



Shemini

The deeper meaning of numbers in Jewish tradition

There is only one *parsha* that has a title containing a number, and that is *Parshat Shemini*—*Shemini* meaning "the eighth." This presents us with an opportunity to study the significance of some of the key numbers in Jewish tradition.

In Kabbalistic teachings, the number six represents the perfection of nature. That's why Hashem took six days to create our natural world. The number seven represents the highest level of perfection that a human being can achieve. Indeed, the seventh day of the week, *Shabbat*, is referred to as being "*me'ein Olam Haba*"— it is the closest we on Earth can come to experiencing life in the celestial spheres of the World to Come.

Let's skip eight for a moment and move on to the number nine. In our tradition, the number nine represents Almighty God. At the end of the *Shema*, we say the words "*Ani Hashem Elokeichem*", and to "*Hashem Elokeichem*", we add the word "*Emet*" from the following paragraph. *Emet* means truth, and the Talmud tells us that *Emet* — truth — is the seal of God. That is why we never separate truth from Hashem.

The *gematria* of *Emet* is 441, and $4 + 4 + 1 = 9$, indicating that the number nine represents the truth and perfection of Hashem. In mathematics, there is also an amazing fact: every number divisible by nine will have digits that add up to nine or a multiple of nine, further suggesting that nine symbolises overall perfection.

So, if seven represents the perfection of humankind, and nine represents Hashem, then eight is the bridge between us and our Creator. This is why the circumcision of a baby boy — the establishment of a covenant between us and Hashem — takes place on the eighth day. That is also why the festival of *Chanukah* lasts for eight days.

On *Chanukah*, we recall the miracles that Hashem performed to guarantee our survival. The festival reminds us of these extraordinary miracles and how

they reaffirmed our connection to Hashem and our people.

This concept lies at the heart of *Parashat Shemini*. It begins with the words "*Vayehi bayom hashemini*"—"And it came to pass on the eighth day." For seven days, the people in the wilderness prepared the Tabernacle for its dedication. They brought sacrifices for seven days with no visible response from Heaven. But on the eighth day, "*Vateitzei aish min hashamayim*" — a fire came from Heaven and consumed the offering on the altar. This moment was the bridge between Heaven and Earth, represented by the number eight.

At this time of year, there is an especially powerful and relevant message for us relating to the number eight. For seven times seven days, we count the *Omer* to remember the 49-day journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai. Then, at the start of the eighth week, we commemorate the anniversary of the giving of the Torah by Hashem to the Jewish people.

That event — the giving of the Torah — was the ultimate bridge between Heaven and Earth, between Almighty God and humankind. Right now, as we count the *Omer* from the beginning of *Pesach* until the festival of *Shavuot*, we recall the journey of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to divine revelation at Mount Sinai.

So, at this time, let us fully appreciate the perfection of nature in which we live. Let us strive to achieve the greatest possible levels of human excellence. And let us reach out Heavenwards, so that the bridge between ourselves and our Creator may be as strong as possible — allowing us to experience the deepest meaning and greatest happiness, in the world that Hashem has so graciously endowed us with.

Shabbat Shalom.

D'VAR TORAH

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