

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

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As the seder concludes, the Haggadah teaches valuable lessons in Judaism and Torah with a simple (yet complex) song.

שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר מְדִינָא. שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר שְׁבֻטֵיָא, אֶחָד עָשָׂר כּוֹכְבֵיָא, עֶשְׂרֵה דְבְרֵיָא, תְּשֻׁעָה
יְרַחֵי לְדָהּ, שְׁמוֹנֶה יָמֵי מִילָהּ, שִׁבְעָה יָמֵי שְׁפָתָא, שִׁשָּׁה סְדְרֵי מְשֻׁנָּה, חֲמִשָּׁה חוּמְשֵׁי
תּוֹרָה, אַרְבַּע אֲמָהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנַיִ לְחֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹקֵינוּ שְׁפָשְׁמִים וּבְאָרְצָא.

“Thirteen is the attributes [of Hashem], twelve is the tribes, eleven is the stars [of Yoseph’s dream], ten is the utterances, nine is the months of pregnancy, eight is the days of circumcision, seven is the days of the week, six is the orders of Mishna, five is the books of Torah, four is the mothers, three is the fathers, two is the luchos of covenant, and one is the Lord, in the Heavens and the Earth.” (Haggadah shel Pesach, Nirtza).

One may presume that on such a lofty night as Pesach, with its themes of redemption, hope, and Hashem’s watchful eye on klal Yisroel, that the night would end on something more sublime or important. That cannot be further from the truth. The verses in the song are not meant for children—who likely have gone to bed or fell asleep at the table long ago—but were written for adults to teach them special items of Torah truth and Judaism. It is a perfectly holy and uplifting way to end the seder.

The reader will notice that this is written in Aramaic, the language of the Gemara. Not much of the Haggadah is written in Aramaic after Halachma anya. This, and Chag gadya, were both late additions to the Haggadah, added in the 16th or 17th centuries by conversos. Conversos were Jews from Spain and Portugal who had to pretend to be Catholic in order to avoid being burned at the stake. Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal in 1492. Those found still living in the countries and not having converted to Catholicism were punished, imprisoned, and often burned at the stake. Many Jews felt there was no choice but to live as faux Catholics while secretly, with tremendous mesiras nefesh, keeping their Jewish faith. They conducted hidden sedarim on Pesach at the risk of their lives. Like the Jews in Judea during the war with the Greeks or after the Churban, the Conversos also found ways of teaching their children about Judaism and Jewish faith in clever and secret ways. Earlier, Chazal taught the aggadatah and midrash as easy to remember stories and mnemonic Talmudic teachings. The learning was passed down without any written evidence. Similarly, the Conversos did the same, and these songs are part of that rich tradition of mesirash nefesh and practicing in the darkest depths of galus.

When examined, this song is not about numbers, but the Torah truths about the world it brings out. Without learning the Torah, these number pairings would not make sense and they are not intuitive. Once listed, though, much of the Torah’s foundational teaching is hinted at.

One – Even in Eretz Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisroel did not believe that Hashem was the only one. They believed in the existence of many deities but that Hashem was *their* Lord. It was not until Devarim 4:35 - אֵין עוֹד מִלְבָּדוּ - “there is no other than Him” and ibid 6:4 - “Hashem is One” that Bnei Yisroel knew there is *only* Hashem. Hashem is One and only.

Two – Moshe broke a set of two luchos. Those were identical to the first two. Thus, only two luchos, written with the finger of Hashem.

Three – Yoseph, Ephraim, Menashe, Moshe, and Aharon are all not avos.

Four – Bilah and Zilpah, despite mothering four shevatim, are not imahos.

Five – The Torah is broken into many segments. There is also Bereishis that does not mention Moshe at all. Yet, all five sefarim are considered Toras Moshe, equally.

Six – Chazal set down their Talmud in six groups of laws.

Seven – The year can be broken down to 12 months of 30. That would be midway between solar (365) and lunar (355) days. A week can be ten days. It can be 14 days, two per month, and 13 months in a solar year (364). There is no intuitive week length. Hashem established Shabbos every seventh day.

Eight – Milah is only on the eighth day. It is not year 99 (like Avraham) or 13 (like Yishmael). It is also not before the eighth day, no *zerizim makdimin l'mitzvos*.

Nine – Month length and amount it also not intuitive. They can be 30 days (solar year) or 29 days (lunar length). While we know the duration of pregnancy, the fact that it is nine months teaches more about how to calculate the months. That is why the song says “moons to pregnancy.”

Ten – there are fourteen mitzvos given in just ten utterances.

Eleven – Yoseph had two dreams. This teaches that it is his second dream that counts for our galus. Eleven tribes have to bow to their brother in peace.

Twelve – There are only twelve tribes. When counting land inheritance, then Levi is out and Ephraim and Menashe are counted. When counting Sons of Yisroel, then there are twelve brothers. At the end they united and the nation acted as one.

Thirteen – the Torah does not count off the midos of Hashem. This teaches that it is thirteen.

Enumerated as such, it is much clearer what the song means. The song is not about the numbers but the items the numbers are paired with. There is only One Hashem. That is number one in faith. While the Torah is five books and the utterances were ten, there were two luchos that Hashem wrote with His finger and gave to His people. The lineage of destiny passed from Avraham to Yitzchok to Yaakov and their wives, and then to Yaakov's twelve sons. One son would and will rule the other eleven. Shabbos is Hashem's day of rest and we observe it knowing He is One who created the Heavens and the Earth. Our holidays are based on the lunar calendar. It is Chazal, with its oral torah made up in six sections, that established leap years and all rabbinical laws. The most important covenant is made on an eight-day old child, not earlier, and not later except for medical reasons. Hashem guards and protects His people with His thirteen attributes.

HAVE A CHAG KOSHER V'SAMEACH - PESACH.