

**Shared materials
for Tzedek Chicago
Torah study, 10/26/24**

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Prepared by Virginia Spatz,
for Shabbat Breishit 5785

songeveryday.org

Before God makes any act of Creation, the Earth is "Confusion and Chaos." Torah does not explore the Confusion and Chaos or examine what is under the surfaces of water and Deep. Some teachers consider these dangerous directions of inquiry and suggest that the Torah's initial ב / bet is pointing us, very specifically, forward – i.e., leftward in Hebrew –



Moses dies, and the God-Wrestlers' wilderness journey ends at a river crossing. Torah does not venture beyond that river or watch the Yisraelites step into history. Instead, the final *lamed* [ל] of *YisraeL* [ישראל] bends around toward that initial *bet* [ב] of *Breishit* [בראשית], restarting the tale, and returning us to more universal territory.

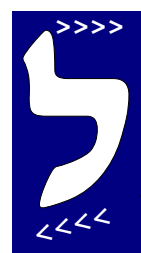


This process of return in the Torah cycle, linking that last *lamed* to that first *bet*, forms *lamed-bet* = לב = *lev*, "heart."
 This "heart" leads to many teachings, including these:



- The heart of the Torah is the people relating to the tale and trying to live its words;
- The heart of Torah is the "white space" between the words, our interpretations in every age;
- We cannot spell "*lev*" without starting over, learning again and again;
- And the heart of the Torah leads us, again and again, to consider the interplay between
 - the particular -- the relationship of one group of people and the prophet, Moses, to God -- and
 - the universal: light, soil, labor, knowledge, exile and the search for home.

Looking further into the *lev* letters: That initial כ [bet] can be read as cautioning us away from some inquiries: Some say we are not meant to ask what is above, what is before, or what is below. The final *lamed* [ל] looks open both to what is behind us and to what is to yet come: The top embracing the relationship story just told; the bottom reaching around to new cycle, new insights.



>>>> Top embracing relationships already developed
 and stories just told >>>>

<<<< Bottom reaching
 around to embrace
 a new telling <<<<

Closed to what



is above;

<< Open only to
 what is ahead

Closed to
 what is before
 or behind;

Closed to what

is below;



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More Hebrew word-play links the Torah's opening and closing words:

בראשית [*breishit, bet-reish-alef-shin-yud-tav*] AND ישראל [*yisrael, yud-sin-reish-alef-lamed*]

The Torah's 2nd, 3rd, and 4th letters form the Hebrew word for "head," *rosh: reish-alef-shin*. ר-א-ש.

As the Torah closes, *rosh* appears transformed within the name, *Yisrael*: sin-reish-alef, ש-ר-א

With each new Torah cycle we have an opportunity to wrestle differently, to approach the relationship anew.

Is there a mind-set you'd like to transform this year for yourself and/or the community?

Is there unexplored relationship territory that could help us build in new directions?



What might we face in,
or through, Torah
in the coming year?

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