

ISAIAH and the Kingdom of Peace

“The prophet does not exempt himself
from the general wretchedness,
lest he be left out of the mercy too.”
– St. Bernard of Clairvaux



Introducing the Aleph

Before reading this book, it's helpful to make friends with the Aleph. The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the Aleph makes no sound of its own. It carries only the intention of speech as it positions the throat for utterance. As such, it becomes a natural symbol for God, who brings creation into being with a word.

Throughout these pages, the Aleph will be used as the sign of God's presence and self-communication to the prophet.



Of course there was a time before visions;
before words
that break upon the mind like glass
leaving sharp fragments of truth
embedded in the soul.
Life was gentler
before these words.

I had a wife, the Prophetess.
We shared the dance of mystical insight,
joyfully surrendered to the beauty of the Will.



Again came to me something inconceivable,
yet clear as water.
In days ahead Jerusalem,
the Lord's own city,
will tower above the cities of earth.
This new high Jerusalem
will be the hope of nations;
the journey into her heart, the only journey.
All may travel this high road,
clasp hands, and find deep peace.
House of Jacob, share my joy!
Cease your wars, and rumors of war!

FOR PROPHECY LOVERS

Welcome to the back of the book. Our hope is that the story of Isaiah, told through words and images in these pages, has sparked your interest in learning more about the prophecies of this Hebrew seer. It may also awaken ideas about how to discern what constitutes authentic prophecy in our own day. After all, many still claim to speak for God. How do we know who the real prophets are and who represents only his or her own interests?

In this section, you'll find information helpful in tracing the ideas presented in this book. Where possible, we list the Scripture citations that point to passages from the books of Isaiah, 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles from which this "autobiography" is taken. The death of Isaiah is not told in the Bible, however. For that story, we must look to traditions found in related texts outside of Scripture which are described below.

All who love learning and seek understanding will appreciate the short survey that follows.

Why Do Artists Use the Aleph to Represent God?

One of the first Commandments in Judaism forbids "graven images." Other ancient peoples worshipped gods that looked like creatures of earth. The people Israel put their trust in a God far more mysterious and elusive. The Lord who could not be controlled by rituals or manipulated by sacrifices would certainly not be portrayed like a mere beast or even a super-human. Judaism went so far as to ban any image-making for the Divine.

This handicapped the artistic impulse to express the Divinity. The best substitution was to capture an attribute or trait of Israel's God: something that alluded to the Eternal

Mystery without actually attempting its depiction. In steps the Aleph. This first silent letter of the Hebrew alphabet reminds us of God's primacy of existence. Just as the Aleph positions the throat for speech, God is before creation is spoken into being. Called "king over the breath" and "formed air of the universe," the Aleph reminds us of the divine breath that brings to life all that is.

The Aleph begins each of the three Hebrew words of God's mystical name in Exodus: "I Am Who I Am." It's also the first letter in the Hebrew word for Truth. The Aleph combines three pen strokes: an upper and lower arm connected by a diagonal. The upper arm is understood to represent God's hidden aspect, while the lower reaches down to humanity in divine self-revelation. The diagonal line connects the two in close communion and covenant.

Since God's word brings the universe to life in Genesis, rabbis view letters themselves as primordial building blocks. It's been said that if letters departed from the world for an instant, all creation would vanish into nothingness. In Hebrew numerology, which assigns a number value to each letter, the two arms of the Aleph combine with the diagonal as three separate pen strokes or $10+6+10$, equaling 26. This being the number of letters in the entire alphabet, the value 26 makes the Aleph a symbol of totality as well.

The writer of the Book of Revelation, being Jewish, was mindful of these things when he calls Jesus "the Alpha and Omega," or "Aleph and Tav": the first letter and the last in Greek or Hebrew (Rev 22:13 and 1:17-18; see also Rev 1:8 and 21:6 where this phrase is used as God's self-description). It's not a new idea, borrowing from three passages of Isaiah in which God describes the divine nature in the same way