

GEMATRIA



“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.”

(Proverbs 25:2)

Wordplay is ubiquitous throughout rabbinic literature. It likely began in the early days of the Bible where, before it was a written text, names were probably given to characters that would help the storyteller remember what was going on. For example, Adam received that name because his body was made from adamah, the ground. Words that sounded alike were often seen as having a connection that was used to expand the meaning of the text, and when the alphabet was introduced, the possibilities for wordplay became even greater. For example, the letters of the ancient alphabet are also the ancient number system, and this gives every Hebrew word a numerical value. Thus, words with the same numerical value could now be seen as connected. This form of ancient Jewish numerology is called gematria, and that is what we primarily want to explore in this slideshow.

First, though, let me explain how I utilize *gematria*. I basically use this procedure to help me make meaningful connections that I wouldn't make otherwise. In other words, just because two words have the same numerical value, that doesn't automatically mean to me that they are connected. That would be like saying *God* is dog because the two words contain the same letters. (Okay, my dog thinks she's God, but I don't go that far.) Instead, the connection has to be relevant and meaningful to me. Also, the second rule I follow is based on the admonition found in *Exodus* not to follow the multitude to do evil.

You shall not follow a multitude to do evil. Nor shall you speak in a cause to incline a multitude to pervert justice.

(Exodus 23:2)

My corollary to this is, “*Never let religion get in the way of doing what’s right.*” Thus, only have faith in a *gematria* if it rings true to you, and if you have developed a habit of *righteousness*, then you will be able to discern more clearly between what’s right and what’s wrong, what is true and what is false.

In addition to the wordplay of *gematria*, you will find other forms of wordplay based on things such as letter shapes and, more recently, *Bible Codes*. An alleged *Bible Code* is a word or message found by skipping a fixed number of letters from some starting point. With modern computer programs, the *Torah* and *Tanach* can be examined quite easily for *Bible Codes*, and the results are sometimes extraordinary. I'll give an example later on in this chapter. But first, below is a table showing the name and numerical value of each Hebrew letter.

NAME	LETTER	VALUE
<i>aleph</i>	א	1
<i>bet</i>	ב	2
<i>gimmel</i>	ג	3
<i>dalet</i>	ד	4
<i>hey</i>	ה	5
<i>vav</i>	ו	6
<i>zayin</i>	ז	7
<i>chet</i>	ח	8
<i>tet</i>	ט	9
<i>yud</i>	י	10
<i>kaf</i>	כ	20
<i>lamed</i>	ל	30
<i>mem</i>	מ	40
<i>nun</i>	נ	50
<i>samech</i>	ס	60
<i>ayin</i>	ע	70
<i>peh</i>	פ	80
<i>tzaddi</i>	צ	90
<i>kuf</i>	ק	100
<i>resh</i>	ר	200
<i>shin</i>	ש	300
<i>tav</i>	ת	400

Recall now the story we told some time ago of *pardes*, the story of the four rabbis who went on a mystical journey and entered the garden (*pardes*). There is a tradition that the word *pardes* is also an acronym for *peshat*, *remetz*, *drash*, and *sod*. These are Hebrew words that represent the different levels of interpretation of the *Torah*. Namely, the plain meaning of the verse, hints contained within the verse for deeper meanings, the allegorical or symbolic meaning of the verse, and the verse's secret, *Kabbalistic* meaning. Of these four levels, *gematria* and wordplay are sometimes seen as *remetz*, hints for deeper meaning.

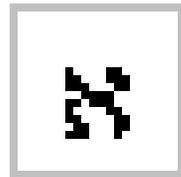
We'll now look at a few classical *gematriot*, and then we'll explore some interesting patterns I've found on my own as a further example of how *gematria* can help expand the meaning of a piece of text.

A very nice and very well known example of *gematria* is its use to show that *God* is a combination of love and oneness. In Hebrew, there are several different names used for *God*, but the one that is considered most sacred is the four-letter name, *yud-hey-vav-hey*. This name has a *gematria* of 26. By the way, it is interesting that if you number the letters in the English alphabet 1 through 26, then the numerical value of *God* is again 26. However, to continue, the numerical value of *oneness* in Hebrew is 13, and the numerical value of *love* in Hebrew is also 13. Thus, $13 + 13 = 26$ is our proof by *gematria* that *God* is *oneness* plus *love*.

God = *yud+hey+vav+hey* = 10+5+6+5 = 26
Love = *aleph+hey+bet+hey* = 1+5+2+5 = 13
One = *aleph+chet+dalet* = 1+8+4 = 13

Therefore, *God* = *Oneness* + *Love*

This next wordplay also involves letter shapes. The letter *aleph* can be decomposed into two *yuds* and a *vav*, and the numerical value of *yud+yud+vav* is again 26. Thus, the letter *aleph* also represents the most sacred name for *God* in Hebrew. Additionally, *aleph* is a silent letter, and recall our discussion several chapters ago about *hashmal*, the speaking silence, and how *God* may be found in silence.



aleph



yud, yud, vav

$$\begin{aligned} \textit{God} &= \textit{yud+hey+vav+hey} = 10+5+6+5 = 26 \\ \textit{aleph} &= \textit{yud+you+vav} = 10+10+6 = 26 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, the silent letter *aleph* is connected to the most sacred name for *God*.

Another name for *God* in Hebrew is *Elohim*, and in our discussions on passages from the *Zohar* we saw how *Elohim* can represent a manifest image of *God* that is created by the unmanifest, unknowable *God* (*i.e. with a beginning, IT created Elohim*). This viewpoint is supported by a *gematria* that shows that the name *Elohim* has the same numerical value as *nature*, thus indentifying the name *Elohim* with the creation itself.

Elohim = *aleph+lamed+hey+yud+mem*
= 1+30+5+10+40 = 86

nature = *hey+tet+bet+ayin* = 5+9+2+70 = 86

Therefore, there is a connection between *Elohim* and *nature*.

Sometimes to find a connection, all we have to do is create a permutation of the letters. Thus, for example, the letters that spell *Mishnah*, the oral law, can be rearranged to spell *neshamah*, the soul. Consequently, people will sometimes say that the oral law is the soul of the *Torah*, the written law.

Mishnah = mem-shin-nun-hey

Neshamah = nun-shin-mem-hey

We all know that when one has been drinking, one is liable to say anything and “loose lips, sink ships.” In the *Talmud (B. Sanhedrin 38a)* the rabbis give a *gematria* proof of this by showing that the words for *wine* and *secret* have the same numerical value. Furthermore, in the *Midrash Rabbah* collection, they give an even deeper meaning to this correspondence. They conclude that when we drink alcohol, our ability to understand the deeper secrets of the universe is severely impaired (*Numbers Rabbah X:8*).

Wine = *yud-yud-nun* = $10+10+50 = 70$

Secret = *samech-vav-dalet* = $60+6+4 = 70$

Another type of wordplay is what is known as an *atbash* transformation. An *atbash* transformation is when we replace letters at the beginning of the alphabet with letters at the end. For example, *aleph* with *tav*, *bet* with *shin*, and so on. Under an *atbash* transformation, if we replace the first two letters of *mitzvah*, commandment, with *yud* and *hey*, then we get the most sacred name for *God*. Thus, the commandments connect us to *God*.

mem = *yud*

tzaddi = *hey*

mem-tzaddi-vav-hey = *yud-hey-vav-hey*

To give another example of the benefits of wordplay, I was once sitting in the synagogue looking at my *siddur* (prayerbook) when I realized that the two middle letters of the word *shalom* are *lamed* and *vav*. These two letters add up to 36 and are often used to symbolize the thirty-six righteous souls for the sake of which *God* refrains from destroying the world, the *lamed-vav tzaddikim*, the hidden 36 righteous ones. Furthermore, the outer two letters of the word spell *Shem*, which means “name,” a reference to *God*. Thus, I concluded that without righteousness at its core, there can be no peace. And when there is a peace based on righteousness, then the name of *God* surrounds it.

shin-vav-lamed-mem = peace

vav+lamed = 36

shin-mem = name

In rabbinic and *Kabbalistic* traditions, there exist a 72 letter name of *God* and a 216 letter name of *God*. On the *Tree of Life*, *Chesed* (*chet-samech-dalet*) has a *gematria* of 72 and *Gevurah* (*gimmel-bet-vav-resh-hey*) has a *gematria* of 216. This suggests that the number 72 is associated with *God's* mercy and the number 216 with *God's* severity or justice.

chet+samech+dalet = 72

gimmel+bet+vav+resh+hey = 216

We've seen before that *Ecclesiastes* deals with some of the harsher realities of life, and it would be nice if there was an association between the number 216 and this text. The text of *Ecclesiastes* begins with the phrase "*Words of Kohelet.*" The very first word *Divrei* (words of) has a *gematria* of 216. Also, the *gematria* of the key theme of *Ecclesiastes*, "*Futility of futilities, all is futile,*" is 216.

We've also talked previously about the following verse from *Ecclesiastes*.

He has also put a world/eternity/enigma into their heart so that man cannot comprehend what God has done from beginning to end.

(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Compare this verse to the following from *Deuteronomy*.

You shall place My words upon your heart and upon your soul.

(Deuteronomy 11:18)

The *gematria* of *My words* (*divarai*) is 216.

Finally, many scholars believe that the last four verses of *Ecclesiastes* were a later addition to the text for the sake of political correctness. If we remove these four verses, then *Ecclesiastes* has a total of 216 verses. And *Ecclesiastes* then ends with *Kohelet* once again uttering the words, “*Futility of futilities, all is futile,*” the *gematria* of which is 216.

We'll now look at some numerical patterns in the Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26).

*The Lord bless you, and keep you,
The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be
gracious to you,
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give
you peace.*

*Y'varekh'kha Adonai v'yishm'rekha;
Ya'ar Adonai Panav ay'lekha viy'hunekha;
Yisa Adonai Panav ay'lekha, v'yasaym l'kha shalom.*

On the *Tree of Life* there are just three paths that connect the left and right sides of the *tree*, and these paths correspond to the three mother letters: *Aleph*, *Mem*, and *Shin*. The top connecting path is *Shin*, the middle path is *Aleph*, and the bottom connecting path is *Mem*. Elementally, these are fire, air, and water. Notice that this also corresponds to our physical anatomy. We have electrical fire in the brain, air in the lungs, and water and other fluids in the organs of the belly. Also, as connecting paths, these letters represent ways in which we can balance the two sides of our being. For example, think of how you might use fire to balance yourself, or air, or water. There are a variety of ways in which this can be done, and yet another good exercise is to find ways pertaining to fire, air, and water that you enjoy using in order to bring about health and balance within you.

Additionally, if we look at the corner letters of the square defined by the three middle words, these letters also add up to 36.

						ר	ר	ט	ש	ו	י	ה	ה	ו	י	נ	ר	כ	כ	ו							
			ך	נ	ה	ו	י	ך	ל	א	ו		י	נ	פ	ה	ו	ה	י	ר	א	י					
ם	ו	ל	ש		ך	ל		ם	ש	ו	י	ך	ל	א		ו	י	נ	פ		ה	ו	ה	י	א	ש	י

If we now read this as two words with the *vav* representing the number 6, then we get *pani vav, my face – six*. This is reminiscent of a passage in the *Sefer Yetzirah* where the six directions are sealed with the letters from *God's* name.

*IT selected three letters from the plain ones, in mysterious counsel with the three mothers aleph-mem-shin, and IT placed them in ITS Great Name, and sealed/completed with them six extremes. Five: IT sealed/completed height and turned ITS attention to ascent and sealed/completed it with yud-hey-vav. Six: IT sealed/completed below and turned ITS attention to beneath and sealed/completed it with yud-vav-hey. Seven: IT sealed/completed east and turned ITS attention to front and sealed/completed it with hey-yud-vav. Eight: IT sealed/completed west and turned ITS attention to behind and sealed/completed it with hey-vav-yud. Nine: IT sealed/completed south and turned ITS attention to the right side and sealed/completed it with vav-yud-hey. Ten: IT sealed/completed north and turned ITS attention to the left side and sealed/completed it with vav-hey-yud.
(Sefer Yetzira 1:13)*

Furthermore, the *gematria* of *pani* by itself is 140, the same as the *gematria* of *elame*, to conceal. This should now remind us of the following verse from *Ecclesiastes*.

*He has also put a world/eternity/enigma into their heart so that man cannot comprehend what God has done from beginning to end.
(Ecclesiastes 3:11)*

This is another hint that *God's* face is concealed from us. Also, as we mentioned previously, the *gematria* of *God's* name, *yud-hey-vav-hey*, is 26, and this is associated with the letter *aleph* which can be deconstructed into *yud-yud-vav* = 26. Additionally, if we spell *aleph* as *aleph-lamed-peh*, then this word has a *gematria* of 111.

There are 60 letters in the *Priestly Blessing*, and this is the numerical value of the letter *samech*. The letter *samech* also stands for *samach*, to support. And support also alludes to righteousness as indicated by the *Talmudic* passage below. Additionally, if we spell out the letter *samech* as *samech-mem-kaf*, then this spelling has a *gematria* (numerical value) of $60 + 40 + 20 = 120$. This is also the *gematria* of the word *amud* meaning “pillar” ($amud = ayin + mem + vav + dalet = 70 + 40 + 6 + 4 = 120$). Hence, the following passage from the *Talmud* lends even more credence to our association of *samech* with the support of the righteous.

“R. Eleazar b. Shammua’ says: The world rests on one pillar, and its name is ‘Righteous’, for it is said: But ‘Righteous’ is the foundation of the world.”
(B. Chagigah 12b)

If we now count the white fire (the spaces) along with the black fire, then we arrive at a count of 72, the number representing *God's* mercy.

							ך	ר	מ	ש	ו		ה	ו	ה		י	ה	ו	ה								
			ך	נ	ה	ו		ך	י	ל	א		ו		י	ט	פ		ה	ו	ה		ו	א				
ם	ו	ל	ש		ך	ל		ם	ש	ו		ך	י	ל	א		ו	י	ט	פ		ה	ו	ה		ו	א	

We now note that there are 3 words in the first verse, 5 words in the second verse, and 7 words in the third verse. This creates the sequence 3, 5, 7 where the difference between each successive term is 2. Also, there are 15 letters in the first verse, 20 letters in the second verse, and 25 letters in the third verse. This creates the sequence 15, 20, 25 where the difference between each successive term is 5.

If we include the spaces, the white fire, in each verse, then the sequence of black and white letters in each verse is 17, 24, 31. In this sequence (17, 24, 31) the difference between each successive term is 7. If we combine these numbers 2, 5, and 7 by thinking of them as 2 hundreds, 5 tens, and 7 ones, then we get 257 which is the *gematria* of both *liv'rachah* (for a blessing) and *brachah*, "a blessing." Additionally, 257 is also the *gematria* of *l'zachor*, "to remember."

							ר	ד	ש	י		ה	ו	ה	י		כ	ד	י										
			ד	נ	ה	ו		ד	י	ל	א		ו		י	ט	פ		ה	ו	ה	י		ר	א	י			
ם	ו	ל	ש		ל	ד		ם	ש	י		ד	י	ל	א		ו	י	ט	פ		ה	ו	ה	י		א	ש	י

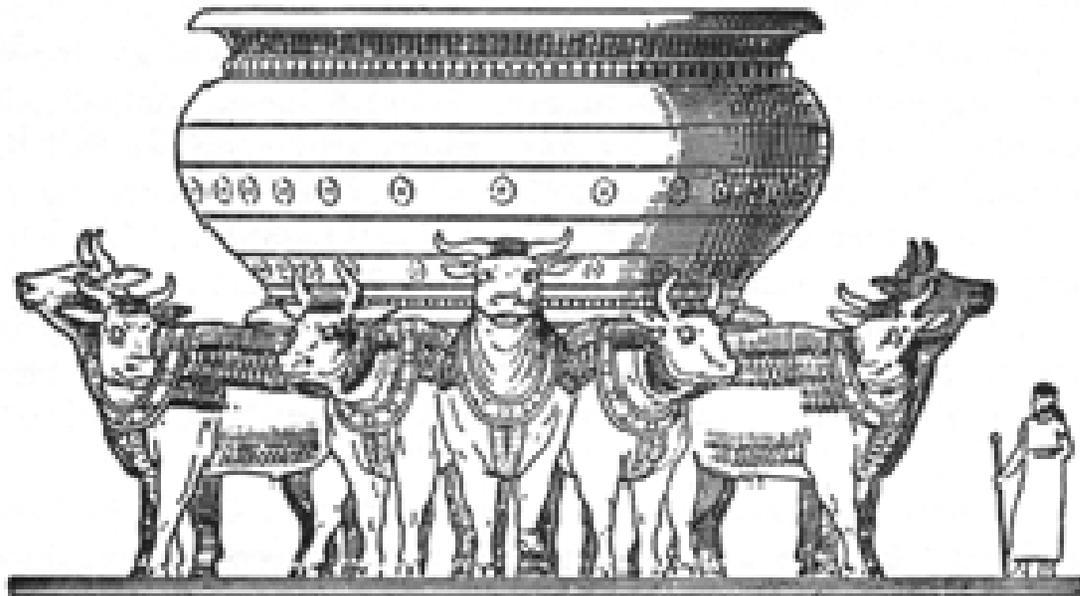
“A light burns above the head of a baby in the womb, and it looks and sees from one end of the world to the other. As it is said, ‘Then his lamp shined above my head, and by His light I walked through darkness.’ . . . It is also taught all the Torah from beginning to end, for it is said, ‘And he taught me, and said unto me: Let your heart hold fast my words, keep my commandments and live (Proverbs 4:4).’ . . . As soon as it sees the light an angel approaches, slaps it on its mouth and causes it to forget all the Torah completely.”
(B. Nidah 30b)

Well, that's quite a bit of analysis of the *Priestly Blessing*, but hopefully you can see how *gematria* can expand the meaning of a passage while also creating a unity with a variety of core concepts of Judaism.

Now for something a little different, let's look at the *Bible* with respect to the irrational number π . In the process of so doing, we will come across a very interesting *Bible Code*. Our journey begins with the following passage from *1 Kings*.

He made the sea of a casting ten cubits from one lip to the other lip, circular all around, five cubits its height, and a measuring line thirty cubits could encircle it all around.

(1 Kings 7:23, circa 550 BCE)



The problem with this passage is that it states that the circumference of our circular object is exactly three times the diameter, and as every child should know, the real ratio of circumference to diameter is the irrational number π whose decimal expansion goes on forever without repeating. The fact that the ratio is stated in the *Bible* as being exactly three caused consternation for all those who believe in *Bible* inerrancy.

$$\pi = 3.141592654\dots$$

However, Jewish scholars noted that the word *kav* for *measuring line* was spelled oddly, and that if we divide the numerical value of the unusual spelling by the numerical value of the usual spelling, and if we multiply this result by the ratio of 30 cubits to 10 cubits that is given in the text, then we get a value for *pi* that is accurate to four decimal places!

Measuring line thirty cubits

קוה שלשים באמה

unusual spelling → קוה = 111

usual spelling → קו = 106

$$\pi = \frac{30}{10} \cdot \frac{111}{106} = 3.141509434\dots$$

What would be very cool now would be if we could find the digits 3, 1, 4, 1, and 5 appearing as a *Bible Code* that starts somewhere in this passage from *1 Kings*. Well, it turns out that reality is even cooler than I imagined. Not only do we have these numbers appearing as a *Bible Code* that begins in this verse, the beginning of our code starts in the very middle of the word *circular*. The length of the skip sequence for this code is 8,976 letters. Now how cool is that!

From the above examples we can see how much richer the text becomes when *gematria* and wordplay are brought into the picture. Also, assuming these incidences are not entirely due to coincidence, we have to ask ourselves what makes this happen? To some the answer may be that of an ancient, bearded man sitting on a throne, but that image of *God* is far too anthropomorphic for my taste. I believe that *God* exists, but is ultimately unknowable and generally works through physical laws so that his/her presence remains concealed.

Thus, in this case, I believe the physical law at work is *quantum entanglement*. In a nutshell, *quantum entanglement* means that once two particles have interacted, they become part of a single system and will contain shared information regardless of the magnitude of the separation by space or time. And, of course, countless numbers of people have intellectually and emotionally interacted with the *Bible* throughout much of recorded history. Thus, I suspect that a principle of *quantum entanglement* has resulted in information about us and many other things being encoded into the very structure of the text.

In so stating this, I should also mention that I am taking the concept of *quantum entanglement* to a point far beyond where most conventional physicists would feel comfortable doing, so let's just call this a religious belief of mine. It is my religious belief that everything throughout spacetime is interconnected, and that this results in information about the individual parts of spacetime being encoded throughout the whole. And, of course, I may be completely wrong. After all, there's a first time for everything!