

SUMS &

Secrets

the hidden world
of Jewish numerology

A ZINE BY HANNAH GELMAN + ZMIRA STOUBER



The Judaism on Our Own Terms Network is a national movement of independent campus Jewish organizations committed to promoting student self-governance and radical inclusivity – both on our individual campuses and in the wider Jewish community.

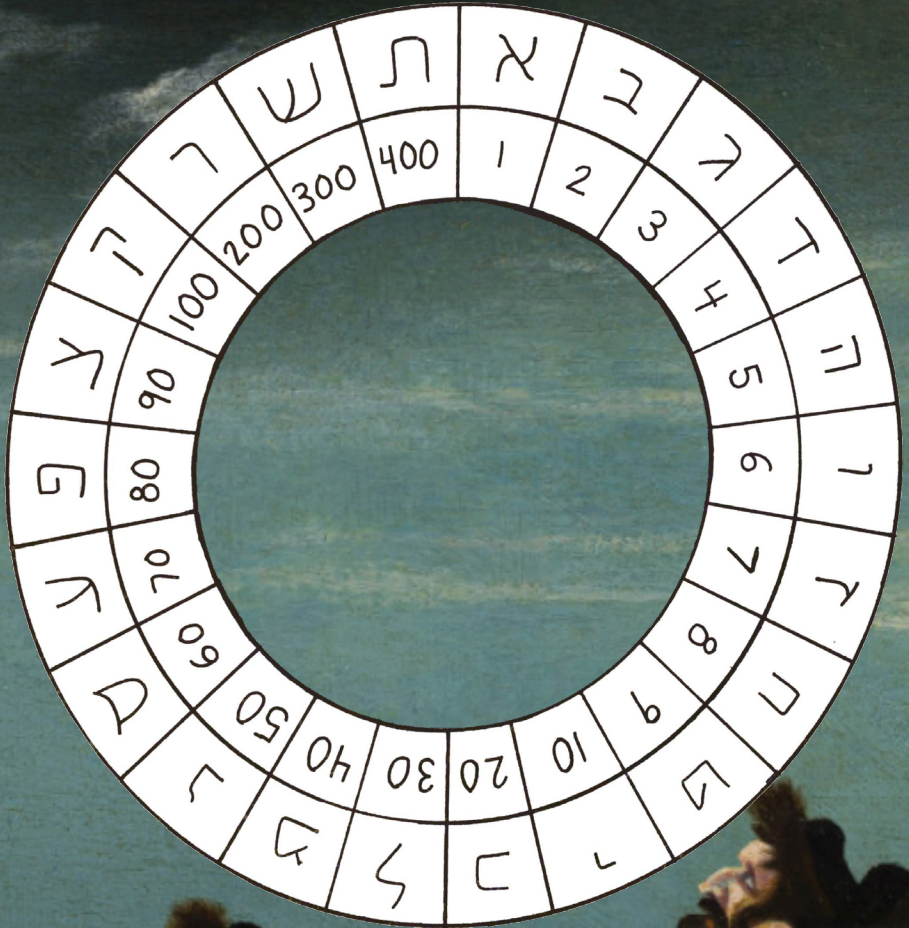
We invite our fellow Jewish students to join with us by either building new student-run groups or committing existing organizations to this mission. Together, we can shape the future of American Jewish discourse and community; the independent Jewish communities of today will foster the independent Jewish leaders of tomorrow.

Check us out on Instagram @judaism_on_our_own_terms, or join the Judaism on Our Own Terms Facebook Group for more information and resources, and to stay up to date with exciting JOOOT happenings!

WHAT IS

GEMATRIA?

Gematria is a Jewish numerological system in which Hebrew letters are substituted for numbers. There are a variety of methods for using this system, but the most common is known as standard gematria. Within standard gematria, each Hebrew letter corresponds to a number. One can calculate the numerical value of a word by adding together the values of its letters. When two apparently unrelated words or phrases have the same numerical value, gematria draws connections between them.



History

"Gematria" derives from the Greek word, "geometria," as used by Plato. While occasionally used in the Talmud and the Midrash, gematria was primarily employed within medieval Jewish mysticism, or Kabbalah. Gematria was first mentioned in a Jewish text in the Sefer Yetzirah, the first Kabbalistic text which dates back to the 2nd century C.E. The medieval Kabbalists believed that God created the universe through the power of the Hebrew letters and their numerical values. Gematria thus enabled Jews to gain secret mystical insights into sacred texts.

Control Versy

Modern Hasidic Jews, a sect of Orthodox Jewry which draws heavily upon Kabbalist thought, continue to use gematria when reading the Torah. In recent years, some secular Jews have begun to use gematria to attempt to predict current political and cultural events, a phenomenon that is often met with criticism among scientists and theologians.

One well-known example of a contemporary prophetic use of gematria is the 1997 book by American journalist Michael Drosnin, "The Bible Code," which illustrates that many historical events, such as the Holocaust, exist in gematriatic form within the Torah. Arguments against Drosnin's and similar works claim that this use of gematria merely explains past events by manipulating parts of the Torah, rather than proves that it contains genuine prophecy.

Examples

Perhaps the most well-known example of gematria is the word 'ח (chai), Hebrew for "life." The numerical value of 'ח is 18:

$$ח = 8$$

$$י = 10 \rightarrow 18$$

As a result, the number 18 is seen as significant in contemporary Jewish culture, and Jews often give monetary gifts and donations in multiples of 18.



Genesis 14:14 says that 318 men made up the house of Abram, the army which he brought to defeat his enemies. The Hebrew word for "speech," נ'ש (*sikh*) has the value of 318:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{ש} &= 300 \\ \text{'} &= 10 \\ \text{נ} &= 8 \end{aligned} \quad \rightarrow \quad 318$$

This connection is interpreted to mean that the power of speaking G-d's name is what brought Abram to victory.



The fifth commandment of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12) states, "Honor thy father and mother,"

כבוד את-אביך ואת-אמך (kavod et aviach v'et imach). The Hebrew word for "honor," כבוד (kavod), has the numerical value of 26:

$$כ = 20$$

$$ב = 2 \rightarrow 26$$

$$ד = 4$$

The Hebrew word for "love," אהבה (ahavah) has the numerical value of

13:

$$א = 1$$

$$ה = 5 \rightarrow 13$$

$$ב = 2$$

$$ה = 5$$

So, the numerical value of "respect,"

כבוד, is double that of "love," אהבה.

This relationship is interpreted to mean that you can honor your parents by giving them a double portion of ♥love! ♥

TRY IT

AT HOME!

Q: In Genesis 28:12, Jacob sees a ladder that ascends from Earth to Heaven. The Hebrew word for “ladder” is סלם (sulam). In Exodus 19–24, God reveals the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Hebrew word for Sinai is סיני. Use the gematria chart at the beginning of the zine to determine the numerical value of the words סלם (sulam), “ladder,” and סיני, “Sinai.” How can we interpret the connection between them?

נלו (sulam) has the value of 130:

ו = 60

ל = 30 → 130

נ = 40

So does 'ינו (Sinai)!

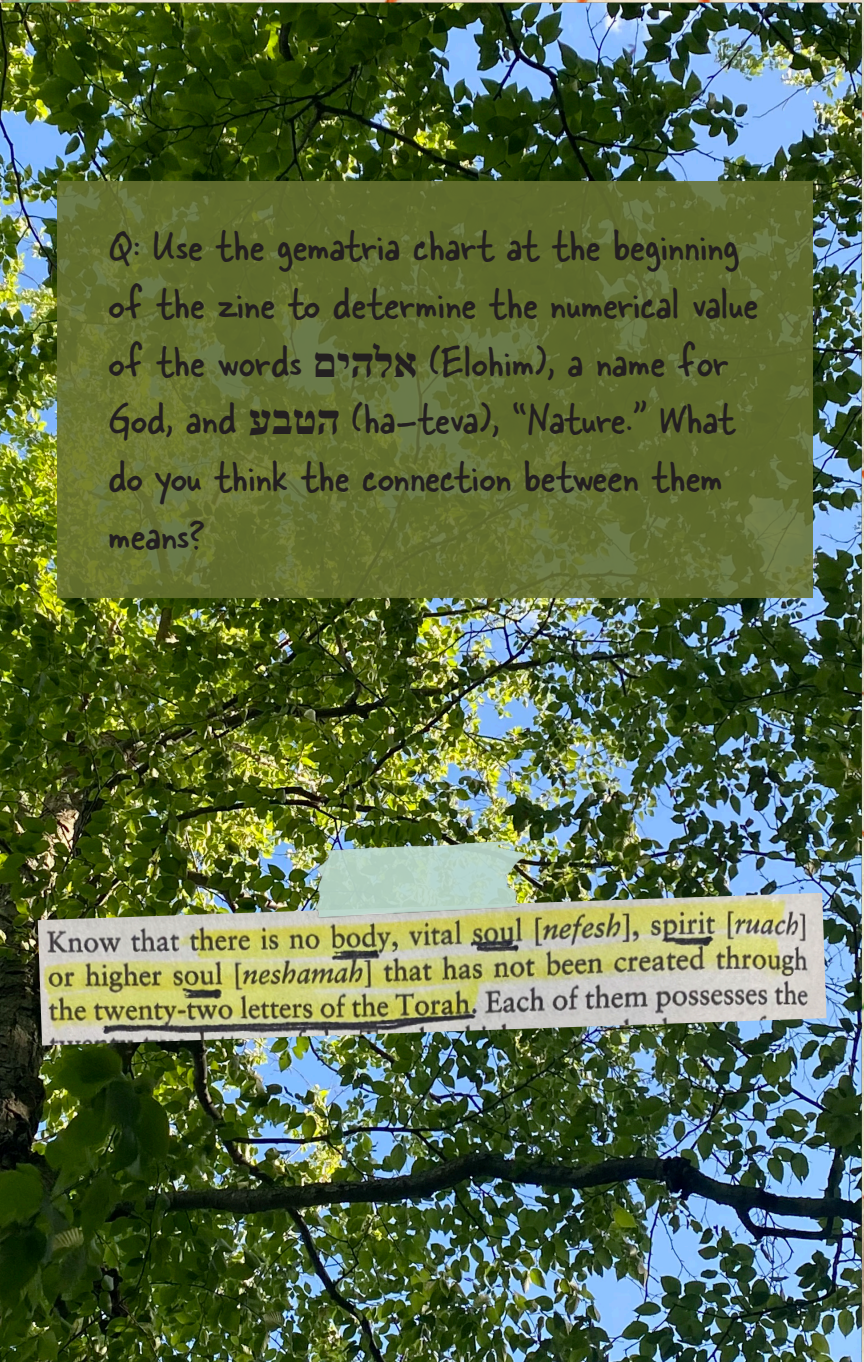
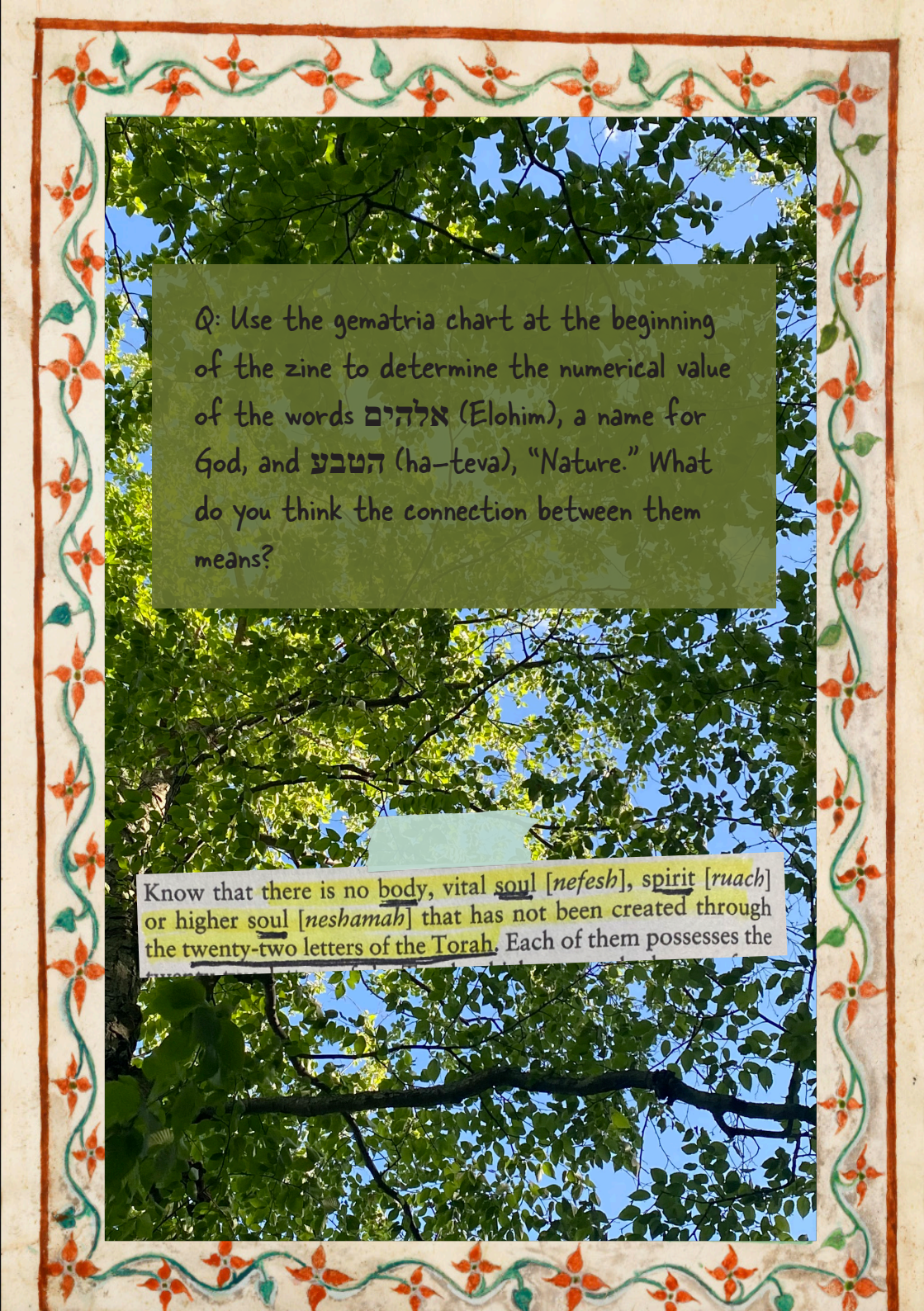
ו = 60

' = 10

י = 50 → 130

' = 10

This connection is interpreted to mean that the Law as revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai is the way in which Jews can reach Heaven; it is the ladder which they ascend.



Q: Use the gematria chart at the beginning of the zine to determine the numerical value of the words אלהים (Elohim), a name for God, and הטבע (ha-teva), "Nature." What do you think the connection between them means?

Know that there is no body, vital soul [*nefesh*], spirit [*ruach*] or higher soul [*neshamah*] that has not been created through the twenty-two letters of the Torah. Each of them possesses the

אלהים (Elohim) has the numerical value of 86:

א = 1

ל = 30

ה = 5 → 86

י = 10

צ = 40

הטבע (ha-Teva) does, too!

ה = 5

ט = 9 → 86

ב = 2

ע = 70

Two possible interpretations of this connection are that G-d and nature are one and the same, or that the particular name "Elohim" refers specifically to divinity as it manifests in the natural world.





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