

Since I know not everyone gets the Milton Times, click [here](#) to read my annual December Holiday message. Shabbat Shalom RabbiB

By Rabbi Alfred H. Benjamin  
Congregation Beth Shalom of the Blue Hills

God is Love, Just do the Math

Whether it's a haiku, limerick, or a poem that utilizes iambic pentameter, we know and embrace the idea that words can be presented in styles that contain their own unique, inner rules and rhythms. Such is the case with Biblical Hebrew and numerology – the system where each letter in the alphabet has a numerical value ( א Aleph, the first letter = 1, ב Bet, the second letter = 2, etc), and those values have meaning.

This comes to mind every time I see signs or posters that proclaim “God is Love.” While the Christian Bible / New Testament states this quite clearly in 1 John 4:16, that is not the case in the Hebrew Bible. But believe me, it's there, once you do the math.

The central idea of monotheism is that there is One God, as in “the Lord is One.” In Hebrew the word for “one” is אָחַד/EChad which is made up of the three letters Aleph, Chet and Dalet whose numerical values respectively are 1,8 and 4. Add those up and you get the number 13. Meanwhile, the Hebrew word for “love” is אָהַב/AHaVaH whose numerical values are 1,5,2 and 5. A little addition and again we have 13.

This no coincidence. The idea is that One and Love are numerical synonyms. But there is more! The Hebrew Bible's four letter Name of God that the Witnesses pronounce as Jehovah\* and is spelled out using the English letters YHVH gives us Yud = 10, Hey = 5, Vav = 6 and another Hey = 5. Add that up and you get.....26. In other words, we are presented with a compound synonym: One/13 + Love/13 = God/YHVH/26.

All this is fine and dandy, but the power of this realization really takes off when combined with the idea expressed in Genesis that human beings – all of us, regardless of shape, size, ability or other ability, orientation or faith – are created in God's image. The point being that God is Love = that we have the ability to love too.

Imitating Divine love isn't easy, but it is one we are challenged to strive for. How do we know that? Prior to the Torah commanding us to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might,” it presents us with two other love demands: 1) “Love your neighbor as yourself,” and 2) “Love the stranger.” It is as if God is saying, your love for Me must only come – maybe even can only come – after you have figured out how to love people who you may find it difficult to love: your neighbor and those who, for you, are alien, strange or different.

Wishing you all lives filled with love that is both given and received this season and every season of the year.

- - In Jewish tradition, this Name is not said aloud, and only written out in Hebrew in sacred texts.