

מלכותו לעולם ועד

lamed

Twelfth of Kislev

Lamed is all about *limud*—learning. But isn't everything in Torah? Of course. But like the *Aleph* and the *Mem*, the *Lamed* is also comprised of letters (*Chof-Vav*) that total twenty-six, the *gematria* of the *Shem Hovayah*.

The *gematria* of *Lamed* is thirty which, according to *Pirkei Avos*, is when a person has reached full strength.¹ According to the *Midrash Shmuel*,² this means that a person has reached the ability to guide and influence others for good.

It is also the last letter of the Torah, in a sense saying that everything up until then, like the first twenty-nine years of a person's life, was for the sake of preparation of

¹ *Pirkei Avos* 5:23.
² *Midrash Shmuel*, *Avos* 5:22.

development. A round of education may finish with the last letter of the Torah, but it tells us to go out and teach—*lelameid*—others what we have learned. . . to be the light to the nations God redeemed us to become.

As a prefix, a *Lamed* means “to.” *Eretz* is land, but *l’aretz* means “to the land.” But as *Rasbi* points out on several occasions, the *Lamed* at the beginning of a word can be replaced with a *Heb* at the end of the word. *Artzah* means the same as *l’aretz*.

Combining the two concepts, the *Lamed* teaches us that learning should always lead somewhere. And not just anywhere, but to God. One of God’s Names is *HaMakom*—The Place—to indicate that wherever we go in life, we should always be going towards God.

As the *Nefesh HaChaim* explains,³ God’s place is not *in* Creation, but rather He is the *place* of Creation. All of Creation exists *within* Him, and it is a wonder that people can live in this world and see it every day and yet not see God in everything and at every moment. Where do you hide when you are both that which is hidden and what hides it?

That’s how well He does it.

And He purposely hides Himself so that man can look for Him and find Him. History is just one long, ongoing game of Divine hide-and-go-seek. Man was given free will so that He can choose to seek out God, the reward of

³ In *Sba’ar* 3.

which is to find and know Him.

Anyone who has succeeded at this even a little knows how incredibly rewarding this is in this world, and how awesomely rewarding it will be in the World to Come. That's when the veils come off according to those which a person removed while in this world, as the prophet has said:

You shall call Me and go and pray to Me, and I will bear you. And you will seek Me and find [Me] for you will seek Me with all your heart. (Yirmiyahu 29:12-13)

The *Lamed* alludes to this. This is why its components, the *Cbof* and the *Vav*, total twenty-six, the *gematria* of the *Shem Hovayab*. And this is why a *Lamed* looks like a platform with a pole reaching upward, to indicate that if a person first intellectually climbs to the appropriate level, then they will have clear access to Heaven after that, as it says:

If a person purifies themselves, they (Heaven) help them. . . if they sanctify themselves a little, they sanctify them a lot. (*Yoma* 38b)

It all comes down to one question: Do you learn to live, or live to learn. Someone who learns to live sees learning only as a means to an end, so when the end doesn't

matter, neither does the learning anymore. Education is a part of life, but not life itself.

But when a person lives to learn, school is in session every moment, which is intimidating for a person who doesn't like school. But that's usually because a person is made to focus on knowledge that doesn't enhance their life in any obvious way. Most educators don't go the extra distance to show their students how it does.

That's why Torah learning is not just about *learning*, but about learning *how* to learn. That's when a person can take even mundane knowledge and "spectacularize" it, greatly enhancing their understanding of life, and experience of it.