

Prayers of the Aseres Y'Mei Tshuva – David Levy

נח אלול תשע"ו – 1st October 2016 – שבת פ' נצבים

Talmud, Berachot 40a and Rambam, Hilchot Berachot 1:5 warn that “Whoever deviates from the formula prescribed by *Chazal* (“the Sages”) for the Blessings has not fulfilled his obligation” but *Chazal* have themselves instituted some changes and additions to the usual wording of our prayers during the *Aseres Y'mei S'shuvah* (“Ten days of Repentance”). It is not only the meaning of these prayers that has deep significance but also their very fabric has secret depths beyond comprehension of the ordinary person especially during this time.

In *Nusach Ashkenaz* (but not *Nusach Sefard*) the end of the last Blessing in the *Amidah* for the *Aseres Y'mei S'Shuvah* changes to **עֲשֵׂה הַשְּׁלוֹם** (from **הַמְבַרְךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשְׁלוֹם**) because of a *Gematriya* (total value in numbers of the letters of the word - Hebrew letters each have a numerical value). **עֲשֵׂה** = 381 and **הַשְּׁלוֹם** = 381 and so is the *Gematriya* of the letters of the name of the Angel **סַפְרִיָאֵל** who is in charge of the Book of Life. So also does the *Gematriya* = 381 of the words **זְכַרְנוּ לְחַיִּים** the beginning of the extra passage introduced into the first blessing of the *Amidah* during this period.

Chazal would not have changed the ending of a blessing through *Gematriya* alone if there had not been an ancient text supporting such change (apparently there was one concluding with **עֲשֵׂה הַשְּׁלוֹם אֲדוֹן הַשְּׁלוֹם**). The end of the *Kaddish* in this 10 day period is also changed by adding **ה** before **שְׁלוֹם** (though, as the Artscroll *Machzor* notes, not all authorities are happy with this because **עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו** (without the) **ה** is a direct quote from *Iyov* 25:2)

So during *Aseres Y'mei S'shuvah* the number 381 is encoded in the first passage of the *Amidah* and at the end of the closing passage. What is significant about 381? It is suggested by Rabbi Joseph Pearlman in his Book “Pearls of Life” (upon which this short essay is based) that $381 = 3 \times 127$. The number 127 occurs only twice in *Tanach* - Sarah lived for 127 years and Queen Esther ruled over the 127 provinces of Persia. Both have a (not obvious) connection with *Rosh Hashana*, Sarah because she is believed to have died on hearing about the *Akeidah* which is the principal Torah reading for *Rosh Hashana* and source of the use of a ram's horn for the *Shofar* (and for Esther see below.) 3 represents security and continuity; as it says in *Koheles* 4:12 **וְהַחַוֵּט הַמְשֻׁלָּשׁ לֹא בְמַהֲרָה יִנָּתֵק** “A three-ply cord is not easily severed”.

The verse **זְכַרְנוּ לְחַיִּים** contains 50 letters and this follows the view of the *Aruch HaShulchan* that these 50 letters correspond to the 50 gates of wisdom.

Few are aware that the letter **פ** alone is completely absent from the regular first blessing of the *Amidah* but it is contained twice in **זְכַרְנוּ לְחַיִּים** (in **הַפָּי** and in **בְּסַפֵּר פ**). (*Peh*) represents the mouth and normally we have no right to open our mouths to the King of Kings. *Avruhadram* gives this as the reason why we always preface the *Amidah* with the phrase **ה' שְׁפַתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ** (“Lord open my lips and let my mouth declare Your praise” – the letter **פ** appears 3 times in this phrase). So how is **פ** included in the **זְכַרְנוּ** verse and (queries the *Tur*) how can we ask for our personal needs in the first three blessings of the *Amidah* which are meant just for praise of *HaSh-m*? He quotes *Rav Hai Gaon* that the needs of the public and the emergency situation of the *Aseres Y'mei S'shuvah* allow us to dispense with normal etiquette.

Perhaps also few know that only the letter **ז** (*Zayin* - which as a word means: “weapon”) is normally absent from the second *B'racha* of the *Amidah* yet in the *Yamim Noraim* when the additional sentence **מִי כְמוֹךָ אֱב הִרְחַמְתָּ זִכְרֵךְ** is added the letter **ז** now appears; with the sword of the Angel of Death hovering over us **ז** (*Zayin*) becomes appropriate. (**ז** was also the only letter absent in the blessing given by *Yaakov* to *Yehuda* promising Kingship of Israel but by words not by the sword, *Bereishit* 49:8-12)

Space permits us just one more example of the significance of numbers in our prayers namely 13 and its multiples: **וּבְכֹן** (which uniquely appears in the *Yamim Noraim Amidot*) has a numerical value of 78 i.e. 6×13 – so incidentally does **לֶחֶם** (bread) and **מֶלַח** (salt). This word **וּבְכֹן** (found in only 2 places in *Tanach*) was used by Queen Esther (4:16) to show her apprehension at going unbidden to King *Achashveirosh* to plead for her people. We approach *Hash'm* in similar fear on *Rosh Hashana*. 13 = value of **אֶחָד** (one); the number of the Divine Attributes; the total number of letters in **יִצְחָק יִצְחָק יִצְחָק**; the number of intermediate blessings in the weekday *Amidah*; $2 \times 13 = 26 =$ יְקוּק (*HaSh'm*); $3 \times 13 = 39 =$ the number of prohibited kinds of work on *Shabbat*; $5 \times 13 = 65 =$ אֶל-נִי; $7 \times 13 = 91 =$ אָמֵן. $8 \times 26 = 208 =$ פִּינְחָס and also יִצְחָק; $7 \times 26 = 182 =$ יִצְחָק; $6 \times 26 = 156 =$ יוֹסֵף.

Hopefully a realisation of the amazing relationship and significance of these numbers can inspire us to greater heights in our prayers at this season.