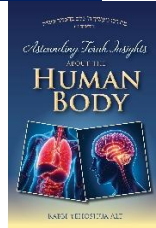


# Fascinating INSIGHTS

ד' אייר תשפ"ה  
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### A Rare Scare

An elderly Jew, over 80 years old, brought his tefillin to a sofer to be checked. The sofer discovered a flaw that rendered them

invalid—something that had been overlooked in previous inspections.

Realizing that he had never truly fulfilled the mitzvah of tefillin in his entire life, the elderly man stood in shock. But then, he suddenly began

to sing and dance. When asked why, he explained, "Had this flaw never been found, I would have gone my whole life without ever fulfilling the mitzvah of tefillin. Now, at least, I have the chance to do it properly!"



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### Lasting Laugh

The name יצחק means "laughter." Yet, paradoxically, he is the last person we would associate with laughter, as he embodies *midas hadin*, strict judgment. What, then, is the deeper meaning behind his name?

Laughter arises when the unexpected happens. The first mention<sup>1</sup> of laughter in the Torah occurs when Hashem informs Avraham and Sarah that they will have a child. Avraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90<sup>2</sup>—well beyond the natural age for childbearing. The very idea seemed impossible as neither of them was seemingly capable of having children. Yet Hashem not only promised them a child, but also declared that this child would carry their legacy of monotheism throughout history. Their reaction? Laughter.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Hashem instructed them to name their son Yitzchak,<sup>4</sup> meaning "he will laugh." So, the first person born as a Jew is someone whose very name means laughter that is associated with paradox. When a person encounters something unexpected and paradoxical—when a situation seems to be progressing in one direction and then abruptly pivots in the opposite direction—the natural response is laughter.

Yitzchak's life continued to reflect this theme. At the *Akeidah*, he was moments away from being sacrificed, when, at the last instant, Hashem intervened. The outcome was entirely unexpected. This is the concept of laughter. As a result, the name יצחק signifies laughter.<sup>5</sup>

In many ways, the Jewish people mirror their ancestor Yitzchak—our very survival defies logic and expectation. We exist against all odds, a nation that should not have endured, yet continues to thrive.

Laughter is the result of an unexpected twist. Consider a simple joke: A waiter

approaches a table of elderly customers and asks, "Is anything okay?" The expected phrase would be, "Is everything okay?" The inversion surprises us, triggering laughter. Or take another example: Someone says "thank you," and the response comes as "my pressure" instead of "my pleasure." The humor lies in the unexpected turn of phrase. The more unpredictable the twist, the funnier it is.

Kabbalah teaches that each month in the Jewish calendar corresponds to a different aspect of the human experience. The month of Adar, the time of Purim, is associated with laughter. This is what Purim is about as it is the embodiment of *והפוך הוא*—reversals of fortune and unexpected twists. Unlike other festivals, Purim has no open miracles, yet the entire story is filled with improbabilities and absurdities that culminate in an astonishing victory. As we celebrate Purim, we recognize the humor in our own history—the endless series of improbable events that have ensured our survival against all odds. This is the essence of laughter.

This concept is reflected in the ultimate redemption. It says<sup>6</sup> that when Hashem will



return the  
captivity of  
Tzion, we will  
be like  
dreamers. אז  
ימלא שחוק פינו,  
then our  
mouths will be

filled with laughter. At the time of redemption, the Jewish people will be filled with laughter as they look back on their exile and suffering. They will realize that all of it was, in essence, a dream, although a painful one. Redemption, by contrast, will be reality. Here we see the idea of שחוק, laughter, in the contrast of these two.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years and received semichah from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written thousands of Torah articles on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of nine books including the recently released "Exhilarating Torah Insights on Recreation and Vacation." His writings, many of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. His shiurim can be found on various websites including Kol Halashon's. Rabbi Alt lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, lectures, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

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<sup>1</sup> The root meaning of every matter is revealed where it is mentioned for the first time (see R' Tzadok Hakohen in Yisrael Kedoshim 7, Pri Tzadik Bamidbar, Rosh Chodesh Tamuz 1, Ki Seitzei 11, Kislev 3 and 5, Chanuka 18, Rosh Chodesh Adar 7, Kedushas Shabbos 7, Pokeid Akaraim 1, Resisei Layla 8 and the Bnei Yissasschar, Iyar 3).

<sup>2</sup> Breishis 17:17.

<sup>3</sup> Breishis 17:17, 18:12.

<sup>4</sup> Breishis 17:19.

<sup>5</sup> Additionally, Yitzchak embodies *middas hadin*, the attribute of strict judgment. How does this connect with laughter? To understand this, let's return to the very beginning of creation. Hashem considered creating the world solely with the attribute of *din*. However, upon seeing that the world could not endure under such strict judgment, He gave precedence to the attribute of *rachamim*, mercy and combined it with *din* (Breishis 1:1, Rashi). This connection reveals that *din* is associated with the unexpected.

<sup>6</sup> Tehillim 126:1-2.