

# Gematria: Secrets of Torah

by [Petr Chylek](#) (August 2025)



Many of us read the Old Testament (Torah) stories and see them as simple tales, outdated and with little relevance to today. However, the Zohar [\[1\]](#) offers a warning:

*Woe to the human being who says that Torah presents mere stories and ordinary words! These stories of Torah are the garment of Torah. Whoever thinks that the garments are the*

*real Torah will have no portion in the world that is coming.*

*There is a garment visible to all. When those fools see someone in a good-looking garment, they look no further. But the essence of a garment is the body, and the essence of the body is the soul. So it is with Torah. She has a body—the commandments of Torah. This body is closed in garments: the stories of this world. Fools of the world look only at the garment, the stories of Torah, and they know nothing more. Those who know more do not look at the garment but rather at the body under the garment. The wise one, the servants of the King, look only at the soul, root of all, real Torah.*

To summarize: garment—stories of Torah; body—commandments of Torah; soul—true Torah. Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572) warns: If you do not study Torah on all levels, you are not fulfilling the commandment to study Torah.

Rabbi Nachmanides (1194-1270) is recognized as an important religious leader, scholar, and mystic. He became well-known for his role in the Barcelona Disputation in 1263, where he defended Judaism against Paulo Christiani, a Jewish convert to Christianity. As is common in political debates, both sides claimed victory. He also built a reputation for his critiques of Moses Maimonides (1138-1204), especially in his Commentary on the Torah.[\[2\]](#) When Maimonides died, Nachmanides was ten years old. Later, when Nachmanides criticized Maimonides, Maimonides had no chance to respond.

In his commentary, Nachmanides suggests that the Torah contains many mysteries, and that those who possess this knowledge aren't permitted to reveal them. Following his advice, I don't want to disclose any secrets. Instead, I want to show you a way for you, the reader, to discover some of

these secrets on your own.

Kabbalah is considered a mystical way to interpret the Torah. One of the many techniques used by Kabbalists is gematria. Gematria depends on the fact that the Hebrew language does not have separate symbols for numbers. Instead, it uses regular letters to represent numbers. The first letter of the alphabet stands for the number one, the second for the number two, and so on (see Table 1). You can find the value of a word by adding up the values of its letters. Sometimes, two or more words can have the same value, and gematria suggests that these words share a special connection.

Table 1: Twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, corresponding Hebrew symbol (a Hebrew letter), and the number they represent.

Aleph (א)= 1	Zayin (ז)= 7	Mem (מ)= 40	Koof (ק)= 100
Bet (ב)= 2	Chet (ח)= 8	Nun (נ)= 50	Resh (ר)= 200
Gimel (ג)= 3	Tet (ט)= 9	Samekh (ס)= 60	Shin (ש)= 300
Dalet (ד)= 4	Yod (י)= 10	Ayin (ע)= 70	Tav (ת)= 400
He (ה)= 5	Kaf (כ)= 20	Pe or Fe (פ)= 80	
Vav (ו)= 6	Lamed (ל)= 30	Tzadi (צ)= 90	

For example, the word Amalek, the name of one of the tribes the Jews encountered after leaving slavery in Egypt, has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word SAFEK, meaning “doubt.”

To understand how gematria works, try applying gematria to the words: Amalek and doubt. Amalek is spelled Ayin-Mem-Lamed-Koof ( $70+40+30+100=240$ ), and doubt, SAFEK in Hebrew, is spelled Samekh-Fe-Koof ( $60+80+100=240$ ).

Therefore, Amalek and SAFEK are represented by the same number (240) in Hebrew, and according to gematria, they can be somehow related. Thus, Amalek signifies DOUBT. In Deuteronomy 25:18, we see that Amalek attacked the Hebrews right after they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. You can interpret the story literally, that a tribe of Amalek attacked the Hebrews.

If you analyze the Torah more deeply using gematria, you'll see that doubt attacked the Jews. They questioned whether they should have left Egypt to wander in the wilderness for a few decades and then die there, or stay in Egypt. In Egypt, they had security, with plenty of food—including fish from the Nile—and ample water; they knew that way of life. Why would they trade it for the insecurity of following Moses through the desert, uncertain about how they would find food, get water, or reach their destination?

Similarly, we might question our decision to give up chasing a bigger house, a nicer car, and other societal comforts as our main life goals, and instead consider following the advice to store treasures in heaven:

*Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. Instead, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).*

The case of Amalek and SAFEK (doubt) shows how gematria works. To give you a real task to discover one of the secrets of Torah, you'll need the chart that shows how to turn Hebrew letters into numbers (Table 1), along with a set of words and their spellings that you want to analyze (Table 2). Each

letter has a unique symbol, and each symbol is assigned a specific number. Then, you add the numbers for each letter to get a total for the whole word. Finally, words that have the same number are considered related.

Table 2: Names of Abraham, his two wives, and Abraham's second son, and their Hebrew spelling

Name	Hebrew spelling	Name	Hebrew spelling
Abraham	Aleph-Bet-Resh-He-Mem	Hagar	He-Gimel-Resh
Sarah	Shin-Resh-He	Itzak	Yod-Tzadi-Chet-Koof

Using Tables 1 and 2, you should be able to identify the numbers that correspond to the names of Abraham, his two wives, Sarah and Hagar, and his second son, Isaac. By comparing their numbers, you can determine which two are connected. This is a hidden secret that is not immediately apparent from reading the story of the Torah. Now, go ahead and try it. What secret have you discovered?

I believe that over the centuries, as rabbis studied Kabbalah and experimented with gematria, some of them may have uncovered the aforementioned "secret," but they chose to stay silent. They didn't want to create trouble and rock the boat. They followed Rabbi Nachmanides' advice to keep the Torah's secrets undisclosed.

According to the story in the Torah, Abraham and his wife Sarah struggled to have a child for a long time. Eventually, Sarah asked her husband, Abraham, to take her maidservant, Hagar, as a second wife (some authors refer to her as a concubine). This is how Abraham's first son, Ishmael, was born. This is not a new idea; as the Hammurabi code [\[3\]](#) shows, it was a common practice in the land.

Later, God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child of their own, and this came true when Abraham was a hundred years old and Sarah was ninety. Since Sarah was past the age when women usually have children, this is seen as a miracle God performed for the Jewish people. The gematria, however, offers an alternative explanation. In line with Nachmanides' rule of secrecy, you, however, are not allowed to tell others.

[1] D. Matt, *Zohar, The Book of Enlightenment*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey, 1983.

[2] R. Nachmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Shilo Publishing House, Brooklyn, NY, 1999.

[3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code\\_of\\_Hammurabi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code_of_Hammurabi).

## [Table of Contents](#)

**Petr Chylek** is a theoretical physicist who has served as a professor at several universities in the US and Canada. He has authored over 150 publications in scientific journals. For his scientific contributions, he was named a Fellow of the American Geophysical Union and a Fellow of the Optical Society of America. He credits his daughter, Lily A. Chylek, for her comments and suggestions on the early draft of this article.

**Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)**