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The [Number](nchart.html) One

By Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben [David](fathers.html) (Greg Killian)

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Who knows one?[[1]](#footnote-1)

I [know](daat.html) one:

*One is Our God[[2]](#footnote-2)*

*who is in the* [*heavens*](heaven.html) *and on earth.*

The [number](nchart.html) one represents unity and completeness. The [Hebrew](hebrew.html) representation for the [number](nchart.html) one is the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) [letter](letters.html) *alef* - א. What is an alef?

If it were only a random arrangement of pen strokes de­signed to prompt the reader to say the sound “ah,”[[3]](#footnote-3) this question would be irrelevant. However, every aspect of the alef’s construc­tion has been Divinely designed to [teach](teacher.html) us something. Contrast this with a child learning to read English for the first [time](time.html). He is never [taught](teacher.html) why a capital “A” looks like a teepee and a small “a” looks like a soap bubble stuck to a wall.



But [Hebrew](hebrew.html) is different. The design of an alef is actually made up of [three](three.html) different [letters](letters.html): the [letter](letters.html) yud or dot above; a yud or dot below; and a diagonal vav, or line suspended in between.

The yud above represents [HaShem](hashem.html), Who is above (or beyond) our comprehension. In com­parison to His true essence, our understanding is a mere dot.

The yud below represents a Yid or Yehudim, [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people who [dwell](dwelling.html) here on earth. The only way that we can grasp [HaShem](hashem.html)’s wisdom, to the extent that a person is capable, is by being humble. When we realize that we are but a dot or a speck compared to the All-Mighty and All-Powerful G-d, we become a vessel to receive His Divine wisdom.

The diagonal vav represents a [Jew](gen-jew.html)’s faithfulness,[[4]](#footnote-4) which unites him with [HaShem](hashem.html).

There is another [teaching](teacher.html)[[5]](#footnote-5) that posits that the suspended vav represents the Torah. Since the Torah is what unites a [Jew](gen-jew.html) and [HaShem](hashem.html), the alef represents this unity between mankind and [HaShem](hashem.html). This is the design, or form, of the alef.

We can see that every stroke of the alef (and every other [let­ter](letters.html) as well) has a special purpose, and that there is much more to learning the alef-beit than just mastering its sounds.

The alef has [three](three.html) different meanings. One is אלוף, aluf, which means a master or a chief. The second is אולפנה, ulfana,a school of learning[[6]](#footnote-6) or [teacher](teacher.html). The [third](three.html) meaning is reached by reading the [letters](letters.html) of the word back­wards, פלא, pela (pronounced peleh), wondrous.

The Maharal[[7]](#footnote-7) indicates that one:

1. Conveys “completeness”. Since one is not divisible, it has no parts and is intrinsically whole.
2. One may imply “unique”.
3. One may be used to describe that something is “foremost”, to which all else is mere adjunct.

The [Gemara](orallaw.html) [teaches](teacher.html) us that the *alef* is interpreted, by our Sages, as an injunction to [study](study.html) Torah.

***Shabbath 104a*** *The Rabbis told R. Joshua b. Levi: Children have come to the Beth Hamidrash and said things the like of which was not said even in the days of Joshua the son of Nun. [Thus:] alef Beth [means] ‘learn wisdom [alef Binah];*

The meaning of alef is also found חָכְמָה וַאֲאַלֶּפְךָ, *I shall* [*teach*](teacher.html) *you wisdom* (Job 33:33).

*That the first* [*letter*](letters.html) *calls for Torah* [*study*](study.html) *and simultaneously symbolizes the primacy of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *is no coincidence. This, too, is an expression of the principle that* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, Torah, and* [*Israel*](gen-jew.html) *are one:* [*Jews*](gen-jew.html) *are charged with the* [*study*](study.html) *of the Torah that represents the wisdom of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*.*

*The transformation of alef into elef (thousand) applies to all areas of human endeavor inn which persistence and effort are rewarded, but, since the symbolism of the alef-beit has such profound* [*spiritual*](physical.html) *overtones, the alef-elef relationship must be given particular application to Torah* [*study*](study.html)*. Success in Torah understanding and the accumulation of Torah* [*knowledge*](knowledge.html) *requires constant review and continuous application, even if a difficult concept must be analyzed a* ***thousand*** *times.[[8]](#footnote-8)*

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The Arizal explains that [numbers](nchart.html) have their origins in the supernal [spiritual](physical.html) [worlds](worlds.html). Single digit [numbers](nchart.html) correspond to the [physical](physical.html) realm Asiyah, the sefirat Malkhut. Tens correspond to the angelic realm Yetzirah, the sefirat Tiferet. Hundreds correspond to the Neshama realm Beriah, the sefirat Binah, Imma. Being that hundreds emanate from the realm of Imma, they are the source of blessing. Therefore, all offerings are the rectification of 100% of the produce offered.

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1. This famous quesitons comes from the [haggada](file:///D:\Word\Numbers\haggada.html) used at the [Passover](file:///D:\Word\Numbers\passover.html) seder. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There is one infinite creator, the cause of causes and the maker of all. He is not one in a numerical sense -- since He is not subject to change, definition or multiplicity. He is one in that the number one signifies an independent unit and is the basis of all numbers; the number one is also contained in all numbers. Similarly, the Creator is actually within everything, and everything is within Him. He is the beginning and cause of everything. The Creator does not change, and therefore one cannot add or subtract from Him.

   Moreover, His existence is necessary existence (i.e. it is not contingent upon anything else), in the same way that the number one is a requisite for the existence of any other (whole) number. If the number one would cease to be, every other number would also cease to exist. However, if other numbers disappeared, one would continue to exist. There are properties of the number one; similar qualities apply to the Creator. Even if the act ceased to be, the One who acted remains. Because His being is not contingent upon the existence of anything else, were they to cease being, His existence would continue. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The alef is actually an inarticulated letter whose sound is determined only by its accompanying vowel. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The vertical line of the vav represents hierarchy: the submission of a subject to his king (as explained in the chapter on the letter hei). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See also Likkutei Sichos, vol. 2, p. 616. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Also see Job 33:33—ואאלפך—“And I will ‘teach’ you.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Maharal: Pirkei Avot, by Rabbi Tuvia Basser, pg. 288 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. # The Sacred Letters As a Guide to Jewish Deed and Thought, by Michael L. Munk

   [↑](#footnote-ref-8)