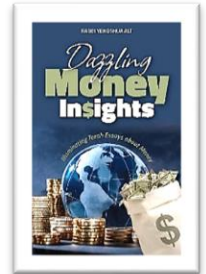
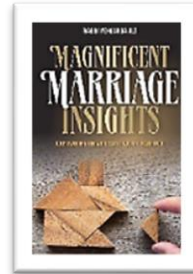
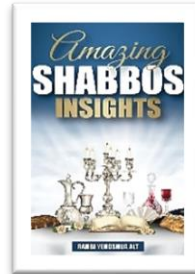
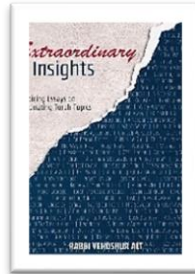
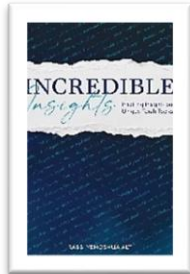


Fascinating INSIGHTS

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A Heartfelt Hug

There was a rabbi who would visit prisons that had Jewish inmates in order to cheer them up and encourage them. The rabbi's love spilled over to the extent that he would even inspire the non-Jewish prisoners, giving them hugs just as he did to the Jewish inmates. However, in one of the prisons he visited, there was a particular inmate named Neil who was exceptionally scary-looking — muscular, very tall, covered in tattoos — whom he avoided due to fear. As he was leaving this prison, he heard someone call out from behind him, "rabbi, no hug for me?" It was none other than Neil. After the rabbi gave him a hug, Neil said that he needed another hug. Of course the rabbi conceded.¹ The inmate then began to cry and said that those were the first hugs he had ever received in his life.²

In a similar story, R' Yitzchak Dovid Grossman once made a Chanuka party in prison with a music band, donuts, latkes, making it an uplifting experience. When it was over, he said goodbye to everyone and then spontaneously gave an impromptu hug to one of the inmates, radiating warmth. With that he made his exit

from the prison. A few days later he received a letter addressed to him. It said "I'm the prisoner whom you hugged just before leaving the Chanuka party at the prison. I am now sitting in my cell, crying and writing this letter to you. I want you to know that tonight was the first time in my life that someone gave me a hug or put their arms around me, just because they wanted to show me how much they cared." He signed his name at the bottom of the page.



Here is another story that brings out the power of a hug. In May, 2011, Dr. Itzhak Brook, a pediatric infectious disease doctor at Georgetown University, wrote an article in the Los Angeles Times. He underwent some tests and since he was a doctor, he had access to his hospital's laboratory results. Dr. Brook was overcome with despondency when he discovered that he was sick with cancer. He broke the news to his internist who gave Dr. Brook a caring hug. To have his illness removed, he

¹ About 100 years ago, a Rav in Eretz Yisrael who was questioned as to why he loved Jews who were far removed from an observant Torah lifestyle answered, "Better that I err on the side of baseless love than to err on the side of baseless hatred."

² Obviously, if he had some hugs in his life prior to this, he would have been a different person.

underwent painful procedures, which left him drained and nearly unable to speak. With all that he was going through he always remembered that hug, a hug which gave him the strength to overcome his hurdles. “Dr. Brook was dealt a most daunting test that rendered speaking arduous, but he discovered a different manner of expression that is so much more powerful. He had experienced the unparalleled impact of a heartfelt hug.”



In one of the Nazi death camps that were liberated by an American soldier’s platoon, there were many starving children. The American soldiers set up a gargantuan pot of soup to feed these children, and the children lined up, eager to receive their share of food. One particular soldier made eye contact with a boy at the end of the line. Since the American soldier couldn’t speak the boy’s native language, he communicated by offering the boy a hug. After they finished hugging, the soldier looked up and noticed that the children who were previously lined up for soup had postponed their chance to eat and instead formed a line behind the soldier to receive their hugs as well.³



The four walls of the Succa and the Schach covering overhead is compared to a child that is totally embraced in a full body-surrounding hug. It is a Divine hug to us, His children (as we are called 'בנים אתם לה', you are children to Hashem⁴).

Of course four complete walls are preferable, but the Succa can be made with a minimum of two complete walls and a section of a third wall. Even a child who is older appreciates a “smaller hug” — an affectionate arm around the shoulder. That is like the minimum Succa — a Succa of two walls and a bit. The Arizal points out three sections — the arm itself from the shoulder to the elbow, the forearm from the elbow to the wrist and from the wrist to the edge of the fingers. This parallels the Succa where the first wall represents a Divine embrace from the “shoulder” to the “elbow”; the second wall reflects the embrace of the “forearm” and the third small wall symbolizes the palm

³ Virginia Satir, a world-renowned family therapist, is famous for saying, “We need four hugs a day for survival. We need eight hugs a day for maintenance. We need twelve hugs a day for growth.”

⁴ Devarim 14:22.

⁵ Shir Hashirim 2:6. See Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Chag HaSuccos, chapter 4 and Likutei Torah, Derushim L’Succos, pp. 78-79, 82d, 84a-b, 87a.

embrace. This is what is referred to in וימינו תחבקני, His right arm embraces me.⁵

The Succa is Hashem’s hug to each of us. We must be conscious of His hug when we enter the Succa and feel His divine, eternal, and unconditional love for us.

Forced Forces

The gemara⁶ cites Reish Lakish who says that from the pasuk, זאת התורה לעלה למנחה ולחטאת ולאשם,⁷ we learn that whoever engages in Torah study is considered as if he offered an Olah, a Mincha, a Chatas and an Asham. Why are only these four karbonos mentioned and not for example the Karbon Shelamim?

We begin Maariv with והוא רחום יכפר עון ולא ישחית, He, the Merciful One, is forgiving of iniquity and does not destroy. Frequently He withdraws His anger, not arousing His entire rage.⁸ The Zohar notes the four forces of evil mentioned here — עון, night is where the evil forces have rulership. Consequently, we begin Maariv with this in order to counter these four evil forces so that they shouldn’t rule over us.

The Eretz Hachaim authored by R' Avraham Chaim Hakohen tells us that when there was a Beis Hamikdash, we nullified these evil forces with the four karbonos of חטאת, עולה, מנחה, אשם. The first letters of these four are ע, ה, מ, א. These correspond to the four evil forces of עון, משחית, אף, חמה. Because of this Reish Lakish mentioned only these four karbonos.

The four species that we take on Succos subdue these four evil forces. A hint to this is found in the gematria of ערבבה and אתרג, לולב, הדס, which is 1018. This is the identical gematria of עון, משחית, אף, חמה.⁹

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of six books including the recently released Dazzling Money Insights. His writings, some 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. 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

⁶ Menachos 110a.

⁷ Vayikra 7:37. The simple meaning is, “This is the law of the Olah, the Mincha, the Chatas and the Asham.”

⁸ Tehillim 78:38.

⁹ Learning Torah also subdues these forces. A hint to this is found in the words זאת התרה (spelled without the ו), which is the beginning of the pasuk mentioned above. These words have a gematria of 1018, the same as עון, משחית, אף, חמה.