

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted March 31, 2005 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

THE POWER OF THE HEBREW ALPHABET

© Judith Z. Abrams, 2005

Hebrew numbers are not just letters, they are numbers, as well. You know that in Roman numerals V = 5 and X = 10, so XV = 15. Unlike Roman numerals, all Hebrew letters have numerical values. But these letters have much more meanings still. Sefer Yetsirah explains how different kinds of letters have different characteristics. Reading this book is a little like learning Chemistry. In Chemistry you learn about the elements and how they are organized by looking at the Periodic Table.

Just by seeing the group of elements one certain element is in and noting it's 1-, 2- or 3- lettered name and numerical value, one potentially has the key to understanding many of Chemistry's mysteries. An enormous amount of information is packed into such tiny letters as H (Hydrogen) and O (Oxygen). When two H molecules combine with one O molecules they form H₂O, i.e., water.

One of the easiest numerological symbols to see is this combination:

Love + One = God

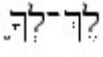
אהבה אחד יהוה

Hebrew letters have the following numerical values:

aleph=1	yud=10	kuf=100
bet=2	caf=20	reish=200
gimel=3	lamed=30	shin=300
dalet=4	mem=40	tav=400
hey=5	nun=50	
vav=6	samech=60	
zayin=7	ayin=70	
chet=8	pey=80	
tet=9	tsadi=90	

So we can see that love, ahavah = 1 +5 +2 + 5 = 13 and one, echad = 1 + 8 + 4 = 13, God's name = 10 +5 +6 + 5 =

26. So this sort of numerological exercise tells us that God is oneness and love combined. Another important and easy example of this sort of numerology is God's first command to Abraham is to leave his homeland and go to Israel. The

form of God's command in Hebrew is "Lech I'cha!" . The shapes and numerical values of these letters give us important messages. The letter lamed goes as high up as any Hebrew letter does while the final form of the letter chaf goes down the lowest of any Hebrew letter. So the command in these words is saying, "Use everything within you, from the top to the bottom, to make your journey. In addition, lamed = 30 and chaf = 20 = 50 x 2 = 100 so this phrase has a numerological value of 100. This is 10 squared and is something complete in our base-10 number system. So going on a spiritual journey takes everything we can give it, from our highest faculties to our lowest ones, and as a result of making this effort we can come to a place of wondrous wholeness.

Discussion Questions:

1. This sort of analysis is the "remez" part of the four-part formula for studying Torah known as Pardes. Pardes is an acronym for Peshat (straightforward meaning), Remez (the meaning that is hinted at through the numerical values of the words or their shapes), Drash (the way the sages saw the text) and Sod (the secret mystical way of looking at the Torah). Does this approach, Remez, satisfy you? Why or why not? Does it need to be used in concert with the other three methods?
2. Do you have a favorite numerological insight you'd like to share? Please do!