



1. Clyde Haberman, *For Japanese, Learning to Receive*, NY Times 3/14/11

In his office, Mr. Sakurai scrolled through a long list of donors on a computer screen. Most of the names — “my gut feeling is 90 percent,” he said — were not Japanese. “Everybody is very much touched by the sympathy and generosity of American people,” he said.

Some people gave \$1,000 and similarly large sums. But most gifts were much smaller: \$50 here, \$25 there. They came from the heart, not from a deep pocket. On occasion, there was a donation of \$18. It seemed an odd figure to Mr. Sakurai, until he learned that it meant the donor was probably Jewish. Jews often make charitable contributions in multiples of 18. In the Hebrew alphabet, letters have numerical equivalents. Eighteen represents “chai,” Hebrew for “life.”

Are “lucky numbers” legal in Judaism?

2. Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:9-13

Do not eat blood; do not read omens or calculate propitious times.

For you are entering the land Hashem your Gd is giving you; do not learn to practice the abhorrences of those nations. There shall not be found among you one who passes his son or daughter through fire, or engages in sorcery, or calculates times or uses omens or magic. Or one who practices charms or inquires of *ov* or *yidoni*, or seeks the dead. For all who perform these deeds are abhorrent to Gd, and because of these abhorrences Hashem is eliminating them from before you. You shall be complete with Hashem your Gd.

3. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Guide of the Perplexed 3:37, Friedlander edition

When you read the books which I mentioned to you. you will find that witchcraft, which will be described to you, is part of the customs of the Sabeans, Kasdim, Chaldeans, and to a higher degree of the Egyptians and Canaanites. They caused others to believe, or they themselves believed, that by means of these arts they would perform wonderful things in reference to an individual person, or to the inhabitants of a whole country, although no analogy and no reasoning can discover any relation between these performances of the witches and the promised result... It is the object and centre of the whole Law to abolish idolatry and utterly uproot it, and to overthrow the opinion that any of the stars could interfere for good or evil in human matters, because it leads to the worship of stars.

4. Rabbi Moses Nachmanides (13th century Spain), Commentary to Deuteronomy 18:9

The blessed Creator, when He created everything from nothing, made the upper realms direct the lower realms which are beneath them. And He placed power over the land and all that is in it in the stars and constellations, according to their direction and gaze upon them, as has been tested by astrology.

5. Rabbi Moses Nachmanides (13th century Spain), Commentary of Ramban to Deuteronomy 18:13

The meaning of “You shall be complete with Hashem your Gd” is that we are to dedicate our hearts to Gd alone, and trust that Gd alone engineers all and knows the truth of all future events, and from Gd alone we should seek the future, from His prophets or His pious ones, meaning the *urim v’tumim*.

6. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idolatry 11:16

All of these are words of falsehood and deception, which the early idolaters used to trick the nations to follow them, and Israel, who are wise and educated, should not follow these matters of emptiness or put the thought into their hearts that these are beneficial. As it says, “For there is no omen-reading in Jacob, and no sorcery in Israel.”... Anyone who believes in these and similar matters, thinking in his heart that they are true and wise, and the Torah prohibited them, is only from among the fools and those who lack knowledge...

7. Talmud, Chullin 95b

Any *nachash* which is not like that of Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, and Jonathan son of Saul, is not *nachash*.

8. Genesis 24:12-14

And [Abraham's servant] said: Gd, Lord of my master Abraham, prepare before me today, and perform kindness with my master Abraham. Behold, I will stand by a spring of water, and the daughters of the local population will go out to draw water. And the girl to whom I say, "Please incline your pitcher, and I will drink," and she will say, "Drink, and I will also give your camels to drink," she will be the one You have identified for Your servant Isaac, and through this I will know that You have performed kindness with my master.

9. Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein (19th-20th century Eastern Europe), Torah Temimah to Genesis 24 #17

It appears clear in this matter that in truth, the only prohibited *nichush* is when one links the *nichush* to the event itself, without mentioning Gd's Name and without asking Gd for aid in causing that event. Then it appears to involve magic...

10. Samuel I 14:8-10

And Jonathan said: Behold, we will cross to the men and be exposed to them. If they say thus to us, "Remain still until we reach you," we will remain where we are and not ascend to them. But if they say thus to us, "Ascend to us," we will ascend, for Gd has given them into our hands, and this is our sign.

11. Don Isaac Abarbanel (15th-16th century Portugal/Spain/Italy) to Samuel I 14:10

The test was that if they would speak the message and words themselves which Jonathan said, this would only be from Divine supervision, placing the message in their mouths, the spirit of Gd sparking in them to tell them what to do. This was a level of Divine inspiration, and so he chose this.

12. Rashi (11th century France), Commentary to Samuel I 14:10

If they will say thus, "Ascend to us" – the fear of Gd would be in their hearts, fearing to budge from their place.

13. Rabbi David Kimchi (12th century France), Commentary to Samuel I 14:9

This and the like are messages one hears and his heart becomes strong, for they are a sign and symbol of the deed...

14. Summary: Three cases of acceptable "lucky numbers"

- Messages from Gd
- Practical in their own right
- Emotional/Psychological boost, which do not determine one's actions

Messages from Gd

15. Talmud, Chagigah 14b

Four entered *Pardes*... Ben Azzai gazed and died, Ben Zoma gazed and was harmed, Acher chopped down the growth and Rabbi Akiva exited safely.

16. Talmud, Bava Batra 134a

They said that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai did not leave any verse, mishnah, talmudic discussion, legal tradition, biblical analysis, biblical decree, rabbinic decree, logical argument, pleonasm, astronomy lesson, *gematria*, parable, demonic oaths, speech of people among the palm trees, speech of the angels, large matter or great matter. Large matters are the accounts of the *Merkavah*, small matters are the questions of Abbaye and Rava.

17. Rabbi Chaim Vital (16th century Israel), Shaar haMitzvot 1a

[W]ith regards to Torah study, which is one of the 248 commandments, one does not fulfill this mitzvah unless one studies the PaRDeS of the Torah, which is the acronym of Peshat, Remez, Derash, and Sod. Within each of these aspects each person must strive to achieve. If one does not do this, one is missing an aspect of the mitzvah of Torah study...

18. Genesis 47:2, and Baal haTurim commentary of Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (14th century Spain)

And from the edge of his brothers, he took five men, and he displayed them before Pharaoh.

החלשין = ומקצה אחיו לקח = 403/404

19. Genesis 47:6, and Baal haTurim commentary of Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (14th century Spain)

The land of Egypt is before you; in the best of the land place your father and your brothers. They will dwell in the land of Goshen...

גושן = במיטב הארץ = 359

20. Mishnah, Avot 3:18

Seasons (alt. astronomical circuits) and *gematriaot* are appetizers/accompaniment for knowledge.

21. Rabbi Menachem Meiri (13th-14th century France), Commentary to Avot 3:18

And it said that after he completes himself in the wisdom of the Talmud, he should begin other fields of study. And it said that the entrée into those is the sciences, the seasons [alt. astronomical circuits] and constellations and *gematriaot* and hints to the study of mathematics and numbers and geometry and measurement. And from them one will come to understanding nature and the Divine, as is known to those who understand.

22. Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (14th-15th century Majorca/Algiers), Magen Avot commentary to Avot 3:18

And *gematriaot* is to calculate letters, and *gematria* is also the name in Latin for the study of calculations and measurements, which is the study of engineering. And this is not of actual law. The sages already knew that an unspecified period of *nazir* is thirty days, and they wanted to sharpen the students by linking this with a *gematria* that יהיה is 30 (days) in *gematria* as per Nazir 5a. And the fact that a *hin* is 12 *log* was known to them, and they linked it to Exodus 30:31, "the oil of sacred anointing, this [זֶה] shall be for Me," as in Keritot 5b and Horiyot 11b... All of this is appetizer/accompaniment, not of the essence, and one does not receive reward for [studying] them as one receives for actual law.

23. Rabbi Baruch halevi Epstein (19th-20th century Eastern Europe), Torah Temimah to Deuteronomy 32:8

Our Sages regularly assign numbers from mundane issues as parallel to numbers of great associations and holiness, like 248 commandments parallel to 248 body parts, and the like.

Messages to Gd

24. Rabbi David Avudraham (13th century Spain), the Amidah

Some explain that "Amen" in *gematria* is 91, the combined value of two Names: the four-letter Name and Ado—nai.

25. Rabbi David Avudraham (13th century Spain), Blessings recited with Shema

Some say *Kel Melech Ne'eman* at the start of Shema, to complete 248 words in Shema, for a midrash says, "Proverbs 7:2 says, 'Guard My mitzvot and live.' Guard the 248 words in Shema and Gd will guard your 248 body parts."

Messages about that which is being counted

26. Cycles of Seven Sabbath, Sabbatical Year, Jubilee Year

27. Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman (19th-20th century Germany), Commentary to Genesis 21:27-30

Seven is the Divine number, the sacred number, the root and basis of which may be found in the number of the days of Creation. Because of this, they would take seven objects at the time of an oath. And this is the source for the verb *l'hishava* (to swear), meaning, to obligate oneself with the sacred number seven (*sheva*).

28. Mishnah Avot 5

The world was created with ten Divine declarations...

There were ten generations from Adam to Noah... There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham...

Our ancestor Abraham was tested with ten tests...