literally, "the Other", referring to Elisha ben Abuya], and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva warned them, “When you enter near the Stone of Pure Marble, do not say 'water, water,' since it is written, 'He who speaks falsehood will not be established before My eyes' (Psalms 101:7).”*

*Ben Azzai gazed and died. Regarding him it is written, “Precious in G-d's eyes is the death of His pious ones” (Psalm 116:15).*

*Ben Zoma gazed and was stricken [with insanity; he went out of his mind]. Regarding him it is written, “You have found honey, eat moderately lest you bloat yourself and vomit it.” (Proverbs 25:16)*

*Acher gazed and cut the plantings [i.e. he became a heretic].*

*Rabbi Akiva [entered in peace and] departed in peace...*

Somehow, the experience of *Pardes* has a negative effect on three of the rabbis, because of the assumed urge they would have to “speak falsehood” and say “water water.” What is the meaning?

Arizal explains the “Stone of Pure Marble” is actually the unification of joy and sorrow, the place where “upper waters” and “lower waters” meet. This is represented by the *Alef*, which is two *yuds*, connected by *vav*: Connection between upper and lower waters. (Upper waters (wet) are joy of closeness to Divine, lower waters (cold) are bitterness of distance, according to Hassidic teaching as transmitted by R. Yitzhak Ginsburgh.)

Ordinary experience is dualistic, which is why Creation begins with *Bet*, *Bereisheet*. The giving of Torah begins with *Alef*, *Anokhi Hashem*, because the point of spirituality is to discover and embody the oneness of the opposites.

Why is Akiva the one who can unify joy and sorrow?

*Once he was traveling to a city and arrived after dark and the gate was locked, so he had to camp out in the woods. He had a lit candle, a donkey*

*and a rooster to wake him up in the morning. The wind blew out his candle, a lion ate his donkey, and a cat killed his rooster.*

*Still he said, “Kol man d'avid Rahmana l'tav avid – All that the Merciful One does is for good.”*

*In the morning, he learned that a vicious band of robbers invaded the city and murdered the inhabitants, while Akiva was safe under cover of the woods, and not betrayed by his animals.*

### **So how do you do it?**

*A disciple asked Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, which was a better path—the path of joy, or the path of sorrow? He answered, “Both paths are great, if you do them right; there is a good sorrow and a bad sorrow, a good joy and a bad joy:*

*“Bad sorrow is wallowing in negativity. Good sorrow is when your suffering is transformed into prayer: ‘O Hashem, this is what you have given me... please help me...’*

*“Bad joy is gloating about how good you have it. Good joy is like when your house is burned down, and you begin building anew, and with each brick you rejoice with gratitude for the opportunity to build...”*

### **The Ikar...**

Joy and sorrow are united in their relation to the Divine; that's the *Vav*, always saying “Yes AND.” This is embodied in the first blessing of the morning *Sh'ma*:

*“Yotzeir Or uvorei hoshekh, Oseh shalom uvorei et hakol – Who forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates The All.”*

In essence, the *Aleph* practice is intentionally opening to joy and sorrow. This is similar to equanimity, except equanimity is often associated with not having emotions, or not caring. In this practice, there is no pushing away of emotion or care; rather, there is simply an embrace of whatever appears in experience. This is the deeper equanimity – the realization of oneself as the open space that receives everything, like the open air we all breathe, rather than a manipulation of one's thoughts and feelings...

## **Aleph Practice for the Month**

### **1. Chant the Aleph Invocation Verse with the following *kavanot*.**

אַרֹמִימְכָה אֱלֹהֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאַבְרַכָּהּ שְׁמֶךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

*Aromimkha Elohai HaMelelekh, va'avarkha Shimkha le'olam Va'ed*

*I will exalt You, my Divinity, the Sovereign, and I will bless Your Name forever and ever.*

The first part is surrender, feeling any sorrow that is present as fully as you can— “*I will exalt You... the sovereign...*” The second part is gratitude— “*I will bless constantly...*”

When you chant, try these *kavanot*: feel the alternation between surrender and gratitude. Try saying each:

“Surrender – *Aromimkha Elohai HaMelelekh*, Giving Thanks– *va'avarkha Shimkha le'olam Va'ed*”

### **2. Advanced Practice – wherever you are at!**

### **3. Silent meditation: 20 minutes is wonderful, two minutes is infinitely better than nothing!**