The Seventieth Face of Torah

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Dr. Sharon Keller, advisor

To the memory of my cousin

Rabbi Michoel Dov Weissmandl z"l, hero of Slovakian Jewry,

discoverer of the *Bible Code*[1]

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THE SEVENTIETH FACE OF TORAH

שגיאות מי יבין
מנסתרות נקני

Sh'giot mi yavin,
ministarot nakeni.

Who will understand mistakes,
uncover me of things hidden.

-Psalm 19:13

B"H

"It is the glory of God to conceal things."

Proverbs 25:2

"There is a God in heaven who unveils secrets."

Daniel 2:28

FOREWORD

Scholars have debated, to no conclusion, questions regarding the origin of Jewish mystical tradition, what is broadly referred to as "the Kabbalah." Some have argued that the earliest works - the so-called *Merkabah* (Chariot) or *Hekhalot* (Chambers) literature - began to be written down beginning in the tenth century in Babylonia (Zunz, Graetz, Bloch) in what is known as the "Gaonic" period. Others have argued for an earlier dating: notably Gershom Scholem, who at first dated the literature to the fourth or fifth century[2], but ultimately pushed his estimate back to the period "before Christianity developed, or at any rate before Christian Gnosticism as a distinctive force came into being."[3]

Today, most scholars believe that the Kabbalah has its roots in the Pharisaic or Tannaitic period, in the period just prior to the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE). For that reason, many see the influence of pre-Christian Gnostics on early Jewish mysticism.

Scholars who have tried to place the roots of Jewish mysticism earlier, specifically in biblical times (Hertz, Horodetzky, Lindblom, Montefiore), have generally been dismissed.

In Scholem's words "[t]he fact is that nobody seriously thinks of applying the term *mysticism* to the classic manifestations of the great religions. It would be absurd to call Moses, the man of God, a mystic, or to apply this term to the Prophets, on the strength of their immediate religious experience."[4]

Nevertheless, it is exactly this claim that I wish to take up. It is my thesis that the Torah is, in its essence, a mystical text; and that a close, structural analysis will show it to be so. In saying "a" mystical text, I am also making the claim that the Torah, also known as the Five Books of Moses, is not a poorly redacted collection of documents, but is, rather, a single, unified literary work.

In characterizing any text as "mystical" it is crucial to make a distinction between mystical traditions which may have grown up around a particular text, and the text itself. Thus it can be and has been argued that while late Second Temple period Hekhalot or Merkabah mysticism centered on imagery found in the Sixth Century BCE book of Ezekiel, the prophet Ezekiel himself was not a mystic, nor the book of Ezekiel a mystical text.[5]

But if we cannot decide the issue on the basis of such extra-textual considerations, on what basis can we decide? By the satisfaction of what criteria might we come to characterize a text as essentially mystical?

Hallmarks of Jewish-Mystical Texts

In the literature on Jewish mystical texts there is no uniform employment of terminology. Thus, one finds such terms as "Jewish Gnosticism," "Rabbinic-Gnosticism," "Kabbalistic-Gnosticism," "Jewish-Esoterism," and "Jewish Mysticism" sometimes used to describe the same, and sometimes used to describe what are arguably quite different doctrines or texts. Nor is there even agreement on the meaning of the term "mysticism." As Scholem wrote, "there are almost as many definitions of [mysticism] as there are writers on the subject."[6]

And yet it does not seem necessary - even were it possible - to identify the one key element which all Jewish-mystical texts have in common. Rather, we might identify a group of elements with which Jewish mystical texts have come to be associated, and then seek to establish whether the Torah seems to embody most of those elements to a significant degree.

In a lecture entitled "General Characteristics of Jewish Mysticism," (which appeared as Chapter One of his *Major Trends In Jewish Mysticism*), Scholem characterized Jewish Mysticism as (a) a secret doctrine; (b) highly paradoxical in nature; (c) written in a language which itself is thought to have a mystical value; (d) whose concern is a restoration of the primal unity which is said to exist beyond the multiplicity of apparent reality.

(a) A secret doctrine. Regarding the secrecy surrounding the doctrine of Jewish mysticism, Scholem noted that, with the early Merkabah mystics, "...we are dealing with organized groups which foster and hand down a certain tradition; with a *school* of mystics who are not

prepared to reveal their secret knowledge, the 'Gnosis,' to the public."[7]

One reason for such reluctance was given by the early thirteenth century Eleazar of Worms, who wrote:

> ...if I were to write down the interpretations, someone who is not worthy might see it and arrive at corrupt conceptions of it.... That is why [such an interpretation can be transmitted] only by way of tradition, *kabbalah*, that is to say, through oral transmission.[8]

(b) Highly paradoxical in nature. Regarding the highly paradoxical nature of Jewish mysticism, Scholem suggested that such paradox points to what lies beyond it: "...the conception of God as the union and root of all these contradictions."[9]

An example of such paradoxical imagery is that of the Merkabah mystic's "descent" to the chariot; the chariot upon which God is said to ride. One would naturally expect the mystic to "ascend" to the chariot. And indeed, Scholem notes, the language "is all the more remarkable because the detailed description of the mystical process nonetheless consistently employs the metaphor of ascent and not of descent." [10]

(c) Written in a language which itself was thought to have a mystical value. Regarding this, Scholem argued that to the Kabbalists, Hebrew reflects the fundamental spiritual nature of the world..."[11] The mystical value of the letters was closely tied to the notion of numbers as "living numerical beings." "While the numerical-mystical speculation on the sefiroth," Scholem wrote, "probably has its origin in neo-Pythagorean sources - Nikomachos of Gersas, the celebrated author of a mystical arithmology who lived around 140 C.E. came from Palestine east of the Jordan - the idea of 'letters by means of which heaven and earth were

created' may well come from within Judaism itself."[12]

Thus we find in Jewish mysticism various sorts of number manipulations via gematria (exegesis based on a word's numeric value) and other esoteric systems. Such is the case in the Lesser Hekhaloth literature, where one finds the secret name *Azbogah*, composed of three pairs of letters, (alef, zion; bet, vov; gimmel, hay) each of which has the numerical value of eight. So too with the name *Atbah*, where the value of each pair (alef, tet; bet, chet) equals ten.

(d) Whose concern is a restoration of the primal unity which is said to exist beyond the multiplicity of apparent reality. Finally, regarding this concern, Scholem wrote:

> Mysticism does not deny or overlook the abyss (between humankind and God); on the contrary, it begins by realizing its existence, but from there it proceeds to a quest for the secret that will close it in, the hidden path that will span it. It strives to piece together the fragments broken by the religious cataclysm, to bring back the old unity...(T)he soul's path through the abysmal multiplicity of things to the experience of the Divine Reality, now conceived as the primordial unity of all things becomes its main preoccupation.[13]

In the words of the *Zohar*, we live in the *alma de-peruda*, the world of separation. This is epitomized by the separation of "the two principles of the masculine and feminine," which, in the mystical book the *Bahir*, are said to be "united by the *beth* at the beginning of the first word of the Torah. This union is evidently seen as the primordial act of creation."[14]

These "General Characteristics of Jewish Mysticism" have been for the most part accepted as definitive by students of Jewish mysticism. And so, in searching for evidence to support the notion that it is a mystical text, we might think to begin to search the Torah for evidence

that it contains precisely these characteristics. And yet, in the first generation after the Holocaust, the dark night in which the *shelshelet ha-kabbalah* (the chain of tradition) was nearly destroyed, how would we - who were not privileged to hear the holy teaching "mouth to ear" - go about locating the general characteristics of Jewish mysticism in the Torah? It is all well and good to say that we would agree that the Torah is a mystical text if it can be shown to contain a secret doctrine, highly paradoxical in nature, written in a language which itself was thought to have a mystical value, whose concern is a restoration of the primal unity which is said to exist beyond the multiplicity of apparent reality. But if the doctrine is esoteric, with what key might we be expected to unlock its secret?

One might begin by arguing that the Torah has long been said to contain a secret doctrine; and yet, such statements might have been made based on nothing more than the impression made by the obscurity of the language. One might argue that many stories - or elements within stories - in the Torah appear paradoxical; and yet those "paradoxes" may be the result of nothing more than poor redaction and/or scribal error. One might argue that the existence of various systems of numero-mystical speculation based on the text of the Torah argue for the root of such systems being inherent in the text; and yet those systems could just as easily have been formulated quite apart from the text, and then later have been adapted so as to harmonize with it. So, too, one might find classical interpretations which claim for the text a symbolic content based on a theme of male/female separation and of the unity which is purported to exist beyond them; and yet even the earliest of such interpretative works could well be already late reworkings of the much older text itself.

And so we begin by acknowledging the difficulty in "proving" our hypothesis. What could

be generally accepted as a scientific or metamathematical proof simply may not exist. We may rather find ourselves searching to establish a preponderance of the evidence - much as one might argue that five consecutive lines of iambic pentameter establishes a pericope as a poem.

One thing does, however, seem clear: if the Torah is indeed a mystical text, it will - by its very nature - resist attempts to decode its meaning based on an entirely linear approach. The meaning of a mystical text lies hidden in the crevices of its elliptical structure, precisely because one purpose of a mystical text is to hide its meaning from the uninitiated. To uncover anything of significance, therefore, one must be willing to follow the twists and turns in the text, rather than attempt (in the way of most modern biblical scholars) to straighten them. To pull anything meaningful out of a twisted and turned text, one must begin by assuming that the text is *meaningfully* twisted and turned; that it has been *purposefully* twisted and turned.[15]

We are not advocating an a-critical approach to the text. Rather, our critical questions form the background, the general tone, of our more circuitous inquiry. We keep them in mind as we enter the world of the text, and will touch back with them from time to time, to the extent that they help to orient us. At a certain point in our exploration of the text, we may feel the need to resurface and to look at the process more critically. By examining our experience in light of the critical questions whose answers we had earlier set out to find, and finding them satisfied, we may feel that we are able to make a declaration, acceptable in the modern academy, regarding the nature of the text. If not, there will still have been the exploration.

We will begin by asking the question: How would we know if the text contained a secret doctrine? What signs might there be which would point the way to an esoteric level, an encrypted communication?

We know, for example, that in the Middle Ages, Jewish pietistic poets would often secret their names, or a name of God, into their *piyyutim*, their liturgical poems. Often times, the poems were constructed so that the first letter of each verse would spell out the name. In this way one finds, for example, Shlomo ha Levi Alkabetz's name spelled out in his famous poem *Lecha Dodi*. Might there be anything nearly so clear in the Torah? Might we find in the Torah a clear correspondence between a name - or a key word -and the structure of the text itself?

We begin in left field; not with the Hebrew Bible itself, but with the ancient Greek translation known as the *Septuagint*.

> Concerning this matter there are hidden mysteries and secret things which are unknown to men. You will now see that I am revealing deep and secret mysteries which the holy sages regarded as sacred and hidden, profound matters which properly speaking are not fit for revelation so that they may not become a target for the wit of every idle person. These holy men of old have pondered all their lives over these things and have hidden them, and did not reveal them to everyone. And now I have come to reveal them. Therefore, keep them to yourself, unless it be that you encounter one who fears God and keeps His commandments and the Torah...
>
> Moses de Leon
> *Mishkan Ha-Eduth*[16]

THE SEVENTIETH FACE OF TORAH

The translation of the Torah into Greek goes by the curious name *Septuagint*, meaning "Seventy." A rabbinic legend claims that the work was so named because some seventy rabbis, each working independently, arrived at exactly the same translation.[17]

One may dismiss the etiology as so much rabbinic fancy, and yet the textual evidence is that there was a deep (if to us now enigmatic) connection between the Greek translation of Scripture and the number 70. In the Septuagint, the book dubbed "Numbers" opens, in the Greek, with a *seventy*-word long sentence. Could this be simply by chance?

The connection between Scripture and the counting of words did not originate with the Greeks. The Talmud tells us that the ancient Israelite Temple scribes considered the counting of the words of the Torah to be one of their most sacred tasks[18]. As the root of the Hebrew word for scribe *sofer* in fact means "number," it might have been that a Temple scribe was considered less a sacred "copyist" of text than a sacred "counter" of words. Indeed, scholars have noted that the Septuagint appears at times to be "attempting to reproduce the order as well as *the number of words*...in a sentence."[19]

We wonder: is it possible to find anything in the original Hebrew text which corresponds to the seventy words "hidden" in the Septuagint? As there is no one sentence in the Torah which comes anywhere close to seventy words, must we assume that such numero-symbolism was of Greek origin? Or is it possible that there are seventy words hidden, as well, in the original Hebrew text - only more deeply hidden? What, if any, connection might there be between the seventy words and the rabbinic tradition that the Torah has "seventy faces"? And what was this fascination with the counting of words to begin with?

Both modern and medieval Torah commentators have pointed to pericopes in which the number of words seems to underscore the narrative theme. In his *Rimze Baal Ha-Turim* (Hints by the Author of "The Columns"), the 14th century Spanish commentator Jacob ben Asher noted that the opening line of the book of *Bereshit* (Genesis) contains seven words, corresponding to the seven days of the week.[20]

Umberto Cassuto noticed that the three opening lines of Genesis 2, are also patterned on a seven word structure:[21]

> 1) And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their hosts. 2) And God finished on the seventh day the work which He had done, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work which He had done. 3) And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it God ceased from all the work which He created to do.[22]

In the Hebrew, the sentences contain the following word-counts: 5 (line 1), 14 (line 2), 16 (line 3). But, in fact, Cassuto says, the three sentences are really five:

> 1) And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their hosts.
>
> 2) And God finished on the seventh day the work which He had done.

3) And He ceased on the seventh day from all the work which He had done.

4) And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

5) Because on it God ceased from all the work which He created to do.

Properly organized, we note a hidden structure in the word-count of the Hebrew text: 5 (1), 7 (2), 7 (3), 7 (4), 9 (5).

The three inner lines - lines 2, 3, and 4 - contain seven words each. And on the narrative level we note that each of these lines contains the word "seven." Finally, the total word count for the pericope (35) when divided by the number of lines (5) yields an average of seven.[23]

Is it possible that these are the only two instances of their kind in the Torah? Or might the Baal ha-Turim and Cassuto have uncovered an organizing principle of much broader implication?

Scholars have noted that the second book of the Torah, *Shemot* (Exodus), recapitulates many of the themes of *Bereshit* (Genesis). The book often seems, in fact, to be quoting from the book which precedes it. "But the Israelites were fruitful (*paru*), and swarmed (*vayishr'tzu*), and they multiplied (*vayirbu*)..." of Exodus 1:7 recalls "...the waters brought forth in swarms..." of Genesis 1:21, and "[b]e fruitful and multiply..." of Genesis 1:22. The little basket that the baby Moses is placed in is called a *tavah*, the same word which, in the story of Noah (Genesis 6:14) is usually translated as "ark." The splitting of the waters through which the free people of Israel is, in effect, "born" (Exodus 14:21-22) recalls God's divisions of the waters in the "birthing" of the world (Genesis 1:1-19).

If, indeed, the second book of the Torah is meant to be read against the first, the opening paragraph of Exodus seems well constructed to support such a reading. The opening paragraph of the book of Exodus in the Masoretic text presents a pericope of seven lines:

> 1) And these are the names of the children of Israel, those coming to Egypt with Jacob, each man with his household they came: 2) Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; 3) Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; 4) Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. 5) And it was that all the souls which issued from Jacob's loins were seventy souls, Joseph being already in Egypt. 6) And Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. 7) And the children of Israel were fruitful, and swarmed, and multiplied and grew very strong, and the land was filled with them.

In the first line, "the children of Israel" is a "quotation" from Genesis and means, quite literally, the children of the man named Israel. But by the seventh line, "the children of Israel" has been transformed into an expression which henceforth will mean the tribes, or the nation, of Israel.

In the Hebrew, the first and last lines of the paragraph contain eleven words each. The 12th century commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra, in his commentary to the book of Jonah, identified the number eleven as a "reconsideration" based on the fact that it is "a number which requires a second computation (on the fingers)."[24]

Indeed, the first line of the book of Exodus contains eleven words, as does the last line. The word count for the paragraph is as follows: 11 (1), 4 (2), 3 (3), 4 (4), 11 (5), 7 (6), 11 (7).

Not only do we begin and end with eleven words - emphasizing the transformation of the expression "the children of Israel" - but the lines in between seem to suggest a compression

(11, 4, 3) and expansion (3, 4, 11). Read this way, lines 6 and 7 seem perhaps intended to emphasize the coupling of Genesis (with its opening line of seven) to Exodus (with its opening line of eleven).

If Genesis and Exodus open with lines whose word-counts appear intended in some way as "thematic," we wonder if this pattern might not run across all five books of the Torah; and if it does, might we discern a meta-pattern which connects the books in some meaningful way.

Based on a number of factors, including the uniformity of the book of Deuteronomy's literary style, some biblical scholars have posited the existence of an ancient "Tetrateuch," a four book Bible which they suggest may have pre-dated the Pentateuch.[25] Without arguing the theory, it might nevertheless be helpful to look first at the first four books of the Penteteuch.

Indeed, the word-counts of the opening lines of each of the five books do seem to suggest that there is something "different" about the last book:

Genesis:	7
Exodus:	11
Leviticus:	9
Numbers:	17
Deuteronomy:	22

The first four books all begin with sentences of odd-numbered word counts; the last book is the only one to begin with a sentence of an even word count.

Beyond that, the word-counts from the first four books (7, 11, 9, 17) seem almost to suggest a pattern in and of themselves. Taken together, they almost look intentional; almost like a series of prime numbers. (Indeed, we need only substitute the number "13" for the number "9" to achieve a string of prime numbers.)

But any speculation that the "original" opening sentence of the book of Leviticus (*Vayikra*) was thirteen words long must take into account that the key word "priest" (*kohain*) appears nine times in the opening lines of the book.[26] Furthermore, the early division of the work was said to have been in nine parts.[27] So is it reasonable to continue pursue the idea that the number 9 has been substituted for the number 13 in what was "originally" a string of four prime numbers?

Perhaps we have been too influenced by our reading of science fiction. It was Carl Sagan, in his 1985 bestseller *Contact*,[28] who wrote of scientists, scanning the heavens with satellite dishes, who receive just such an "intentional transmission."[29] One character asks another skeptically "Don't you think it's a little strange that the first message from God in two thousand years or more is prime numbers?"[30]

And yet, the notion is intriguing. Again, it is possible that we may be influenced based on our extra-biblical reading.[31] In *The Reality of Meaning and the Meaning of "Reality,"* Eddy M. Zemach, a professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, wrote "Now,

to logically impossible beliefs. Shem, a schoolboy, believes that 9 is a prime number. Is there a possible world where 9 is a prime number?"

And yet, what if the nine words which open the book of Leviticus are *intended* as a substitute for thirteen words? How would we know? And what would it mean if it were true? Is it possible that there is a connection in sacred Hebrew writing between the numbers 9 and 13?

The Prophet Ezekiel's Key

The key to unlocking this mystery lies, I believe, in the mysterious book of Ezekiel (*Yehezkel*). Strangely, when one plots the word-counts in this book, one is struck by the number of *setumot* and *petuchot* (Masoretic paragraphs and chapters) which seem to draw a connection between the numbers 9 and 13:

In Ezekiel 1, the ninth line is thirteen words long.

In Ezekiel 2, the first paragraph is made up of only two lines: of nine and thirteen words.

In Ezekiel 2, the ninth line is thirteen words long. In Ezekiel 3, the thirteenth line is thirteen words long.

The ninth paragraph of Ezekiel (Ez. 3:16) is nine words long. The thirteenth paragraph of Ezekiel (Ez. 4:13) begins with a line thirteen words long.

A boundless creativity seems to have been employed to tie these two numbers together. In Ezekiel 26 it is the root *b'not*, here meaning "daughter towns", which provides the connection. *B'not* appears in a nine word sentence (line 6) and in a thirteen word sentence (line 8).

In the third paragraph of Ezekiel 28 there are nine verses, and one hundred and thirty words.[32]

In the first nine-line paragraph of Ezekiel 31 the second and second to last lines are thirteen and twenty-two words (22 being 9 + 13). In the second paragraph of Ezekiel 31, there are proximate lines of nine and twenty-two words (lines 11 and 12). And in the third paragraph of Ezekiel 31, there are proximate lines of twenty-two and thirteen words (lines 16 and 17).

In Ezekiel 34, the first paragraph is nine lines; the second paragraph is one line of twenty-six words (2 x 13); the third paragraph is nine lines; the fourth paragraph is nine lines. This is followed immediately by the first paragraph of Ezekiel 35 - which is thirteen lines long.

Ezekiel 36 opens with a line of thirteen words. Ezekiel 37 opens with two lines of thirteen words each. Ezekiel 38 opens with a nine-line paragraph, the ninth line being thirteen words long.

The last line of the book, Ezekiel 48:35, is nine words long. And now returning to Ezekiel 1 we note that the total number of words is three hundred eighty two (3 + 8 + 2 = 13), and

that the first and last lines are seventeen and twenty-three words (1 + 7 + 2 + 3 = 13).

It seems almost beyond belief that all of this is simply by chance. And the case becomes even stronger when we consider that Ezekiel wrote in Mesopotamia, and that the Mesopotamian number system was in base six.[23] If we lay the base six and base ten number systems side by side, we readily see the connection:

Base 10: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Base 6: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13.

In Ezekiel's Mesopotamia, when one counted up nine numbers, one counted to the number thirteen.

But having made a reasonable case for the connection between the numbers 9 and 13 in the Book of Ezekiel, we still must wonder if a similar connection exists in the Torah. Is there any evidence of a connection between the numbers 9 and 13 in the Torah? More specifically, is there any evidence that in the Torah, the number 9 is a *substitution* for the number 13?

Perhaps we might approach the Torah as an oracle, searching the Five Books for every instance in which the phrase "Is this a substitution?" appears. This is not a difficult task. The phrase "Is this a substitution?" (*hatachat* in the Hebrew) appears in the Torah exactly twice. The first appearance is:

Jacob was snorting mad at Rachel and said, "Is this a substitution, myself for

> God, who has denied you the fruit of the belly?" *Vayichar af Ya'akov b'Rachel vayomer: Hatachat Elohim anochi asher mana mimech p'ri vaten?* (Genesis 30:2).

And the second appearance is:

> But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid. For is this a substitution, I for God?" *Vayomer alehem Yosef: Al tira'u ki hatachat Elohim ani?* (Genesis 50:19).

In the only two sentences in the entire Torah in which the phrase "Is this a substitution?" appears, one sentence is rendered in thirteen words, and the other is rendered in nine![34]

(The centrality of the play between the numbers "9" and "13" in the Torah may be of interest to scholars who have posited that the Mayans of Central America are descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel. For the Mayans *also* structured their cosmology on the unification of "9" and "13."[35] Likewise, what we will have to say about the symbolic use of prime numbers in the Torah may be of interest to scholars reassessing the development of number theory, the history of abstract thought in general, and the roles of Pythagoras and Plato specifically).[36]

Before turning to the question of what these numbers might represent (and a survey of the final three books of the Torah) a brief word regarding reapproaching the Text.

Sh'giot: Mistakes or Disturbances?

The prejudices of the 19th century biblical scholars and their intellectual heirs have had a far-reaching effect on readers of the Hebrew Bible. Encouraged to view the Torah as the

work of "primitives," a poorly edited "collection" of stories which fit together none-too-well; "clumsy" in its execution; shot through with contradictions, it is little wonder that many modern readers have failed to appreciate the power of this text.

But increasingly over the past few years, one has become aware of a growing receptivity to the text on the part of readers sensitized by encounters with writers such as the novelist James Joyce and the playwright Tom Stoppard; various literary theorists; post-modernism in general; and - most especially - Jewish mysticism, and its ancient concept of *Torat ha-Sod*, or the Primordial Torah.

As I write this, it is now seventeen years since Rabbi Steven Shaw (then a rabbinical student at Jewish Theological Seminary) wrote an article in which he discussed what he called "one of the most daring (or perhaps bizarre) attempts to reconcile concepts of traditional faith with the problems aroused by nineteenth century Biblical criticism...one which has drawn heavily on this concept of *Torat ha-Sod*."[37]

Shaw described "...the effort of Rabbi Mordecai Breuer [who resides in Israel, and is a descendant of the famous German Orthodox thinker, Yitzchak Breuer] to accept almost religiously all the contradictions and documentary evidence cited by Julius Wellhausen, while at the same time, upholding the Divine nature of the Torah and its Mosaic authorship."[38] According to Breuer's analysis, Shaw wrote, "the simple meaning of the Torah (with its various 'documents' and seeming contradictions) leads directly to its hidden meaning."[39]

> Thus the teachings of Wellhausen, although "born and taught in uncleanliness and brought up and strengthened in evil," are turned around in the hands of Breuer and become a key to the Torah's innermost secrets. He exalts Wellhausen far above the

> Orthodox "harmonizers" who try to hide contradictions which the German Bible scholar pointed out; since the 'Sages of the Esoteric Wisdom understood these (contradictions) well, and explained them as hints pointing to those higher roots showing the workings of justice and mercy and the other Divine *middot* in their revealed multiplicity and in their hidden unity...' In part, he finds support for his stance of using the work of "heretics" and for extracting from them a "holy spark" from the teachings of Rav Kuk, who bases himself on a long mystical tradition which sees the source of uncleanliness ultimately flowing from *K'dusha* or Holiness.[40]

Shaw characterized Breuer's position as "an almost desperate extreme," noting that "all of Breuer's critics reject the idea that the contradictions which Wellhausen insists he has uncovered can find their solution in the idea of a Primordial Torah."[41]

And yet, my reading of the text supports - to my own astonishment - Breuer's position. I think it is beyond question that passages which the biblical scholars claimed were "corruptions" and "scribal errors" in need of "emendation" may now be clearly seen as intentional "disturbances" carefully placed at the surface level of the text. These disturbances, like the ripples on a pond just above where the fish are swimming, are perhaps the most rewarding points at which to enter the text.

A case in point: Cassuto uncovered the organization of Genesis 2:1-3 - five lines, including a three line core of seven words each, with a first and last line which also average seven words - but whose structure only becomes apparent when it is "unrolled" from within its three sentence "shell."

And yet for all this unseen structuring, the surface - the narrative level - seems unquestionably "sloppy." Commentators have been at pains to explain the line: "On the seventh day God finished the work which He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh

day from all the work He had done" (Genesis 2:2). Shouldn't it have read, as the Septuagint has it, "On the *sixth* day God finished the work which He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work He had done"? How can a pericope so tightly structured on one level be so loosely conceived on another level? Unless the "problem" is purposeful. Unless our attention is meant to be drawn by this "disturbance."

The Baal ha-Turim noticed the seven-word opening sentence in the book of Genesis. The structure could hardly have been accidental, given the theme of the seven-day Creation, and (as Buber later showed) the seven-fold repetition of the word "good" (*tov*). And yet there is a "problem" on the surface of the text. The opening word *bereshit* is in the construct state. This means that the opening sentence of the book of Genesis literally reads "In beginning of... God created the heavens and the earth." In beginning of what? Again, commentators have tried to emend, to fill in the blank, all the while missing the point: the disturbance has a purpose. The disorder on the surface is meant to pull us beneath to discover the inner structure.

Sometimes the disturbance takes the form of awkward syntax, or superfluous language. Take, for example, the following: "And they set over them officers of tribute in order to afflict them in their burdens..." (Exodus 1:11). There's something "off" about the phrase "in their burdens" (*b'sivlotam*). In the next chapter we find the line "And it was in those days that Moses grew and went out to his brothers and saw in their burdens..." (Exodus 2:11). We may be struck that the word *b'sivlotam* appears in the eleventh line of chapter 1, and then in the eleventh line of chapter 2.[42] Our attention is being drawn to the number 11; the number 11 being the "theme number" of the book of Exodus.

Sometimes the disturbance takes the form of a non-sequitur, or an otherwise jarring bit of narrative. An example is the aforementioned Genesis 30:2: Jacob was incensed at Rachel and said, "Is this a substitution, myself for God, who has denied you the fruit of the womb?" Nehama Leibowitz notes that Jacob's "strange and unfeeling" response - to his most loved wife! - has puzzled commentators, both ancient and modern.[43] But if we are right to theorize that the text contains intentional disturbances, the line is so confounding *precisely* because its purpose is to draw our attention to another level of the text.

Deuteronomy 1:11-12 is also confounding. Why would Moses bless the people of Israel ("May YHVH, God of your fathers, add to you a thousand times like you; and may He bless you as He said to you"), only to immediately complain against them ("How can I alone bear your problem, and burden, and dispute?"). This disturbing couplet, which seems to express sentiments in direct opposition to each other, is rendered in lines of 9 words and 13 words respectively.

Support for this theory of intentional disturbances is, I believe, to be found in the cryptic thirteenth verse of Psalm 19. This verse contains the only appearance of the word *sh'giot*, "mistakes," in the entire Hebrew Bible. The Jewish Publication Society translates the verse as "Who can be aware of errors? Clear me of unperceived guilt."[44] But this is more interpretation than translation. More literally *sh'giot mi yavin ministarot nakeni* probably means "Who will understand mistakes! Uncover me of things hidden!" Psalm 19 is, I believe, telling us that the Torah's secrets will be uncovered by those who will understand its "mistakes."

Another example: the story of the annunciation of Isaac's birth. In Genesis 17:21 God says to Abraham "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac whom Sarah will bear to you at this time next year." But something is off. Is the writer so primitive as not to know that pregnancy takes nine months, not one year? Our attention seems drawn to make the connection between "nine" and "pregnancy." And it is curious that the line is rendered in the Hebrew in thirteen words. Thirteen is, of course, the age associated with male sexual maturity. Before the Hebrews first practiced eighth day circumcision, the general practice of near Eastern cultures was to circumcise at the age of thirteen.

This subtle play between nine and thirteen is made manifest in the lines which come just few sentences later:

> 24) And Abraham was 99 years old when he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin, 25) and his son Ishmael was 13 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26) On that self-same day were Abraham and his son Ishmael circumcised.

Nine years earlier, the covenant of circumcision had first been announced by God to Abraham. In Genesis 17:10 and 11 we read:

> 10) This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and between you and between your seed after you: all your males shall be circumcised [thirteen words]. 11) And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and it will be for a sign of covenant between me and between you [nine words].

In Genesis 34:16 and 17, in a plot to avenge the rape of their sister Dinah, the sons of Jacob tell the sons of Shechem that if they will circumcise themselves:

> 16) And we will give our daughters to you and your daughters we will take to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will be as one people [thirteen words]. 17) But if you will not listen to us, to be circumcised, then we will

take our daughter and we will go [nine words].

In the Judah and Tamar story, Judah is twice-referred to by the term *ham*: here (and, in the Torah, *only* here) meaning "father-in-law." The word is homonymous with the word meaning "hot." And so the phrase "your father-in-law is coming" is heard as a double-entendre: "your hot one is coming." The two lines in which this double-entendre appear (Gen. 38:13 and 25) are 9 and 13 words long respectively.

Another example of the coupling of these two numbers is to be found in a comparison of the genealogies of Adam (Genesis 5:1-32) and the genealogies of Noah (Genesis 10:1-32). In the genealogies of Adam we find the standard biblical formulation: Adam begot Seth; Seth begot Enosh; Enosh begot Kenan; etc. All tolled, the word "begot" (*va'yoled*) appears nineteen times. However, in the genealogies of Noah we find something strikingly different. In place of the expected "begots" there we read: the descendants of (*b'nei*) Japheth were so-and-so; the descendants of Gomer were so-and-so; the descendants of Javan were so-and-so. This formula repeats seven times. But in line 8 the pattern is disturbed, and we are told "And Cush begot (*yalad*) Nimrod." The next four lines then go on to tell the story of Nimrod. But when we look under the surface at the point at which we noticed the disturbance, we see that in lines 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, the number of words are 9, 13, 9, 13, and 9.

In the entire Torah, there are only two occurrences of the words to plant (*charish*) and to sow (*katzir*). At Genesis 45:6 we find "For it is now two years that the famine has been in the midst of the land, and another five years in which there will be no *planting* nor

sowing." And at Exodus 34:21 we find "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, from *planting* and *sowing* you shall rest." The first line, in the Hebrew, is thirteen words long. The second is nine words long.

Another example can be found in the two versions of the Decalogue, which appear at Exodus (20:2-14) and Deuteronomy (5:6-18). There are well-known differences between the two versions, perhaps the most notable being the injunction regarding the Sabbath (in Exodus 20:8 it is *zachor* - to *remember* - the Sabbath; in Deuteronomy 5:12 it is *shamor* - to *keep*, or *guard*, or *observe* - the Sabbath.) While Jewish tradition sought to harmonize the two versions, critical Biblical scholars have argued that the differences were due to varying oral traditions. Is there any evidence that the rabbis were right; that the two versions of the Decalogue are *meant* to be read one against the other?

A rabbinic legend has it that the words *shamor* and *zachor* were miraculously spoken by God *b'dibur echad*, in one utterance. The mystical book *Bahir* gives a more detailed explanation, relating the two verbs to masculine and feminine principles in the divine world.[45]

> What is the reason that [the Torah says] "remember" [in one place] and "keep" [regarding the Sabbath in another]? "Remember" (*zachor*) refers to the male (*Zachar*). "Keep" (*shamor*) refers to the bride.[46]

If the gender associations seem, at first, the product of rabbinic fancy, they yet have etymological bases: the root of the word *shamor* means to surround, or envelop; while the root of the word *zachor* means to penetrate. Further, it seems that the two versions of the Decalogue are constructed to highlight a syzygy between the two principles.

In the Exodus version, the Decalogue is preceded by a one-line introduction - the Decalogue proper beginning on line 2. In the version in Deuteronomy, the Decalogue is preceded by a five-line introduction - the Decalogue proper beginning on line 6. This means that line 9 of the Exodus version aligns with line 13 of the Deuteronomy version. And as we have seen, the numbers "9" and "13" stand, respectively, for the feminine and masculine principles.[47]

Jews refer to the Decalogue as *Aseret HaDibrot*, The Ten Words. The expression first appears in the Talmud: "They recited *Aseret HaDibrot*, the *Shema*, and *And it shall come to pass if you listen*, and *(God) said*, *True and Firm*, and the *Avodah*, and the priestly blessing" (Ber. 12a). The expression *Aseret HaDibrot* is curious because in the Torah (Exodus 20:1) we find not *HaDibrot* (which is a feminine construction), but *HaDivarim* (which is a masculine construction). Indeed, the Mishnah also utilizes the masculine construction when it refers to the Decalogue as *Aseret HaDivarim* (Tamid 5:1). Why the change from masculine to feminine?

Rabbi Gunther Plaut notes that *HaDibrot* is the plural of the noun *HaDiber*, which occurs in Jeremiah: "The prophets shall be wind, for the word (*HaDiber*) is not in them; thus shall be done to them" (Jer. 5:13).[48] And we note, in turn, that the line in which Jeremiah utilizes the feminine construction is 9 words long; and the line in which the Mishnah utilizes the masculine construction is 13 words long.

A few final examples: The Babylonian Talmud preserves an observation of Isaac of Kartigin[49] that Hannah (in praying to God for a child) "mentioned the Divine Name in her

prayer...nine times."[50] It has also been noted that the word *brit* ("covenant") appears 13 times in the section dealing with the circumcision of Abraham (Gen. 17:1-14).[51] And in the *Zohar*, the 13 Attributes of God (found at Exodus 34:6-7) and the 9 Attributes of God (found at Micah 7:18-20) are regarded as God's male and female aspects, respectively.[52]

But are we correct in reading "nine" and "thirteen" as symbols of female and male sexuality in the Hebrew Bible itself? For further support, we might want to return to Ezekiel to see if the book which we now know is founded on a play between those numbers, might contain somewhere a "disturbance" related to gender.

What we find when we return to the book of Ezekiel is not only "a" disturbance, but that the entire narrative seems to be one long sequence of disturbances relating to gender. Masculine nouns are modified by feminine adjectives; feminine nouns are modified by masculine adjectives. Biblical scholars consider this one of the most obvious problems in the book of Ezekiel, yet generally dismiss it as the result of "poor editing." (Although the problem is so acute that in 1946, one scholar actually went so far as to claim that the prophet must himself have suffered from gender confusion, feeling himself to be a woman.)[53]

Another disturbance presents itself on the narrative level of the opening paragraph of the book of Ezekiel:

> 1) And it was in the 30th year, on the 5th day of the 4th month, and I was amongst the exiles by the Chebar Canal, the heavens opened and I saw visions of God. 2) On the 5th day of the month - it was the 5th year of the exile of King Jehoiachin - 3) the word of the Lord came to the priest Ezekiel...

Scholars have long wondered why the text - while being so specific about the date - has omitted a critical piece of information: In the thirtieth year of what? Understanding this as a "disturbance," and reading the paragraph for its numero-symbolic information, we see that the digits of the numbers which appear in the paragraph (3 + 0 + 5 + 4 + 5 + 5) "collapse" to 22, the sum of 9 and 13.

The number symbols work, of course, on more than one level. Given the overt nature of male, and the covert nature of female genitalia, the masculine/thirteen can also be a symbol of that aspect of reality which is manifest; the feminine/nine of that which is hidden. The former may also be read as a symbol of exile (being outside); the latter as a symbol of rootedness (being inside). That the number 22 comes up so often, points to what is perhaps the heart of Ezekiel's mystical message: that ultimately God will affect a unification; a "collapse" of masculine/feminine, exile/return, the external and internal realities.

That the hidden/feminine "9" and the manifest/masculine "13" are also intended to carry the associated symbolic meanings of exile and return seems supported by the following pericope from the book of Exodus 33:

> 7) And Moses took the tent and inclined it *outside* the camp, far from the camp, and called it "the tent of appointed meeting." And it was that everyone who sought YHVH went *out* to the tent of appointed meeting which was *outside* the camp. 8) And it was that when Moses went *out* to the tent, that all the people rose, and were placed every man at the opening of his tent, and looked after Moses, until he was come *into* the tent.

The first sentence, describing Moses pitching the tent outside the camp, is twenty-six words long (13 x 2). The second sentence, describing Moses going into the tent, is eighteen

words long (9 x 2).

There is a further play between the numbers "9" and "13" and the theme of "substitution" in the story of the *Akedah* ("The Binding of Isaac"), Genesis 22:1-19. The story is set off as a discrete unit by the use of a *petucha* at either end. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg has written:

> The climax of the Akedah is the displacement of Isaac by the ram: "He went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son" (22:13). Rashi comments on the redundant "in place of his son": Over every part of the ritual that he performed, he prayed, "May it be Your will that this act should be *as though (ke'eelu)* it were done to my son - as though my son were slaughtered, as though his blood were sprinkled, as though he were flayed..."[54] The rhetorical motif of Abraham's prayer is *ke'eelu* - "Look at it *as though*..." Abraham has earned the right to metaphoric substitution.[55]

The line to which Zornberg refers is the thirteenth line of the chapter. The pericope itself opens with a thirteen word line (22:1). And thirteen of the pericope's lines contain duplicative word counts.[56]

The last six lines of the pericope have a curious structure. The word-counts of the outermost lines (14 and 19) are one apart (13 and 14 words). The word-counts of the second and second-to-last line (15 and 18) are one apart (8 and 9 words). The word-counts of the innermost lines (16 and 17) are one apart (18 and 19 words). The total number of words is 81, the sum of whose digits is 9.

The number motif seems to be further played out in their ages: Abraham - whom the tradition understands as the expansive, even extroverted Patriarch - lives to be 175 (1 + 7 + 5 = 13); while Isaac - whom the tradition understands as the passive and introverted Patriarch, lives to 180 (1 + 8 + 0 = 9).

If we return now to the book of Leviticus, we note that the opening line is nine words long, and the first paragraph (Lev.1:1-9[57]) ends on the ninth line of the book; and the opening line of the second paragraph (Lev.1:10-13[58]) is thirteen words long, and the paragraph ends on the thirteenth line of the book.[59] The numeric value of the first word of the book - *vayikra* - collapses to "9";[60] the numeric value of the last word of the book - *Sinai* - collapses to "13."[61]

Rashi, in his commentary to the nine-word opening line (Lev. 1:1) notes that "Rabbi Judah said 'Thirteen communications in the Torah are stated to have been spoken to Moses and Aaron together.'"[62] And the Rambam stated in the ninth of his thirteen principles of faith that the Torah would not be overturned (*muchalefet*); in other words, no revelation would ever be substituted for it.

The evidence is overwhelming that the number "9" was intended in the Torah as a substitution for the number "13".[63] The statement by the character in Carl Sagan's book notwithstanding, prime numbers - divisible only by themselves - do seem an entirely appropriate organizing vehicle for the first document to introduce the "One" God of the Universe to humankind.[64]

The Fourth Book

The book of Numbers (*BaMidbar*) opens with God speaking once again to Moses; this time, preparing to instruct Moses in the taking of a census. The opening line in the Hebrew is seventeen words long: "And God spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai, in the tent of

appointed meeting, on the first of the month, in the second year of their going out from the land of Egypt saying" (Numbers 1:1).

Sensitized now to the importance of the word counts, we may approach the book of Numbers assuming that the number of words in the opening line carries some symbolic meaning. Indeed, I believe it does. But in this case, in order to understand the significance of the number seventeen, we will need to go back to an earlier story - in the book of Genesis.

In the closing lines of Genesis 47 we are told of the death of Jacob:

> 29) And when the days of Jacob's death drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him "Please, if I have found favor in your eyes please put your hand under my thigh [to swear] that you will be kind and truthful with me: please do not bury me in Egypt. 30) Then I will lie with my fathers, and you will carry me from Egypt and bury me in their burial place;" and he said "I myself will do according to your word." 31) And he said "Swear to me" and he swore to him; and Israel bowed over the head of the bed (Genesis 47:29-31).

The story is elegant, simply but beautifully told, full of pathos. The story is so filled with emotional power that one may overlook the fact that the last line makes no sense. Shouldn't it be *Joseph* who is bowing over the head of the bed?

This "disturbance" on the surface level of the text is a clue that there is something about a confusion or conflation of father and son which is asking to be explored.

Genesis 37 opens:

> And Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph... (Gen. 37:1-2)

...and then the story goes on to tell about Joseph. An early commentator, Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman, wondered why Joseph is the first of the progeny mentioned. There is something disturbing here. Should it not have begun with the oldest son, Reuben? His answer is that Jacob and Joseph were like mirror images: virtually everything that happened to the one happened to the other:

> As Jacob was born circumcised, so was Joseph born circumcised; as the former's mother was childless, so was the latter's; as the former's mother had great labor, so did the latter's; as the mother of the former bore two, so did the mother of the latter; as the brother of the former hated him, so did the brothers of the latter; as the brother of the former sought to kill him, so did the brothers of the latter seek to kill him; the one was a shepherd and the other was a shepherd; the one was pursued by Satan and the other was pursued by Satan. 'Stolen' occurs twice in connection with one and twice in connection with the other; the one was blessed with ten [blessings] and the other was blessed with ten; the one emigrated from the Land (Eretz Israel), and the other emigrated from the Land; the one took a wife outside the land, and the other took a wife outside the Land; the one begot children outside the Land, and the other begot children outside the Land; the ones was escorted by angels and the other was escorted by angels; the one was promoted through a dream, and the other was promoted through a dream...[65]

Although this is *midrashic* (some of these connections were imagined by the rabbis) the Torah itself does also seem to underscore the connection between father and son in any number of ways.

First of all, there is the orthography of the Hebrew text. In the Hebrew, there is no punctuation mark, no colon in Genesis 37:2 between the words Jacob and Joseph. The text simply reads: "These are the generations of Jacob Joseph..."

Then there is the coincidence of 37:2 and 47:28. In the former we are told "These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph, who was seventeen years old...." And in the latter we are told that "Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years...." Joseph lived the first seventeen years of his life in the house of his father. Jacob lived the last seventeen years of his life in Egypt, in the house of his son. That the text does not employ a round or stylistic number - such as 20, or 40 - seems to put the issue of "meaningfulness" beyond question. The number is just too specific not to have been intended.

When Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, we are told that:

> Joseph said to his brothers "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, for they were amazed at his presence. (Genesis 45:3)

But the line does not seem to make sense in context. For just before it is spoken, we have a long, impassioned speech, given by Judah, in which he mentions his father over a dozen times. How can Joseph not know that, yes, his father is still alive?

Scholars will argue for "poor editing"; that this is the result of a rough edged redaction of mutually contradicting versions of oral tradition. But again, the "problem" proves to be a "disturbance." We notice that Judah's long speech is delivered in seventeen lines (Genesis 44:18-34). The line in which Joseph's strange question appears (Genesis 45:3) contains, in the Hebrew, seventeen words. Apparently, Joseph cannot be satisfied by merely hearing the mention of his father. He will only be satisfied that all is alright when he is in his presence again:

> And Joseph bound up his chariot,[66] and he went up to encounter Israel his

> father - to Goshen; and he appeared before him, and he fell on his neck, and he wept long on his neck. (Genesis 46:29)

This sentence, which describes the actual reunion, is also seventeen words long. The story of Jacob concludes just one chapter later. This time, when we look again at line 47:28:

> And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Jacob's life, the years of his life, were one hundred and forty seven years

we are not surprised that it, too, is seventeen words long.[67]

The story of Jacob and Joseph is a story of intertwined lives which are then separated and reunited. Jacob provides for Joseph, the relationship is disrupted, and then Joseph provides for Jacob.

There is a sense of mutuality, of complementariness. Not only do Jacob and Joseph love each other, but they seem to *complete* each other. It is not enough that they know of each other's existence; Joseph knows that his father is alive when he cries out. What each seeks is to be in the other's presence. For it is only there that a true sense of well-being, of completion, can be found.

As we have seen, the opening lines of the books of the Torah present us with a "theme number." In Bereshit it was "7," signifying the good. In Shemot it was "11," signifying repetition. In Vayikra it was "9," the priestly number signifying the substitution of the feminine for the masculine principle.

If we have read the Jacob and Joseph story correctly, we may conclude that the seventeen-

word opening sentence in Numbers must be there to signify completeness, or well-being based on the unification of like and like. Does the text support such a reading?

Certainly one could argue that the taking of a census (that begins the book) lends itself to such a reading. But the census only begins the book. Soon we are discussing the prescribed offerings one is to bring on various occasions: wronging one's fellow (Num. 5:8); suspected adultery (Num. 5:15); consecration of the nazarite (Num. 6:9); etc.

In Numbers 7:17 we come to the chieftains' *shlamim* offerings, which we are told consist of "...two of the herd, five rams, five he-goats, five one year old lambs." The total number of animals to be sacrificed for the *shlamim* offering is seventeen. And the name of the sacrifice - *shlamim* - means "completeness," or "well-being."[68]

We see now that this numeric symbol was present in the book of Leviticus, as well. The *shlamim* offering was described in Leviticus 3:1 in a line of seventeen words. The five line *petucha* paragraph (Lev.3:1-5) also ends with a line of seventeen words. And the paragraph's three middle lines (Lev.3:2-4) average seventeen words each (18, 16, and 17 words, respectively.) Finally, Leviticus 3 contains a total of seventeen lines.

Understanding the symbolism of the number "17," connecting it to the theme of separation and completeness, gives us a deeper insight into the earlier stories. In the story of Noah, "The dove came to him at the time of evening, and behold, a *torn* olive leaf was in her mouth, and Noah knew that the waters had been made light upon the earth" (Genesis 8:11). In the story of the covenant between the pieces, Abraham, following God's instructions,

takes a heifer, a goat, a ram, and turtle dove, and a young pigeon, "And he took to himself all of these, and he *split* them in the middle, and he placed one piece against another, but the bird he did not *split*" (Genesis 15:10). In the genealogies of Jacob and his descendants we read "To Joseph were born in the land of Egypt - born to him by Asenath daughter of Poti-Phera, priest of On - *Manasseh* and *Ephraim*" (Genesis 46:20). When Jacob is on his death bed, he calls Manasseh and Ephraim (for whom the "split" Josephite tribes would be named) to his side. We are told "So he blessed them that day saying 'In you shall Israel bless, saying: God make you like *Ephraim* and *Menasseh*'; so he put *Ephraim* before *Menasseh*" (Genesis 48:20). Three months after the Israelites left Egypt, we are told "And Moses went up to God; God called to him from the mountain, saying 'Thus shall you say to the *house of Jacob* and declare to the *children of Israel*'" (Exodus 19:3). In the instructions for building the Tabernacle, two planks are to be made for the corners of the Tabernacle at the rear. "They shall be *undifferentiated* at the bottom and *as one* they shall be *undifferentiated* on the top, in *one* ring; so it shall be with the *two of them*: for the *two* corners they shall be" (Exodus 26:24). After God gives Moses the ten commandments we are told "Thereupon Moses turned and went down from the mountain and the *two* tablets of the Testimony were in his hands, tablets inscribed on *both* their transections; *from this* and *from this* they were inscribed" (Exodus 32:15). Each of these sentences is seventeen words long.

So too, we find that in the census of parsha *Ki Tisa* (Exodus 30:13), the required coin for each person counted was the half shekel:

> This they shall give, all who pass among the counted: a half shekel of the holy shekel; a shekel is 20 gerahs; a half shekel shall be the heave offering

to God.

In this sentence, the half-shekel is mentioned twice, and the shekel is mentioned twice. And not surprisingly now we find that the sentence's word count totals seventeen. Each of us, like Jacob and Joseph, the text seems to say, is only a "half." All of us, the text seems to say, need others in order to be complete.

Indeed, when Moses, still lacking a judicial system, is seen personally presiding over every case, his father-in-law Jethro tells him (in a seventeen-word sentence) that what he is doing is wrong. "You will surely wear yourself out, you and these people as well; for the thing is too heavy for you: you cannot do it alone" (Exodus 18:18).[69]

(The theme of "splitting" and "doubling," central to the Book of Numbers, runs throughout the entire Five Books. There is the primordial *tohu* and *vohu* [Gen. 1:2]; the two creation stories [Gen. 1:1 and 2:4]; the two trees in the garden of Eden [Gen. 2:9]; the [forked-tongue] snake[70] [Gen. 3:1]; the "seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night" of Gen. 8:22; the veils [*tza'if* means "double"] of Rebekah [Gen. 24:65] and Tamar [Gen. 38:14/19]; the twins Jacob and Esau [Gen. 25:24] and Perez and Zerah [Gen. 38:27]; Pharaoh dreaming the same dream twice [Gen. 41:32]; the double portion of *manna* [Exodus 16:22]; the two tablets of the Law [Ex 31:18; 34:1] which are given twice [Ex 31:18; Ex 34:27] in two slightly different versions [Ex. 20:1; Deut. 5:6]; the two types of laws - *chukim* and *mishpatim* [Deut. 4:5]; and the oracular *urim* and *thummim* [Lev. 8:8]. And it seems to me that this theme informs, as well, the otherwise non-rational laws of *kashrut* [Lev. 11:1-23] which permit the eating of only such animals as have both cleft [*doubled*]

hoofs, and which chew the cud [chew *twice*]; of fish which have *both* fins and scales; and of vermin which have jointed [*doubled*] legs.)

The Fifth Book

The Book of *Devarim* was called "Deuteronomy" in Greek, meaning "Second Law." The term derives from the Hebrew expression *mishneh ha-Torah*, meaning repetition of the Torah, which is found in 17:18.

Following Ibn Ezra, we might expect that an opening sentence of eleven words would be good numeric symbolism here to underscore a theme of repetition. However, as we have seen, there already is a book which opens with an eleven word sentence: the book of *Shemot* (Exodus).

Further, we will recall that the book of Exodus seemed, itself, to be a repetition of the book of Genesis. The book of Deuteronomy, then, might more properly be understood as a repetition of a repetition.

That, in fact, is what the numeric symbolism of its opening line seems to suggest. In lieu of eleven words, we find twice that, or twenty-two.

> These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan, in the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran and between Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Di-Zahav (Deuteronomy 1:1).

This is an interesting and complex opening sentence. We note that it is the only opening line of the four latter books to begin without the conjunctive letter *vov*. Exodus began *v'eleh* ("And these..."); Leviticus began *vayikra* ("And He called..."); Numbers began *vayidaber* ("And God spoke...").

The opening sentence seems to highlight five ideas which, I will suggest, are thematic in the *Torat ha-Sod*. First, there is the emphasis on wholeness: the entire community ("all Israel") is standing before Moses to hear his words. Second, there its opposite theme: division (they are situated "across" the Jordan). Third, there is the theme of wandering, of boundlessness (they are "in the wilderness"). And fourth, there is its opposite theme of boundedness (the "wilderness" is in the "Arabah," a bounded valley or depression).

Fifth, and finally, there is the detail that Moses is speaking to the people in this bounded wilderness "between" five places (Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, Di-Zahav). The place names are not readably identifiable, and the Midrash suggests that they are symbolic. Would it be inconceivable to read the five places as symbolic of the five books; and to suggest that the purpose of the detail is to convey the idea that meaning must be found "between" the books, in other words "intertexually"?

Indeed, an intertextual reading seems helpful toward a deeper understanding of the expression "all Israel." We find the expression in the opening line of parashat *Vayakhel* (Exodus 35:1):

> Moses then convoked *all* the community of the children of Israel and said to them: These are the words which God has commanded you to do.

Here, we note that the word "all" (*kol*) appears twenty-two times in the Masoretic paragraph Exodus 35:4-29. Further, we find an unusual clustering - two proximate lines of 22 words each:

> And they came, everyone whose *mind* had been raised, and all whose *spirit* had moved him...(Exodus 35:21)
>
> And they came, the *men* upon the *women*...(Exodus 35:22)

A third line of twenty-two words also appears in this Masoretic chapter:

> And they took from before Moses all the *heave offerings* which the children of Israel brought, in the service of the work of the sanctuary, to do it; yet they continued to bring to him *free will offerings* morning after morning. (Exodus 36:3)

Again, we have another twenty-two word sentence in which opposing (or "complementary") realities are juxtaposed. Read this way, it seems clear that where the number "17" symbolizes the unification of like with like, the number "22" symbolizes the unification of like with unlike; a coming together of opposite or complementary realities.

What this has to do with the idea in Jewish mysticism of the collapse of the male and female aspects becomes more clear when one reflects on the now uncovered symbolic meanings of the theme numbers "9" and "13" - whose sum is "22."

The difference between "9" and "13" is "4." And so it is not surprising to see numbers repeating at intervals of four. In the first Masoretic chapter of Devarim (Deut. 1:1 - 2:1), we note the following:

9, _, _, 9 (lines 10, 11, 12, 13)

11, _, _, 11 (lines 20, 21, 22, 23)

21, _, _, 21 (lines 28, 29, 30, 31)

15, _, _, 15 (lines 35, 36, 37, 38)

19, _, _, 19 (lines 36, 37, 38, 39)

In addition, the thirteenth line of the Masoretic chapter is nine words long. Lines of nine and thirteen words cluster together (at lines 10 and 11). And the total number of words in the Masoretic chapter is six hundred and seventy words (6 + 7 + 0 = 13). Scholars have long commented on the difference in literary style in the book of Deuteronomy. Where the other books seem, to them, clearly "composite" works, Deuteronomy is notable for the "unity" of its literary style. It is interesting to note, then, that the numeric symbolism of this book seems, itself, to announce a theme of "unity".

Deuteronomy is the book which contains the declaration of God's unity, the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4). The so-called "watchword of the Jewish faith," the *Shema* is, in Jewish tradition, at once central and obscure. The Jewish Publication Society renders the line vocalized *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad* as "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." But this is only one of many translations.

Since the nineteenth century, biblical scholars have struggled with the text, suggesting that the grammatically impossible word *echad* ("one") might, in classical Hebrew, have meant "indivisible," or "unique." But none of these "solutions" have been entirely satisfactory. One scholar, Dr. S. David Sperling, has gone so far as to argue that the root of the problem in

this core pericope is a "textual corruption"; that the *Shema* of ancient Israel was actually not a monotheistic credo; and that the "grammatically impossible" word *echad* should be emended to read *ehab* ("love").[71]

If, however, we approach the word *echad* not as an "easily explained" textual corruption, but as a "disturbance," an entirely different - yet still normatively Hebraic - understanding of the text reveals itself to us.

We begin by noting that this is not the only instance in the Torah where the appearance of the word *echad* is disturbing. We have a similar "problem" in the opening chapter of the book of Genesis. Working backwards through the Creation story, we note that:

the seventh day is called *yom hashvi'i*[72] (Gen. 2:3),
the sixth day is called *yom hashi-shi* (Gen. 1:31),
the fifth day is called *yom hamish'i* (Gen. 1:23),
the fourth day is called *yom revi'i* (Gen. 1:19),
the third day is called *yom shlishi* (Gen. 1:13),
the second day is called *yom sheni* (Gen. 1:8),
but the first day is called *yom echad*[73] (Gen. 1:5).

To be consistent, the text should have called the first day *yom rishon*, which means "the first day." But in its place we are given *yom echad*, which is also grammatically problematic.[74] We have, then, two phrases which end with a grammatically problematic use of the word *echad*. Is there a connection between these two "mistakes?" Is there a reason to read these lines one against the other?

For one thing, we note that the phrase "...and there was evening and there was morning day One" (Gen. 1:5) is, in the Hebrew, exactly six words long (*...vayehi erev vayehi boker yom echad*). The phrase "Hear O Israel the Lord is our God the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4) is also, in the Hebrew, exactly six words long (*Shema Yisrael YHVH Eloheinu YHVH echad*).

Both phrases have one repeating word. In Genesis the word is *vayehi*; in Deuteronomy the word is the Divine Name *YHVH*. In each of those words there is a repeating letter: the word *vayehi* is spelled with two *yud*'s, a *hay*, and a *vov;* the Divine Name is spelled with two *hay*'s, a *vov*, and a *yud*.

The letters used in the Genesis phrase utilize all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet from *alef* to *shin* except nine (*gimmel, zayin, tet, kaf, lamed, nun, samech, pay, tzadi*). The letters used in the Deuteronomy phrase utilize all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet from *alef* to *shin* except nine (*bet, gimmel, zayin, tet, kaf, samech, pay, tzadi, kuf*).

In addition, there are exactly *nine* letters which appear in both of the phrases (*alef, dalet, hay, vov, het, yud, mem, ayin, resh*). And the two sentences combined utilize a total of exactly *thirteen* letters (those listed, plus: *lamed, nun, kuf, shin*).

Finally, of the words which repeat, we note that the numerical values of the words are:

echad:

alef (1), *het* (8), *dalet* (4) = 13

YHVH:

yud (10), *hay* (5), *vov* (6), *hay* (5) = 26 (2 x 13)

vayehi:

vov (10), *yud* (10), *hay* (5), *yud* (10) = 31 (reverse of 13)

Reading the *Shema* numero-mystically, we can render it (as have others) according to its plain sense: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is (*the number*) One.[75] Indeed, the Genesis and Deuteronomy phrases both seem to point to the idea of a primal unity[76] based on the number 1.[77] And it is worthy of reflection that the construction of the two phrases (playing with the numbers 9 and 13 which form a unity of male and female) only makes sense if one reads the phrase in Genesis against the line in Deuteronomy. (We will have more to say regarding the unity of the Five Books shortly.) Seen from this perspective, the Tetragrammaton (*Yud, Hay, Vov, Hay*), the mysterious four-letter Name of God, may be seen as a retrocessive and abbreviated conflation of the words "he" and "she" (*hu*, here spelled *hay vov*; and *hi*, here spelled *hay yud*).[78] The hidden meaning of the explicit four-letter Name of God - which we are forbidden to be pronounce in Hebrew - is, most likely, in English, "He-She."

Scholars have long commented on the probable origins of the book of Deuteronomy, speculating that the scroll which the book of Kings[79] describes as having been discovered in the Temple during the reign of King Josiah was the book of *Devarim*, Deuteronomy. To be sure, there is something very "Deuteronomic" about II Kings 23:25:

> And there had been no king like him, who turned to God with all his heart

> and with all his soul and with all his might, as all of the Torah of Moses; nor would there arise after him any like him.

Compare it to the last three lines of Deuteronomy:

> 10) And there did not arise again a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom YHVH knew, face to face, 11) for all the signs and portents which YHVH sent him to do in the land of Egypt, for Pharaoh and for all his servants and for all his country, 12) and for all the mighty hand and for all the great sights which Moses did for the eyes of all Israel.

This three-line coda follows a nine-line pericope (Deuteronomy 34:1-9) whose first and ninth lines are twenty-two words each. And the sentence in II Kings to which we compared it...is twenty-two words long.

Not only this, but in line 14 of II Kings 23, we are told that a delegation of *five* men went to the prophetess Huldah to authenticate the scroll; that she was the wife of a man named *Shalum* (meaning "completed"); that he was descended from a man who was a *shomer habigadim* ("guardian of the cloaks"); and that she lived in a section of Jerusalem called the *Mishneh* (meaning the "repetition").

The book of Deuteronomy *is* a *mishneh ha-Torah*, a repetition of the Torah. But what is now clear is that each of the books, in some ways, recapitulates the others. The themes and symbols and story lines of each are intricately and inextricably woven into the others.

The book of Exodus opened with an eleven-word sentence, "And these are the names...." The book of Deuteronomy opens with a twenty-two word sentence, "These are the words...."

The opening line of the last chapter of Deuteronomy (34:1) is twenty-two words. The opening line of the last chapter of Numbers (36:1) was twenty-two words.

Similarly, the last line of the book of Genesis (49:26) is eleven words. And the first line of the book of Exodus (1:1) is eleven words.

The last Masoretic paragraph of the book of Exodus begins on the ninth line of the chapter (38:9), and contains a "cluster" of sentences: nine words, thirteen words, and thirteen words long (Exodus 38:10-13). The first paragraph of Leviticus opens with a nine-word sentence; the second paragraph opens with a thirteen-word sentence, and ends on the thirteenth line.

In a most dramatic interweaving, we note that in the last chapter of Deuteronomy (with its theme number of "22"), the Tetragrammaton, *YHVH*, the unpronounceable four-letter name of God, appears seven times.[80] In the opening paragraphs of Genesis (with its theme number of "7"), the name *Elohim* appears twenty-two times.[81] The unity of the Torah is, then, "sealed" at either end. The beginning ("7") and the ending ("22") fold into each other.

And there is yet one more interweaving of the end of the book of Deuteronomy with the beginning of the book of Genesis which seems to put the question of the unity of the Five Books beyond question.

"And there did not arise again a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom YHVH knew face to face," the Torah declares in Deuteronomy 34:10, in the first of three closing lines. But the

lines that then follow are most curious:

> For all the signs and wonders which YHVH sent him to do in the land of Egypt,
>
> For Pharaoh, and
>
> For all his servants, and
>
> For all his country. (34:10) And
>
> For all the strong hand, and
>
> For all the awesome power which Moses did
>
> For the eyes of all Israel. (34:11)

The repetition of the word "for" (the letter *lamed* in Hebrew) at first seems to make sense (the signs and wonders were intended "*for* Pharaoh," and "*for* his servants," and "*for* his country.") But then meaning seems to break down. What could "*for* all the strong hand," or "*for* all the awesome power" possibly mean? Translating the *lamed* as "to" (its alternative meaning) only brings more confusion (*to* all the strong hand? *to* all the awesome power?).

It seems, rather, that the closing lines of the Torah are another instance of a "disturbance." The text, in its simple, narrative form, does not make sense. And so our attention is drawn again to the numbers: this time, the number of times the letter *lamed* appears in these three closing lines. It appears exactly seventeen times.

Seventeen, we have learned, is a numeric symbol for two pieces which together form a whole. And so we wonder of what "whole" this letter *lamed* is intended to be a part. The very last letter of the Torah is, itself, a *lamed*. Is this a hint that we are intended to couple

that *lamed* with another letter?

Indeed, various rabbinic sources tell us that the final *lamed* is intended to be coupled with the opening *bet* of the book of Genesis *(Berehsit)*.

> *In the beginning*...The Torah begins with the letter *bet* and ends with the letter *lamed* (the last word being Yisrael.) The letters *lamed* and *bet* together spell out the word *lev* - a heart.[82]

While some may consider this, at best, a nice *midrash*, a fanciful rabbinic text-play, close examination of the opening verses of Genesis suggests that the text was intentionally constructed to admit this reading.

The first two words of the opening line of Genesis each begin with the letter *bet*. And the eleventh letter of the line is the letter *lamed* (11 being the numeric symbol for repetition.) Indeed, the letters *lamed* and *bet* repeat throughout the opening two paragraphs:[83] the *lamed* repeats exactly nine times; the *bet* exactly thirteen times, representing the coming together of the male and the female aspects.

As it says of the sefirot in the mystical book *Sefer Yitzirah*: "Their end is embedded in their beginning, and their beginning in their end."[84] "Turn it and turn it again," said Ben Bag-Bag of the Torah, "for everything is contained in it."[85]

Conclusion

And so what of the search for the hidden "70" in the Torah? Does our insight into numeric symbolism shed any light on what the expression "seventy faces of Torah" might have meant to the rabbis; or on the etiology of the name "Septuagint"?

If we look again at the word counts in the opening lines of each of the books, we see:

Genesis:	7
Exodus:	11
Leviticus:	9
Numbers:	17
Deuteronomy:	22

The sum of these numbers is "66." But if we were correct in understanding the "9" of Leviticus to be a substitution for "13," we have instead:

Genesis:	7
Exodus:	11
Leviticus:	13
Numbers:	17
Deuteronomy:	22
Total	70

The 70th face of the Torah turns out, quite literally, to be its "face," its orthography; the

number of words in each sentence; the number of sentences in each paragraph; the "scribal errors" and "corruptions" which may now be seen to have been neither; all of them going into the making of meaning in the Torah.

We now see that the Torah does indeed contain a secret doctrine. The doctrine is highly paradoxical in nature, written in a language which itself is thought to have a mystical value. Ultimately, its concern is the restoration of the primal unity which is understood to exist beyond the multiplicity of apparent reality. It is, in other words, a "mystical" text.

As a mystical text, the Torah remains, of course, a "closed book." The inner teaching has something to do with the collapse of male/female dualities, and the Unity which exists beyond them. It has something to do with numerical structuring as a foundational pattern for reality. It has something to do with the idea that there are mistakes which are not mistakes at all, but rather intentionally placed entrance points to other levels of understanding. But the teaching remains highly obscure.

What is clear, however, is that, in some sense, we have come full circle. The most fruitful way to approach the text, it now appears, is more like the way the Hebrew people have always approached the text: not seeking to overturn it; not attempting to prove its having been "corrupted" by scribal errors; but rather, trying to understand the text as a holy vessel - a vessel which has been passed along with fidelity from generation to generation; passed along more intact than we moderns have assumed; passed along by those who believed that when faced with the "impossible," what may be required is not so much emendation as *emunah.*[86]

AFTERWORD

It is hard to imagine that an esoteric tradition as powerful as that of Hebrew Bible-based Numero-Mysticism could have been carried on for thousands of years throughout the Near East, Mediterranean, and Europe without some hint, word, or knowledge of it being passed to the non-Jewish world. Indeed, something of it was known.

As early as the fifth century, St. Augustine (354-430) was interpreting Scripture - albeit Christian Scripture - from the perspective of numero-mysticism. In Augustine's case, he was fascinated by the number of fish Peter is said to have caught - one hundred fifty three. One hundred fifty three, Augustine noted, is the sum of the first seventeen numbers. For Augustine - who was a Platonist long before he was a Christian - this could hardly be a coincidence. But as a Christian, Augustine gave the number a specifically christological interpretation. For Augustine, 17 stood for the number 10 (for the Decalogue) to which was added the number 7 (for the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost.)

How the esoteric knowledge of numero-mysticism might have passed to Augustine is a question taken up in *The Hidden Sense*, an essay published in 1963 in a book of the same name by the Norwegian scholar, Maren-Sofie Rostvig.[87] Rostvig's claim is that the science of numbers has its basis "in pagan philosophy"[88] - its chief founders being Pythagoras (581 BCE - 497 BCE) and Plato (427 BCE - 347 BCE). Their theories, combined by Nicomachus (c. 100 CE), are said by Rostvig to have passed to the Roman philosopher Boethius (480-524). It was through Philo Judaeus and Augustine that "the Greek science of numbers entered into Christian theology."[89] The "Christianized version"[90] of this pagan science

passed from the early Church Fathers to Dante (whose *Divine Comedy*, composed in 1307 is called "the finest literary example of the structural application of holy numbers[91]") and later to the Florentine Neoplatonists[92] of the sixteenth century.

Of the Florentines, the first most important figures, according to Rostvig, were Pico della Mirandola and his disciple Francesco Giorgio.[93] Rostvig calls Giorgio "the most important exponent of the science of numbers;...his *magnum opus*, the *De harmonia mundi* (1525), [being] an elaborate Christianized version of the Platonic account of creation in numerical terms...."[94]

Rostvig credits the Florentines with catalyzing "a veritable revival [of the technique of numerical composition] in the Renaissance."[95] He cites as an example the English poet Edmund Spenser (b. 1552) who, in his compositions made "extensive structural use of the numbers 7, 7 x 7, and 70 - the most pregnant of all the Biblical numbers..."[96] But in discovering that the sum total of the stanzas in Spenser's *Fowre Hymnes* is 169, which is the square of 13, Rostvig, like Augustine before him, cannot help but resolve the number as a compound christological symbol "whose meaning is that of the two potent numbers of which it is the sum (10 and 3)."[97]

The English poet John Donne (b.1572) had a characteristically ambivalent attitude towards the Kabbala and toward Jews. Although he seemed, according to Rostvig, to reject the Kabbalah; and although he counted himself as one who, in his words, "must fight against Philosophers and Jews," he "...nevertheless blithely proceeds to fill ten pages with comments on numbers, confessing to be particularly fascinated by the number 70..."[98]

The English poet John Milton (b.1608) is considered by Rostvig as the great exemplar in the Renaissance of the practice structuring poems around esoteric numerical patterns of "neo-Pythagorean and Cabbalistic meaning..."[99] Rostvig cites Gunner Qvarnstrom's *Dikten och Den Nya Vetenskapen* (1961), whose analysis of the numbers in Milton's *Paradise Lost* "clearly proves the relevance of the science of numbers to the religious poetry of the seventeenth century."[100]

By the time of Henry More, the English poet and professional numerologist (b.1653), the popularity of using numeric interpretation as an exigetical tool in decoding the Bible was, amongst Christians, on the wane. In his *The Defence of the Threefold Cabbala* (1653), a commentary to his *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, More argued - against those who would reject a Neoplatonic (pagan) interpretation of creation - that Pythagoras and Plato learned arithmology from Moses and the prophets, but then "mingled their own fooleries with it."[101]

But while making the case for the Hebrew origin of the tradition, More nevertheless "...attributed to the school of Plato more true insight into the mysteries of religion than can be found even among the Jewish Cabbalists."[102] Like Augustine, he resolves numeric symbols of the Hebrew Bible into compound symbols which he then interprets christologically. The number 7, for More, is important because it consists of 3 (the triadic symbol) and 4 (which he calls the symbol of physical creation). In More, triadic patterning is everywhere.

Rostvig closes this essay by arguing that, in modern times, it can be seen that W.B. Yeats and James Joyce were inspired by the tradition of esoteric numerical patterning. He cites

William York Tindall's article "James Joyce and the Hermetic Tradition"[103] wherein Tindall declares that it was "the Hermetic idea of an originally interconnected world [which] inspired Joyce to impose a cosmic structure on some of his artistic creations, notably *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*."[104]

And so a line is drawn from Pythagoras to Plato to Nicomachus; to Boethius and Philo Judaeus and Augustine; to the Florentine Neoplatonists Pico della Mirandola and Francesco Giorgio; to the English Renaissance poets Spenser, Donne, Milton, and More; and in modern times to Yeats and Joyce. It is a non-Jewish *shelshelet haKabbalah*, a non-Jewish chain of tradition.

How well has this tradition really been understood by those who have employed it? As Rostvig writes, "the science of numbers was by definition esoteric, and the philosopher (and the poet, too) was under a moral obligation not to reveal his deepest secrets to the uninitiated."[105] And so how much was known cannot be known by us.

But it is true that some of the key numeric symbols found in the Hebrew Bible - 7, 13, 17, and 22 - seem not to make sense to many of those who stand in this chain. Augustine had to break 17 down to 10 and 7. The author of *The Myroure of oure Ladye* had to break 22 down to 10 and 12. More had to break 7 down to 4 and 3. And Rostvig had to break the number 13 down to 10 and 3.

And behind the question of how well its practitioners have understood it, stands the question of the very origin of the tradition. Can we anymore say that it is "Pythagorean"?

It has been thought that Jewish numero-mysticism had its roots in Greek thought; specifically in an esoteric tradition developed and taught at first by Pythagoras, and then later by Plato. Jewish numero-mysticism has long been thought to be an exegetical tool applied *to* the Hebrew Bible, but in no way to be found *in* the Hebrew Bible. We see now, by our own analysis, that that is not the case. The Hebrew Bible is clearly structured as a numero-mystical text.

The only question remaining appears to be whether the Hebrew Bible was written before or after Pythagoras. (If before, we will need to address the possibility that initiates of his secret wisdom *re*-wrote it after him.)

The first historical record of the Hebrew Bible having been read in public - or at least a *book* of the Hebrew Bible having been read in public - is in II Kings, chapters 22 and 23.

> 22 [3]In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent the scribe Shaphan son of Azaliah son of Meshullam to the House of the Lord, saying [4]Go to the high priest Hilkiah and let him weigh the silver that has been deposited in the House of the Lord...[8]Then the high priest Hilkiah said to the scribe Shaphan, "I have found a scroll of the Teaching in the House of the Lord." And Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan who read it...
>
> 23 [1]At the king's summons, all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem assembled before him. [2]The king went up to the House of the Lord, together with all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests and the prophets - all the people, young and old. And he read to them the entire text of the covenant scroll which had been found in the House of the Lord.[3]The king stood by the pillar and solemnized this covenant before the Lord: that they would follow the Lord and observe all His commandments, His injunctions, and His laws with all their heart and soul; that they would fulfill all the terms of the covenant as inscribed upon the scroll. And all the people entered into the covenant.[106]

What was this "scroll of the Teaching" (*sefer haTorah*), this "covenant scroll" (*sefer haBrit*) found in the House of the Lord? Scholars have suggested that it might have been the book of Deuteronomy. But whether it was Deuteronomy or the entire Five Book corpus, is it reasonable to believe that that Text could have been rewritten after having been publicly read and accepted by the people as a foundational text of their covenantal relationship with God? Scholars date the public reading of this scroll to 621 BCE. Pythagoras would not be born for another forty years.

The next historical record of a public reading of the Torah comes in 458 BCE, and is described in chapter 8 of the Book of Nehemiah:

> [1]When the seventh month arrived - the Israelites being [settled] in their towns - the entire people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the scroll of the Teaching of Moses with which the Lord had charged Israel. [2]On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Teaching before the congregation, men and women, and all who could listen with understanding. [3]He read from it, facing the square before the Water Gate, from the first light until midday, to the men and the women and those who could understand; the ears of all the people were given over to the scroll of the Teaching.[107]

Pythagoras began teaching in Crotona in 531 BCE, and died in 497 BCE. And so it is, if not plausible, at least chronologically possible that the secret doctrine he was teaching there somehow reached Jerusalem and set off a massive rewriting of the ancient and sacred Text. But we now have further evidence that this was not the case.

Our analysis of the Book of Ezekiel has shown a deliberate, persistent structural play between the numbers 9 and 13. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the number-

play is virtually everywhere in the Book of Ezekiel. If one accepts that there ever was such a thing as numero-mysticism, arithmology, poetic numerical patterning, and the like, this text must be one of the genre's richest examples. But Ezekiel's first vision has been dated by scholars to 593 BCE - twelve years before Pythagoras was born, some sixty-two years before Pythagoras began teaching.[108]

One could argue, of course, that the entire Book of Ezekiel underwent a massive rewriting when the Pythagorean secrets became known among the Israelite priestly circle. But there is no evidence to confirm that the Book of Ezekiel was rewritten. There is much more compelling evidence that it was not: witness the fact that the book preserves Ezekiel's pronouncement of six major prophecies which failed to come true. (If the book had been re-written, one would expect that these failed prophecies would have been deleted.) Moshe Greenberg, in a piece entitled *What are Valid Criteria for Determining Inauthentic Matter in Ezekiel?* concludes that "there is nothing in the text which necessitates supposing another hand than that of the prophet of the sixth century."[109]

Ezekiel was playing with the numbers 9 and 13 in the same way that the Torah plays with the numbers 9 and 13. That in both books one will find that the ninth line is thirteen words long is only one of many parallels.[110] We may not be able to identify the late seventh century "Scroll of the Covenant," but we are able to identify the early sixth century Book of Ezekiel. And the Book of Ezekiel, we now know, was using "Pythagorean" number plays before Pythagoras. When the teachings of the great Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus (204/5-270 CE) were written down by his disciple Porphyry as *The Enneads* (The Nines), the thirteen-word sentence with which the book opens was an encoded number-play with

origins beyond either Plato or Pythagoras.

Is this not, perhaps, what Heracleitus was referring to when he said of the widely travelled philosopher, "Of all men, Pythagoras was the most assiduous inquirer"?[111]

NOTES

1. There are numerous codes in the Hebrew bible. The code which R. Weissmandl discovered is perhaps one of the most remarkable: that of Equidistant Letter Spacing. It was his work, confirmed and expanded upon by Doron Weitztum, Eliyahu Rips, and Yoav Rosenberg which was popularized in the book *The Bible Code* by Michael Drosnin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

2. Gershom G. Scholem. *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), p. 8.

3. Ibid., p. 34.

4. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends In Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), pp. 6-7.

5. How important the "experiential" is in characterizing a text as "mystical" as opposed to "esoteric" is a question beyond the scope of this essay. Scholem did not believe that the *unio mystica*, or mystical union with God, was an essential characteristic of Jewish (or, for that matter, non-Jewish) mysticism (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 5). The question was a point of departure for Moshe Idel *(Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 59-73). And although for Elliot Wolfson the essential detail seems to be the "quasi-deification" of the mystic (*Through A Speculum That Shines*, p. 84), he concludes his discussion of the difference between "exegetical mysticism" and "experiential mysticism" by noting that "(w)hen the scholar begins to appreciate the active mystical nature of exegesis in general, and exegesis on the chariot vision of Ezekiel in particular, then, I think, the gap between interpretation and mystical technique will be somewhat narrowed" (*Ibid*, p. 124).

6. Ibid., p.4.

7. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 47. How broadly or narrowly one should understand the term *school* is, again, a matter of scholarly debate (*See* Wolfson, *ibid*, chapter 3).

8. Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton: The Jewish Publication Society/Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 183, quoting from Eleazar of Worms in *Arugath ha-Bosem* of Abraham ben Ariel, ed. Urbach [Jerusalem, 1939], p. 204.

9. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 13.

10. Ibid., p. 47.

11. Ibid., p. 17.

12. Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 28-29.

13. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 8.

14. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 170.

15. This, notwithstanding the words of the Psalmist who (ironically?) declared *Ki yashar davar Adonai*, "For the word of God is direct" (Psalm 33:4).

16. Moses de Leon, *Mishkan Ha-Eduth*, 1293, quoted by Gershom Scholem in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 201-202.

17. The etiological legend is slightly "off": according to the Babylonian Talmud, there were 72 rabbis (Megillah 9a).

18. *Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin*, p. 30a.

19. *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd, 1972), s.v. "Bible," vol 4., p. 854.

20. Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Biblical Exegesis* (New York: Behrman House, 1973), p. 106. According to Jacob ben Asher "The German Hasidim (of the 12th and 13th centuries) were in the habit of counting or calculating every word in the prayers, benedictions and hymns, and they sought a reason in the Torah for the number of words in the prayers." (Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p.100.)

21. U. Cassuto. *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I, From Adam to Noah, Genesis I-IV 8*, translated from the Hebrew by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Central Press, 1961), p. 61.

22. I am indebted to Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Prof. Everett Fox, The Jewish Publication Society, and Rabbi A. M. Silbermann whose translations inform my own. I am, however, except where otherwise noted, responsible for the English renderings.

23. I am grateful to my teacher Dr. Masha Turner who introduced me to this insight of Cassuto.

24. Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Book of Jonah*, verse 6: "God will have second thoughts about us. And likewise, this (eleven) is a number that requires a second repetition (on the fingers)."

25. There is also the theory of a "Heptateuch" which includes the book of Joshua.

26. Leviticus 1:1-17.

27. *Sifra* in Encyclopedia Judaica, volume 14, page 1518.

28. I am grateful to my teacher Rabbi Lawrence Kushner for directing me to this book.

29. Carl Sagan, *Contact* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 102.

30. Ibid., p. 165.

31....and by our sensitivity to what Jung called *syncronicity*.

32. In addition, there is a "hidden" thirteen as well. If we re-order the sentences by word-count, we get the following: 5,_,_,_,9,10,_,_,13,14,15,15,_,_,18,_,20,_,_,_,_,25. The blank spaces represent thirteen missing numbers.

33. I am grateful to my colleague Rabbi Michele Medwin for this insight.

34. We have now, perhaps, a bit of insight into the strange penultimate sentence of the book of Leviticus (*Vayikra)*: "He will not seek out between good and evil, and will not convert (*y'mirenu*) it; and if he does indeed convert it, then it and its conversion will be holy; it shall not be redeemed." (Lev. 27:33)

35. "For the Maya, the world, the heavens and the mysterious 'unseen world' or underworld called Xibalba (shee-bahl-BAH) were all one great unified structure which operated according to the laws of astrology and ancestor worship. The towering *ceiba* tree was considered sacred, for it symbolized the Wacah Chan, or world-tree which united the 13 heavens, the surface of the earth, and the 9 levels of the underworld of Xibalba." (Tom Brosnahan *Guatemala, Belize, and Yucatan: La Ruta Maya* [Hawthorne, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 1991.] p. 31.)

36. Is it simply a coincidence that the seminars of Plotinus (considered the founder of Neoplatonism) when written down by his student Porphyry and entitled the *Ennead* (the "Nines"), begin with a thirteen word long sentence?

The idea that it is numbers which are the essential components of reality is said to have come from the Greeks. Plotinus is said to have gotten it from the school of Plato, and Plato from the school of Pythagoras. Hence *one* stood for reason; *two* stood for opinion; *four* stood for justice; *five* stood for marriage, and so on. Beyond that, *one* was understood to be the source of all numbers (Tobias Danzig: *Number, The Language of Science*, New York: The Macmillian Company, 1930. p. 40.)

Scholars who place the origins of Jewish mysticism in Talmudic times - or later - have seen, in Jewish numero-mystical speculation, the influence of Neo-Pythagorean thought. Pythagoras, an Ioanian Greek, was born on the island of Samos, not before 581 BCE. A philosopher and mathematician, he travelled for thirty years before settling in Crotona (Italy) in 529, where he established a secret society based on the mysticism of numbers.

But the prophet Ezekiel had been exiled to Babylon before Pythagoras was born. And in Ezekiel's writings, we now clearly see the prophet making use of a number play which has also been found secreted in the Torah; the Torah which we now see to have been organized, in part, on a hidden string of prime numbers. We will have more to say about this in the Afterword.

37. Steven Shaw, "Orthodox Reactions to the Challenge of Biblical Criticism," in *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought*, #3, 1969, p. 69.

I am grateful to Reba Carmel for directing my attention to this article.

38. Ibid., p. 69.

39. Ibid., p. 71.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p. 69.

42. I am grateful to Victor Appel for this insight.

43. Nehama Leibowitz, translated by Aryeh Newman. *Studies in Bereshit* (Jerusalem: Eliner Library, Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education, Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora) p. 332.

44. *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*, p. 1127.

45. In *Midrash Tanchuma* (Ed. Buber, 4:34) there is an independent association of the word *shamor* with the feminine.

46. *The Bahir*, translation and commentary by Aryeh Kaplan (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995) p. 70.

47. The *shamor v'zachor* verses are not the only such pair of their kind. I noticed something similar at Exodus 31:15 and 35:2. At Exodus 31:15 we find the sentence "Six days your work will be done, but the seventh day is Shabbat, a day of rest holy to God; all who do work on the day of Shabbat will surely die." The sentence is repeated verbatim at Exodus 35:2 with one difference: in the first formulation, the word "will be done" is rendered in the Hebrew via the masculine construction *ya'aseh*. In the second formulation "will be done" is rendered via the female construction *ta'aseh*.

48. W. Gunther Plaut, ed., *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. Note 19, page 1718.

49. Carthage or Carthagenea in Spain.

50. *Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Berachot*, 29a. Although he does not make the specific connection between the nine names and the nine months.

51. Footnote 6, page 49a, Soncino translation of *Berakhot*, Babylonian Talmud.

52. I am grateful to Dr. Elliot Wolfson for this insight. Note, too, that in the Hebrew the two citations are exactly the same length: 37 words each.

53. Edwin Broome, "Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65 (1946), pp 277-284.

54. The formulation "k'" ("as" or "like") repeats over and over in the book of Ezekiel. For all of the details which Ezekiel offers regarding the chariot, the cloud, the wheels, etc. he is emphatic that none are to be regarded as actually descriptive. Rather, the center of the cloud was <u>like</u> the appearance of *hashmal* (Ez. 1:4); the foot of the legs of the *chayot* were <u>like</u> the foot of a calf; and they were <u>like</u> the appearance of bronze (Ez 1:7), etc. The intended effect of all this repetition is, in my opinion, to sensitize us to the text's underlying interest in drawing connections between realities which are <u>not</u> the same, but which can yet stand for each other (as "9" stands for "13").

55. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995), p. 121.

56. Lines 4 and 10 (10 words each); lines 8 and 11 (11 words each); lines 1 and 14 (13 words each); lines 5 and 7 (17 words each); lines 6 and 16 (18 words each); lines 2, 3 and 9 (25 words each).

57. A *setuma*.

58. A *petucha*.

59. There are a total of 191 words in the two paragraphs: a number in which "9" appears in the middle position.

60. 6 + 10 + 19 + 1 = 36; 3 + 6 = 9.

61. 15 + 10 + 14 + 10 = 49; 4 + 9 = 13.

62. Silbermann, A.M. *Chumash With Rashi's Commentary*. (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1934), p. 2.

63. Although in the first line of the book of Leviticus it is, paradoxically, the number 9 which is revealed, and the number 13 which is concealed - exactly the reverse of what we would expect. We find a similar reversal in the Joseph story. Joseph is "hidden" for thirteen years in the prison (from age 17 to age 30; Gen. 37:2, Gen. 41:46). He is then brought out, and nine years later he "reveals" himself to his brothers (after seven years of plenty, Gen. 41:47; and two of the seven years of famine, Gen. 45:6. See also Talmud Bavli Ber. 55b.)

In the mystical tradition, reversals of symbolic meaning are understood as an integral aspect of the dynamic system. Thus a "masculine" sefira, when it is receiving, becomes, as it were, "feminine." And a "feminine" sefira, when it is giving forth, becomes, as it were, "masculine."

I am grateful to Dr. Elliot Wolfson for this last insight.

64. The power of the relationship between the numbers 9 and 13 is, even today, understood - if not talked about - by the sacred Jewish *chevrah kaddisha* burial societies. There are burial societies in which it is the custom, before tying them, to twist the two drawstrings of the burial garments nine and thirteen times respectively. The strings at the top of the tunic before being tied are twisted nine times. And the belt placed around the tunic before being tied is twisted thirteen times.

How deeply hidden this scared number play is can be seen in *Sefer Ha Bahir*, the Book of the Brilliance, considered by some scholars to be the oldest Kabbalistic text ever written. It was first published in Provence in the last quarter of the 12th century, although it is often ascribed to the mystic Rabbi Nehuniah ben HaKana, who lived in Palestine during the first century.

In his commentary to the *Bahir*, the late Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan speculated that:

> Rabbi Amorai, who plays an important role in the Bahir, is actually a pseudonym for [its putative author] Rabbi Nehuniah. Careful study indicates that this mysterious Rabbi Amorai *who is mentioned nine times* in the text, is actually the source of the main teachings found in the Bahir...Rabbi Amorai is particularly intriguing, since his name is found nowhere else in classical Jewish literature. (Page xi. Emphasis added).

Kaplan later notes that:

> (t)he most prominent sage of the Bahir, mentioned more often than any other, is Rabbi Rahumai, *whose name appears thirteen times* in the text. No mention of Rabbi

Rahumai is found in the Talmud or Midrash... (Page xiii. Emphasis added).

65. *The Midrash Rabbah*, The Soncino Press, Genesis (Vayesheb) LXXXIV.6, page 773.

66. The image is paradoxical - "binding up" a chariot in order to use it - and calls to mind the paradoxical images in the book of Ezekiel.

67. The theme of division and unification is set early on in the story of Jacob. In parashat *Vayishlach*, when Jacob is about to meet his estranged brother Esau, we are told "Jacob was very much afraid, and it distressed him, so he *divided in half* the people with him, the flock, and the herd, and the camels into two camps." (Genesis 32:8). The line, in Hebrew, is rendered in seventeen words.

68. The first mention of the *shlamim* in this book, however, comes earlier: in the seventeenth line of Numbers 6.

69. It is interesting to note that the Pythagoreans reportedly had a horror of the number 17. According to Prof. David Kelly of Hampshire College (who delivers an annual July 17 lecture there on the number 17), there is even today a superstition in Italy about the number. Italian opera singers will often not stay on the seventeenth floor of a hotel. And the Fiat 17 automobile had to be renamed. Amongst elite mathematics students at Stuyvesant High School in New York City, there is even a club devoted to the number. (*See* the article "Love of Numbers Leads to Chromosome 17" in *The New York Times*, September 10, 1996. p. C1).

70. Snakes are symbolic of doubling in another way. "Males have paired sex organs - each called a hemipenis, or half penis - hidden in the base of the tail." (*Time Magazine*, October 13, 1997).

71. Sperling, S. David. "The One We Ought To Love," in *Ehad: The Many Meanings of God is One.* Eugene Borowitz, ed. (Port Washington, New York: Sh'ma, 1988) pp. 83-85.

72. There is, of course, a question as to why it is not referred to here as *yom shabbat*. As with God (referred to in Genesis 1:1, but whose explicit Name is not revealed until Gen. 2:4); and as with Moses' parents (referred to in Exodus 2:1, but whose names are not revealed until Exodus 6:20), the withholding of the proper name of the seventh day may well be part of a pattern of name concealment and revelation.

73. I am grateful to Ed Sperling of Pleasantville Community Synagogue for this insight.

74. The Torah opens with a "grammatically impossible" sentence. As we have seen, the opening words *Bereshit bara* means "In beginning of...He created." But the second and third words - *bara Elohim* - read not "God (He) created the heavens and earth," nor "Gods (they) created the heavens and earth," but rather "Gods (He) created the heavens and earth." Again, grammatically impossible.

75. Note, too, Zechariah 14:9: "And God will be King over all the land; in that day God will be one and His name "One." This is the *ninth* line of the section and it is rendered in the Hebrew in *thirteen* words. And in Isaiah 40:26 "So to whom can I be compared, or equated in holiness? Lift high your eyes and see who created these. The One Who draws out by *number* their host, to each by *name* he calls....

76. An emphasis on this primal unity - the mystic quest for an overcoming of dualities - may be the basis for the seemingly nonrational laws of *kashrut*. Permission is given for the consumption of only those living beings which are "dual" in some way. Only those fish which have both scales and fins are considered *kosher* (Lev. 11:9.) Only those animals which have "split" (two) hoofs, and which chew their cud (chew twice) are considered *kosher* (Lev. 11:26.) Of the *sheretz ha'of*, the "winged swarming things" which walk on all fours, only those with jointed legs (two leg parts) are considered *kosher* (Lev. 11:21.)

77. Another reason may be posited for the use of the word *echad* in lieu of *rishon* in Genesis. The numerical values of the words are reducible - by their digits - to 13 and 9 respectively. *Echad* is spelled *alef* (1), *chet* (8), *dalet* (4) = 13. *Sheni* is spelled *shin* (21; 2 + 1 = 3), *nun* (14; 1 + 4 = 5), *yud* (10; 1 + 0 = 1). 3 + 5 + 1 = 9.

78. Retrocessive spellings are not unusual in the Tanakh. (See my piece entitled *Reversal of Fortune*.) I would argue that *Moshe*, introduced in the book of *Shemot* - meaning "Names" - born of (at first) unnamed parents, is another example; meant as a retrocessive spelling of *ha Shem* - the name.

79. II Kings 22:1 - 23:27.

80. Deuteronomy 34:1-12

81. The four opening Masoretic paragraphs of *Bereshit*, Genesis 1:1-23.

82. Cited in *Torah Gems*, Volume I. Compiled by Aharon Yaakov Greenberg. Translated by Rabbi Dr. Shmuel Himelstein. Jerusalem: Chemed Books and Co., 1992. Page 10.

83. Both *petuchot*.

84. Aryeh Kaplan, translation and commentary. *Sefer Yitzirah: The Book of Creation* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1995) p. 57.

85. Babylonian Talmud, *Pirke Avot* ("Ethics of the Fathers"), 5:22.

86. "Faith."

87. I am grateful to Dr. Sharon Keller for introducing this book to me.

88. Rostvig, *The Hidden Sense*, page 7.

89. Ibid., p. 37.

90. Ibid., p. 36

91. Ibid., p. 4.

92. Ibid., p. 4.

93. Ibid., page 16.

94. Ibid., p. 4.

95. Ibid., p. 15.

96. Ibid., p. 82.

97. Ibid., p. 90.

98. Ibid., p. 76.

99. Ibid., p.16.

100. Ibid., p. 5.

101. Ibid., p. 94.

102. Ibid., p. 94.

103. *Journal of the History of Ideas, XV (1954),* pp. 23-39; cited in *The Hidden Sense*, p. 110, footnote 23.

104. *The Hidden Sense*, p. 110.

105. Ibid., p. 17.

106. *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*. The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text. pp 606-607.106.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 1519.

108. Blenkinsopp. *A History of Prophecy in Israel,* p. 194.

109. Moshe Greenberg, *What are Valid Criteria for Determining Inauthentic Matter in Ezekiel?* in *Ezekiel and His Book*, edited by J. Lust. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986, pp. 123-135.

110. My colleague Rachel Smookler's rabbinical thesis offers a brilliant insight into another connection between the book of Ezekiel and the Torah.

111. *Diog. L., "Pyth," xxii; Cook, Zeus; The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 2, page 161, footnote 28.

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