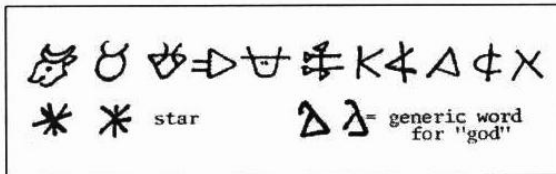


# Hebrew for the Goyim

On-going lessons: The Hebrew alphabet, by Pat Mercer Hutchens, Ph.d.

 Alef



Each lesson or partial lesson on the Hebrew letters will be based on the book, *Hebrew for the Goyim*, by Pat Mercer Hutchens. The entire book may be purchased at TJCI or by going on line to Xulon.com, Amazon.com or any online distributor.

In fact, in one form or another, *alef* is the first letter of *most* alphabets. Today, we refer to all of the letters of the alphabet as the “alpha-bet.” This is because the first two letters are *alef* (א) and *bet* (ב).

Alef (א), the first letter, comes from the Hebrew/Phoenician letter *alef*, the same letter later known as alpha in Greek and A in English.

Bet (ב), the second letter, is the Hebrew/Phoenician letter bet (b), beta in Greek and B in English.

So, instead of saying our ABC’s, it is more accurate to refer to our AB’s – our *alef-bets*, or our alphabet.

One day archaeological evidence may dig up information proving people we call “pre-historic” were after all literate and effectively communicated with written symbols. However, *what we know now* is that thousands of years ago humans reached out to communicate with drawings and marks in caves, others drew signs to represent persons, places and things, and eventually these efforts developed into a simplified written system later called the alphabet. It is impossible to know who was the first person to write, but the Scriptures do say there was once only one spoken language and tongue on the earth.

## Historical Thoughts

- Neither Homer nor Herodotus addresses the question of the origins of language except offering “a generally accepted view in Greek antiquity that the Phoenicians under Cadmus brought into Hellas the alphabet, which had hitherto been unknown, as I think, to the Greeks.”
- The infamous Hitler insisted an Aryan language was the original “pure” one. Of course, his goal was racist, with an “impure” motive to sever connections to all things Jewish.
- A Jewish author, Matityahu Glazerson, insisted that not only is there a similarity between Hebrew words and words in other languages, but published a book saying, “The purpose of this book is to explain and show that...the holy language, Hebrew, is the source of all languages. This phenomenon was not adequately explained by these same linguists, some did not explain this phenomenon at all, while others explained it superficially, or even childishly” and “linguistics if taught in the ‘enlightened’ Western countries, according to the systems developed by anti-Semitic professors, who attempted to construct innovative theories to concern the fact that Hebrew is the source of all languages.” (emphasis mine)
- Plato, who was actually *opposed to writing* because he thought it would instill dependence on visuals and create forgetfulness, mentions that “Theuth,” the Egyptian Thoth, was the creator of the “art of the letters.”
- Diodorus claims Zeus gave the letters to the Greeks; Pliny the Elder supports the Assyrian origin of writing; the author of the Book of Jubilees said Enoch “was the first one who learned writing and knowledge and wisdom;” the Cabalist tradition said that Abraham invented the alphabet; some Chinese historians attribute the origins of their script to Fu-his (often associated with Adam) and the discovery of Sumerian epics and other present day archaeological finds continue to bring hotly debated questions about the origins and development of writing.”



It is known that Ugaritic, Mayan and Egyptian hieroglyphics were elaborate writing systems, but according to most current scholars, archaic signs which later developed into alphabet letters were drawn in the Middle East. Some scholars insist the letters as we know them only began about 1500 B.C. in Canaan. Some credit Cadmus, a Phoenician, with compiling or inventing the alphabet. Others say it was the result of slow evolution and growth of communication that included, among others, the Hebrews, all the peoples in the Levant and the Mesopotamian areas of Sinai, Assyria, Aram (Aramaic), Egypt and Canaan.

Many written or carved graphic signs and symbols used by humans to communicate concepts or ideas have been traced back at least to the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C. and these signs were simple drawings of everyday words, like head, walk, hand, day, fish and water. The figures at the beginning of this chapter show some of the various ancient symbols for the letter *alef* and the letter A in other languages.

Although most scholars indicate *alef* came from the ox drawing in proto-Canaanite, proto-Sinaitic and Phoenician times, it is worth noting similarities between *alef* and both a Coptic (late Egyptian) drawing of a falcon as well as the Gothic symbol for the letter A. In fact, in early Egyptian times the ***image of a falcon*** served as a “determinative for the generic word ‘god,’ with the body representing heaven and the eyes representing the sun. This sign was a specific single determinative with the falcon on a standard-bearer, the ancient sign for ‘god.’” Perhaps symbols of a star, ox, eye and a falcon were all influential in the formation of the final form of *alef*. At any rate, the letter *alef* definitely speaks of God and Higher Powers. The same letters with the sound *elef* is the word “thousand,” a large number in early days. The same letters pronounced *aluf* refers to a Brigadier General in the Army, a high ranking officer.

### *Alef*

Originally, the letter *alef* (English letter *a*) was probably a symbol and drawn like the head of a large ox or bull (figure 2 and 5). This huge, powerful animal was feared, respected and greatly venerated. Many cultures made carved or cast idols of bulls (called *baals*) expressing the idea of what an enormous bull represented – the concept of *incredible power and dominion*.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we might use a mushroom-shaped drawing of a hydrogen bomb to symbolize this concept of vast, enormous power, but originally the ox/bull image was a symbol of this high, ultimate power. As time passed, this ox/bull image simply transformed into a letter of the alphabet. No one who looks at the letter “A” today thinks of anything, except perhaps “A is for apple.”

This original powerful, realistic *alef* symbol eventually became abstract. The Greek letter alpha was *alef* rotated sideways 90 degrees and today’s Latin letter A was *alef* rotated another 90 degrees. (see diagrams) Today, few people would guess that ***the letter A began as an idea***.