

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

כא' אב תשפ"א

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### [Incredible Inspiration](#)

One can be living his routine life and yet others could be so inspired by observing him to the extent that it changes their lives. The following are some stories that illustrate this.

In 1997, a man named Lenny called the rabbi of a Shul in Dallas, Texas expressing to him that he wanted to

make a donation to his shul. When Lenny was asked why he wanted to donate money to a shul that he had no affiliation with, he explained that he just returned from a tour in Israel. He said in Jerusalem, “I was amazed by the intensity of a man dressed in a long black frock with ringlets of hair by his ears (a chasid) whom I saw praying at the Western Wall—the Kosel.<sup>1</sup> I was so moved by the depth of fervor (*hislahavus*) he displayed that I wanted to do something for him. Feeling uncomfortable to approach him, I decided when I return to Dallas, I’ll find a temple where this man would be likely to pray at and make a contribution in his merit. When I arrived home I went to the kosher bakery where the owner told me that a chasid like that would pray in this type of shul. As a result, I want to donate to your shul.” As his connection with the rabbi grew he gave more money and raised even more from his friends. When Lenny passed away his mother gave tens of thousands of dollars in his memory.

In July 1938, delegates from thirty-two countries met at the French resort of Evian to deal with the Jewish refugee problem. With the exception of the tiny Dominican Republic, no country was willing to accept more refugees. The countries that refused included the United States, Britain, France and Australia who offered excuses for not letting in refugees. Why did the Dominican Republic allow entry to Jews whereas the other countries refused? Rafael Trujillo who was the dictator of the Dominican Republic at that time had a daughter that went to school in France. When the events in Europe were turning against the Jews, this girl would tell her father that there was only one girl that cared and was kind to her, and she was a Jew. We don’t know the identity of this Jewish girl but it was because of her that thousands of Jew were saved!

During a summer day in the Catskill mountains in New York, a religious Jew named Naftali slightly hit a parked car while he drove into a parking lot of a supermarket. Since he didn’t know who the car belonged to, he wrote a note which he placed on the windshield of the victim’s car. This note, which he wrote his phone number on, stated that he mistakenly hit the car and will pay for the damage caused. An hour later he received a call from Simon who was the owner of the car that was hit. At first Simon was very suspicious of Naftali since most people would flee the scene because no one would notice. However, a few minutes into the conversation, he was convinced by Naftali’s honesty and they agreed to meet. It turns out that Simon was a secular Jew that was born and bred in the Catskills. He was so astounded by Naftali’s response to hitting his car that it forged a relationship between the two of them which eventually led to Simon becoming an observant Jew!

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<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, the Minchas Elazar (Masaos Yerushalayim, מאמר יום ב) said he has a tradition from his Rabbaim that the Ohr Hachaim gave a note to someone to put between the stones of the Kosel.

## 613 seeds?

The Drashos Chassam Sofer<sup>2</sup> tells us it is known that in a pomegranate there are 613 seeds corresponding to the 613 mitzvos. Similarly, the Malbim<sup>3</sup> writes that a pomegranate hints to the 613 mitzvos like the number of seeds it has.

If one opens up a pomegranate today, he may not find 613 seeds. Why? Nowadays due to sin, there aren't 613 seeds there,<sup>4</sup> as R' Yitzchak Isaac Yehuda Yechiel Safrin of Kamarna<sup>5</sup> (1806-1874) writes that if one doesn't find 613 seeds there, it is because of a curse as in זונה תזנה הארץ, the land is straying completely.<sup>6</sup>

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## English Expert

The question has been raised how important it is to know English for conveying Torah ideas. This includes the sentence structure, the rhythm, the syntax and the vocabulary.

The level of English used surely impacts the Torah ideas being expressed. It has the ability to present sophisticated Torah in a more honorable manner. A high level of English can make Torah ideas more potent.<sup>7</sup> How does it compare when you hear a rabbi giving a shiur with elegance in contrast to one who doesn't? How about when you read a sefer that was translated from another language into English? Surely, the level of English plays a vital role. There was a rabbi who once proposed that talking and writing Torah in English eloquently can be a fulfillment of וזה א-לי ואגדור, this is my God and I will beautify Him.<sup>8</sup> Eloquent English can beautify the Torah.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 2:249b. Also the Eitz Yosef on the Midrash in Shir Hashirim, 4:3, s.v. כפלה.

<sup>3</sup> On Shir Hashirim 4:13.

<sup>4</sup> We have many examples of sin changing nature:

1) With the sin of Adam, thorns and thistles among other things came about (See Breishis 3:17-18 with Rashi).

2) During the generation of the Mabul, three Tefachim deep into the ground were also dissolved and washed away (Breishis 6:13, Rashi), since due to people steeping so low spiritually, it affected the earth.

3) The Trisker Magid (Magen Avraham, Lecha Lecha, s.v. ויאמר) writes that the reason for illness in the world is due to the change in climate, air. Air is classified under רוח which is categorized as דיבור, speech, as in Targum Onkolos who says רוח במללא, speaking spirit (Breishis 2:7). Through damaging one's speech (with falsehood, mockery and the like), it negatively affects the air (speech is done through air—the breath of our mouth) and sickness comes to the world. Through sanctifying one's speech with Torah and Tefilla, it fixes up the climate and removes illness from the world (See also Drashos Chassam Sofer, Chelek קב, 376, s.v. אהז"ל). Incidentally, if we rearrange the word רפואה we get פה אור, light of the mouth.

<sup>5</sup> Zohar Chai, Vayechi, p. 390b.

<sup>6</sup> Hoshea 1:2.

<sup>7</sup> This essay is dealing with one who is raised in a country where English is the first language such as the United States.

<sup>8</sup> Shemos 15:2. The Gemara (Shabbos 133b) comments on this pasuk that one must beautify himself before Hashem through the embellished performance of mitzvos. For example, make a beautiful succa, lulav, shofar, tzitzis...

<sup>9</sup> R' Akiva Eiger requested that his Torah be printed on beautiful paper with black ink and attractive letters, since one is impressed, his mind at ease and concentration is aroused from learning in a sefer with a nice appearance. The reverse, when the print is unclear, has the opposite effect on the reader (שו"ת רבי עקיבא איגר, Hakdama, s.v. והגני).

R' Mordechai Gifter (1915-2001), Rosh Yeshiva of Telz, once expressed that speaking English made him more effective as a Torah scholar.<sup>10</sup> He was able to present Torah in a more eloquent and explanatory manner.

R' Gifter once wrote a letter to his grandson: "Perfect yourself in the English language both in speaking and in writing."<sup>11</sup>

In 1991, R' Emanuel Feldman wrote an article dealing with this issue titled "Tefillin in a Brown Paper Bag."<sup>12</sup> He wrote "Impoverished language cannot accurately reflect the wealth of great concepts... The use of deficient language has practical negative consequences as well, for it prevents us from preaching to anyone but the Orthodox choir...<sup>13</sup> After all, we don't wrap our tefillin in brown paper bags or bind our sifrei Torah with coarse, ugly ropes."<sup>14</sup>

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander zt"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg zt"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the books, Fascinating Insights and Incredible Insights in addition to being the host of The Fascinating Insights Podcast. His writings, some of which have been translated into German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

<sup>10</sup> R' Mordechai Gifter was of the opinion that even a person who would become a gadol should learn English and it wouldn't take away from his becoming great in Torah.

<sup>11</sup> R' Shlomo Eiger (1785-1852) wrote to his son, "Complete yourself in writing and speaking (the language of the country) because there is a great purpose to it. It is pleasing to people and to Hashem, as there is an obligation to learn a trade (and writing and speaking the language of the country is necessary for a job). In these times where it is not possible to fulfill this, there is still an obligation to learn that which is needed for a livelihood" (Chut Hamshulash p. 78).

<sup>12</sup> He notes that this idea first struck him when he was on a flight, where he read the London Economist. He writes that "he reveled in its felicitous style, its elegant phrasing, its precision, its supple prose and keen sense of language." He then read an Orthodox Jewish periodical and the sudden change in atmosphere gave him the literary bends. "The alphabet and the words were English, but the sentence structure, the rhythm, the syntax, the tone, were of another language altogether."

<sup>13</sup> He laments misusages such as "being that" instead of "since"; "comes to tell us" instead of "informs us"; "brings down" instead of "cites."

<sup>14</sup> The gemara (Kidusin 29a) says that a father is obligated to teach his son a trade. A rabbi involved in Kiruv around the world once said that in his opinion nowadays, for those who are able to, one should teach their children English or hire someone to do so. (He said this in context to those who raise children in countries where English is not the mother tongue. Still it is very beneficial for them to know it as a second language.) This is because there are many more opportunities presented to such a person. These include being able to learn more Torah since there is some Torah—be it books or shiurim—that is only available in English and being able to do Kiruv since many secular Jews only speak English. Additionally, more job opportunities are available to those who know English as well as higher salaries. This is because English is the universal language. In fact, in 2015, out of the total 195 countries in the world, 67 have English as the primary language of 'official status.' Plus there are also 27 countries where English is spoken as a secondary 'official' language. (It is also a major business language, as well as the official language of a number of the world's most important institutions, including the United Nations, NATO and the European Union.) Interestingly, a Kiruv rabbi once said that genuine secular Israelis come to Torah events when it is in English. He explained because English is cool, cultural and international. The same poster for the event written in English will draw more Israelis than if it is in Hebrew, although Hebrew is their mother tongue.