

ב

Bet

“The Body is the Temple of Awareness”

Invocation Verse:

בְּכֹל-יוֹם אֲבָרְכֶךָ וְאֶהְלֵלָהּ שְׁמֶךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד
B'khol yom avarkhekha, va'ahal'lah shimkha le'olam va'ed
Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your Name forever and ever.
(Psalm 145:2)

Meaning and Mystical Associations:

Bet means “house.” In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, *Bet* is one of the seven “double letters,” and represents the *middah* (quality) of Life, the astrological body of the Moon, the right eye in the human body, and Sunday in time.

Bereisheet 1:1-5

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:
וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתְּהָ תֵהוֹ וְבַהֲוֹ וְחָשָׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:
וַיֵּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי-אוֹר:
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאוֹר כִּי-טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ:
וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ לַיְלָה וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:

*In the beginning, Elohim created the heavens and the earth.
And the earth was chaos and emptiness, with darkness over the surface of
the deep, and a wind of Elohim hovered over the face of the waters.
Elohim said, “Let there be light” – and there was light.
Elohim saw that the light was good, and Elohim separated the light from the
darkness. Elohim called the light Day, and the darkness It called Night, and
there was evening and there was morning, one day.*

The the first letter of the Torah is *Bet*, which means “house.” The connection between “house” and “creation” is explained by R. Yitzhak Ginsburg in his book, *Aleph Bet*:

The three “servant letters” of *Bereisheet*, the prefix *bet* and the suffix *yod – tav*, together spell the letter *beyt*, and also the word *bayit*, both which mean “house.” The root letters in the middle, *reish – aleph – shin*, spell *rosh*,

which means “head.” When you put these two words side by side, you get *Rosh Bayit* – “Head of the House” – the image of the Divine inhabiting the physical world. A *midrash* expresses this idea when it proclaims that the whole purpose of creation is actually so that the Divine can have a home in the physical world.

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם

V'asu Li mikdash v'shakhanti b'tokham

They shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I shall dwell within them...

(Exodus 25:8)

This verse, in which *Hashem* instructs the building of the *mishkan*, contains the enigmatic formulation *shakhanti b'tokham* – *I shall dwell within them* – rather than *I shall dwell within IT*. This hints that the deeper message of the Divine inhabiting the physical world isn't only about the cosmos or the temple, but rather it's about the practice of body awareness, of making a connection between the Divine dimension of our being, awareness, and our earthly dimension – our physical bodies. This is the practical application of *Rosh Bayit* – bringing the “head” (awareness) into the “house” (the physical body).

Furthermore, another permutation of *rosh* is *ashir*, meaning “happy” or “rich” or “content.” Thus, the implied principle is that when the *rosh* is in the *bayit*, when we bring awareness into the body, there can be true *ashir*, true happiness. Happiness is the root of all *brakhah*, blessing, which also begins with *bet*. When awareness purposefully dwells in the body, dis-identification with thought and feeling happens spontaneously, and we come to know ourselves as spaciousness and wholeness – the greatest of all *brakhah*.

Bereisheet 18:1-8, Parshat Vayeira

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵי וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח־הָאֵהָל כְּהֵם הַיּוֹם:

The Divine appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.

וַיֵּשֶׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיִּרֶץ לְקִרְיָתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲרָצָה:

Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground,

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם־נָא מְצֵאתִי חַן בְּעֵינֵיךָ אַל־נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ:

he said, “My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant.

יִקַּח-גַּא מֵעֵט-מַיִם וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁעֵנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ:
Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree.

וְאַקְחָה פַת-לֶחֶם וְסַעֲדוּ לְבַבְכֶם אַחַר תִּעְבְּרוּ כִי-עַל־כֵּן עֲבַרְתֶּם עַל-עַבְדְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵּן תַעֲשֶׂה
כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ:
And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant's way.” They replied, “Do as you have said.”

וַיִּמְהַר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵלֶּלֶה אֶל-שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מְהֵרָא שְׂלֵשׁ סָאִים קִמַּח סֵלֶת לּוֹשֵׁי וַעֲשֵׂי עֲגוֹת:
Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Quick, three measures of choice flour! Please knead and make cakes!”

וְאֶל-הַבָּקָר רָץ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח בֶּן-בָּקָר רַךְ וְטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן אֶל-הַנָּעַר וַיִּמְהַר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ:
Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it.

וַיִּקַּח חֲמָאָה וְחֵלֶב וּבֶן-הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לַפְּנִיָּהֶם וְהוּא-עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ:
He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

Traditionally, Abraham and Sarah are the archetypes of hospitality, stemming from this story. An unusual aspect of this narrative is that he doesn't invite the guests in, but rather he runs out to greet them, and goes back into the tent only to ask Sarah to make food. The symbolic meaning here is that through our connection with our own bodies, we tap into a deep well of inner nourishment (Presence) which gives us the strength to express generosity outwardly. Thus, there is a direct connection between inner and outer hospitality.

Another implied teaching is in the fact that Abraham was welcoming to dirty, wandering strangers. This hints at our awareness practice, in which we welcome all experience that arises, both sweet and bitter – hearkening back to the *aleph*.

Once, when Reb Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev was traveling, he stopped to spend the night in the town of Lwow. He knocked on the door of a very wealthy man and asked for lodging.

“I have no use for vagrants like you! Why don't you stay at the inn?” said the man.

“I am not able to afford the inn,” replied Reb Levi Yitzhak. “Please, I won’t be any trouble, let me stay in one of your rooms just for the night.”

“Well then, if you can’t afford the inn,” said the miserly rich man, “go around the corner to the schoolteacher. He likes to take in vagrants, and he will offer you a room, food and drink.”

So, Reb Levi Yitzhak went around the corner to the schoolteacher and was offered lodging. But on his way there, someone in the town recognized him, and began to spread the word that the great Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was at the schoolteacher’s house. Before long, there were throngs of people crowding the house, trying to get a blessing from the master.

Among the crowd was the miserly rich man, who pushed his way to the front. “Master! Master! Forgive me! I didn’t know who you were! Please come and stay with me— all the great rabbis who come through town stay with me!”

“Do you know,” replied Reb Levi Yitzhak, “why such a fuss is made over Avraham and Sarah for their hospitality when they opened their home to the visiting angels and gave them food and drink? Didn’t Lot also invite them in and give them food?”

“But in the Torah’s description about Lot, it says, ‘*vayovo ’u shnei hamalakhim s’domah – two angels came to Sodom,*’ but with Avraham it says, ‘*shloshah anashim nitzavim alav – three men were standing over him.*’ Lot saw majestic angels, whereas Avraham saw only dusty wayfarers...”

When we apply hospitality on the inner level, it is, in a sense, the active side of *aleph*. With *aleph*, we focus on the unity of experience, regardless of joy or sorrow. With *bet*, we actively *invite in* whatever comes our way.

But why would you want to invite something in that’s negative or dangerous? Wouldn’t that be unsafe?

It is safe, as long as the *rosh* in the *bayit*. As long as there’s a sense of yourself as the field of awareness, and your awareness is rooted in your body, you can welcome whatever arises; there’s no need to struggle with any experience.

Thus, while *aleph* represents the unity of experience that encompasses the polarities of sorrow and joy, *bet* represents the coming together of

consciousness with form, awareness with body. Both are aspects of the same thing: Presence.

This is also represented by the form of *bet*, which is enclosed on three sides and open on one. Awareness fills the delineated form of the body represented by the three sides, yet it is not limited by the body, represented by the open side.

Chanting

Think: “Let this body be a temple of Presence.” Feel downward into your body and let the chant be a pointer into your field of awareness nestling itself in the body, making the body of home, a sacred space.

בְּכָל-יוֹם אֲבָרְכֶךָ וְאֶהְלֵלָהּ שְׁמִיךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

B'khol yom avarkhekha, va'ahal'lah shimkha le'olam va'ed

Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your Name forever and ever.

Use this to open your daily meditation, then move into your daily practice at your level.