THE NUMBERED SEQUENCE
AS A LITERARY DEVICE
IN THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD

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Robert Gordis (1971, pp. 95–103) has demonstrated the use of the heptad as a literary device by the Biblical and Rabbinic authors. He avoids the risks in this kind of exercise by adducing evidence to show that these authors really had the numbered sequence in mind when they composed their works.

Without supplementary evidence it would be precarious in the extreme to conclude that the occurrence of a given number of instances in a literary unit is anything but coincidental. In any given case the number of examples listed, be it three, seven, or ten, may happen to be the actual number involved, and not a matter of literary style.

U. Cassuto (1959) has brilliantly suggested, for instance, that sequences of seven can be detected in the Pentateuchal narratives. He is often correct in seeing this pattern as a conscious striving for a literary usage based on this number. Yet in some instances, at least, coincidence cannot be ruled out. In general, there is little difficulty in discovering seven words or ideas recurring in any literary work. It is an amusing exercise to discover the number "seven" in Cassuto's own writings.

If one should be on guard against finding the number seven when it is not really present, it is all the more necessary when the search is for a smaller number like three. The author may have adopted this number "unconsciously," because of the natural tendency of the human mind to think of things in threes. Consequently, when the claim is advanced that the appearance of a given number in a text is an intentional literary form, one must adduce sufficient evidence to rule out sheer fortuitousness.

In his splendid pioneering essay on the theme of this article (1977), Shamma J. Friedman quotes, in the name of Jacob of Izbica (1910, p. 8),

the following illustration of a numbered sequence as a conscious literary device in the Babylonian Talmud. The opening *sūgyā* in tractate *Pesahim* considers whether the term *ōr* means 'day' or 'night'. There are fourteen proposed proofs: the first seven from Scripture, the second seven from early Rabbinic sources. In the first set of proofs, all the instances are advanced to demonstrate that *ōr* means 'day', except for the fourth, the middle one, which argues that *ōr* means 'night'. In the second set of proofs, all indicate that *ōr* means 'night', except, again, for the fourth, the middle one, which is that *ōr* means 'day'.

This example provides an excellent key to the proper methodology to be pursued in an inquiry of this kind. Two sets of seven proofs certainly suggest contrivance but it still remains somewhat conjectural. It becomes entirely convincing when it is seen that there is not only the seven sequence but the arrangement in a pattern of 3a-1b-3a; 3b-1a-3b. To attribute not only the numbered sequence itself but also the particular neat arrangement to coincidence is to be blind to the obvious.

I cannot pretend that all the following examples of numbered sequence in the Babylonian Talmud meet the same rigorous test as the above illustration (this is not always possible and much remains speculative) but I have tried to exercise as high a degree of caution as I can.

THREE

The use of this number as especially significant is widespread in the Rabbinic literature. We may begin with the series of sayings in sets of three in *Abot*[1] and proceed to the three patriarchs[2], the three leaders (Moses, Aaron and Miriam)[3] and the three-fold division of Priests, Levites and Israelites.[4]

Friedman has provided important evidence for the use of the number three in the structure of the *sūgyā* in the Babylonian Talmud. What has not hitherto been noted, so far as I am aware, is the remarkable recurring expression in the Babylonian Talmud[5]: 'Hear from this three things' (*šemā'*

1. E.g. 'they said three things' (*Abot* 1:1); 'The world exists on three things' (1:2) and the sets of three sayings further in *Abot*. For the numbered sequence in the Mishna, see Neusner (1977).

2. See e.g. 'one only calls three by the name patriarch', *Berakot* 16b.

3. See Mic 6:3; *Šabbat* 88a; *Ta'anit* 9a.

4. See, e.g., Mishnah *Ta'anit* 4:1; *Baba Qamma* 38a.

5. *Berakot* 27a; *Šabbat* 40b; *'Erubin* 10a; *Pesahim* 4a; 5b; 97a; 107a; *Becah* 35b; *Mo'ed Qatan* 16a; 20b; *Yebamot* 46b; *Ketubot* 21b; 90b; *Nedarim* 7b; 8b; *Qiddušin* 7a; 46a; *Baba Meci'a* 63a; *Baba Batra* 24a; *Sanhedrin* 19a; *'Abodah Zarah* 43a; *Zebahim* 78a; *Menahot* 42b; *Hullin* 106a; *Niddah* 30a. *Cf.* the note of R. Akiba Eger (*Gilyon haššas*) to *Nedarim* 7b

minnah telāṭ) i.e. when inferences are drawn from a Tannaitic or other Rabbinic source it is always three, never more or less, that are drawn. The only explanation of this phenomenon is that it was the accepted procedure to draw three and only three conclusions from any given source; that is to say, it is a wholly contrived formulation in no way suggesting any real 'objective' examination of the source for the purpose of discovering the conclusions to be drawn from it.

Another three-formulation is found when a statement is made regarding which authority is to be followed in practice. Unless there is a strong element of pure formality and contrivance, it is difficult to see why three and only three exceptions are generally stated: 'In all cases our master followed the view of Rab except in three where he followed the view of Samuel'; 'The ruling is in accordance with Rabbah against R. Joseph except for three cases'; 'The ruling is in accordance with R. Johanan against Resh Lakish except for three cases'; 'Wherever the views of Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel occur in our Mishnah they are followed except in three cases'; 'The ruling is in accordance with Raba aginst Abbaye except in the cases of *ya'al qegam*'[10] (i.e., two sets of three, although this in all probablility Saboraic). Unless there is a formal pattern to all this (i.e. the rules of the game demand that there must always be an exception of three or a multiple of three) it is hard to see why an authority whose opinion is valued should not be followed in three and only three cases. It is, however, possible that the formalism in these instances is not due to the use of a literary device by the editors. There may have been a tacit understanding in the Babylonian schools that it is unfair to his opponents to give the total victory to one teacher. For his protagonist to be protected from complete humiliation, deference must be paid to the protagonist's opinion in three cases. In any event the use of three is not arbitrary but intentional.

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that a fourth rule could have been derived. Also see *Qiddušin* 52a: four things could be derived from the Mishnah but Rab seized hold of three! The sole exception is *Pesahim* 105b. where eight matters are derived. However, this is in a category of its own, since it is more in the nature of a mere list of items than an actual series of derivations.

6. *Šabbat* 22a;; 40a; Pesahim 101a; *Menahot* 41b. *Cf.* 'The ruling is in accordance with Rab in these three, whether he takes the stricter or the more lenient view,' *Beṛah* 4b.

7. *Baba Batra* 114b.

8. *Yebamot* 36a.

9. *Ketubot* 77a.

10. *Qiddušin* 52a; *Baba Meṣi'a* 22b; *Sanhedrin* 27a. *Cf.* 'all instances except three', *Šabbat* 3a; the three rules of Samuel's father, *Šabbat* 65a; the three offences for which martyrdom is demanded, *Pesahim* 25a b; the three venerable sages whom people follow, *Berakot* 22a; the three rules given to Moses at Sinai, *Te'anit* 3a.

The number three is pervasive in the realm of Aggadah, as the follow-
ing examples show. 'A certain Gallilean preached: 'Blessed is the All-mer-
ciful who gave a three-fold Torah to a three-fold people through three
persons on the third day of the third month'.[11] 'Scholars are wont to depart
from the strict truth in three matters'[12]. 'All a man's expenses are fixed at
the beginning of the year except for the amount he spends on Sabbaths,
Festivals and the education of his children'.[13] 'One who loves schol-
ars . . . One who respects scholars . . . One who fears scholars . . .'[14].
'There are three who go down to Hell . . .'[15]. 'Three persons made an im-
proper request . . .'[16]. Many further examples can be easily be adduced.

Far greater caution must be exercised before a three-fold division can
be detected in the structure of the *sûgya* since here the three sequence is
not stated explicitly.[17] There are, however, so many instances of a three-
fold pattern that its very ubiquitousness does suggest that the pattern was
consciously adopted. It is obviously impossible within the limits of an ar-

11. *Šabhat* 88a.

12. *Baba Mecīa* 23b.

13. *Becah* 17a see note of B. Ransburg (Vilna edition) that in the parallel passage in the
Midrash *Roš Hodeš* is also included. But if *three* is intentional in the Babylonian Talmud it
would explain why *Roš Hodeš* is not counted since to include it would result in one time too
many.

14. *Šabhat* 23b.

15. *Baba Mecīa* 58b.

16. *Ta'anit* 4a and see 2a for the three keys. The following are instances of the use of three
in the Tannaitic literature: *Berakot* 3a: 'I learned from him three things . . . three times a
day . . . I destroyed My house . . . (three items); *ibid.*'Three reasons why one must not
enter a ruin'; Mishnah *Pesahim* 3:4 'Three women . . . '; *Becah* 32b 'Three have no
life . . .'; *Hagigah* 3b three conditions for determining whether a man is an imbecile; *Hagi-
gah* 16a six chacteristics of demons, three resembling those of angels, three those of humans;
Pesahim 42b the six of Hezekiah, three disapproved of by the Sages; *Šabhat* 88b three char-
acteristics of the *ne'elābim*; Mishnah *Baba Mecīa* 4:10 three illustrations of 'wronging with
words' (in the Baraita *Baba Mecīa* 58b there are five); Mishnah *Šabhat* 2:6-7; Mishnah *Git-
tin* 9:4. Some further illustrations from the Amoraim in the Babylonian Talmud are: *Berakot*
31a three examples of a fixed law; *Qiddusin* 11a three cases where the distinction applies;
Ketubot 111a the three oaths; *Pesahim* 62b 'If Beruriah . . who learnt *three*
hundred . . . from *three* hundred . . . and yet in *three* years . . . and you . . . in *three*
months'; *Pesahim* 85b the *three* who are haughty and the three-fold reply: Not your
cup . . . your wine . . . and my stomach'.

17. See examples given by Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 392-393. Some further examples are:
Mo'ed Qatan 18b, three proofs regarding *hol ha-mo'ed*; *Qiddušin* 43a; three different reasons
for Shammai's opinion; *Qiddusin* 35a, three proofs that negative precepts are binding upon
women; *Quiddušin* 43a-b, a set of three cases; *Qiddušin* 50b-51a, a set of three proofs. Also
relevant to our theme is the whole idea of presumptive state (*hazākāh*) being established by a
three-fold occourance, see *'Enciqlopidíyah Talmūdīt* (1970, pp. 453 ff.).

ticle to examine all the *sûgyôt* in the Babylonian Talmud. Pending further investigation, the following examples may serve as pointers. These are illustrations of what appears to be an intentional striving for a three-fold pattern in the opening *sûgyôt* of tractate *Qiddušin*. In 4a, a Baraita is quoted and a difficulty raised to which *three* replies are given: by Rabbah, Abbaye and Mar bar R. Aahi. In 5b a Baraita is quoted where the implications of the first clause seem to be in contradiction to those of the second clause and *three* possible solutions are advanced. In 6a a Baraita states six different formulae for betrothal, all of which are valid, but these are not presented as a list of six but of two lists, each containing three items. The reason is given: 'The Tanna heard them in threes and thus he recorded them'. 6b-7a discusses *three* cases in which indirect giving of the betrothal money by the man to the woman is valid. In 7b *three* betrothal problems, all of the same type, are presented: by Raba, R. Pappa and R. Ashi. In 8b a Baraita is quoted containing three betrothal laws, all of the same nature. To each of these an Amoraic comment is added, again, all of the same nature. In 8b-9a *three* cases are recorded of a man asking a woman if she will agree to be his betrothed to which she gave an ambiguous reply. In each case the same ruling is given: twice by R. Hama and once by R. Zabid. This latter illustration would, in itself, prove nothing. It may be that, although each ruling is identical with the others, the editors saw fit to record all three simply because there happened to be three rulings. But since the pattern can be detected in so many instances, does it not become more plausible to suggest that in the Talmudic *sûgya* we have a literary work, the structure of which requires this particular pattern?

The following examples, taken at random from various *sûgyôt*, would seem to strengthen our case. In *Pesaḥim* 7b *three* proofs are presented on the question whether the benediction to be recited over the search for leaven is *lebā'ēr* or *'al bi'ûr* and then *three* proof-texts are quoted to show that the term *'ober* means 'before'. In *Beraḳot* 3b–4a *three* solutions are provided to deal with an apparent contradiction about David rising at midnight: by R. Oshea, R. Zera and R. Ashi. The further question is then raised: since Moses did not know when it was midnight how could David have known? To this *three* replies are given: by the anonymous Gemara, by R. Zera and by R. Ashi. Later on in the same passage, *three* examples are given of those who feared that a divine promise given to them may not be realized because they had sinned: David, the patriarch Jacob (given, incidentally, by R. *Jacob* bar Iddi[18]) and the people as a whole. In *Pesaḥim*

18. On the phenomenon of a teacher making a statement on a theme bearing his own name see Jacobs (1977, pp. 56-57, n. 30).

42b three *Bāraitôt* are quoted, each beginning with: 'Let a man sell all he possesses in order to marry the daughter of a scholar'. In Bēcāh 25b *three* plants serve to rebuke three different types of sinners and there are *three* creatures who are brazen. *Pesahim* 3b questions the propriety of Abigail 'riding' (when she should have sat side-saddled as befits a modest woman). To this *three* replies are given: because she was afraid that she would otherwise have fallen off, in fear of the night or in fear of David or in fear of the steepness of the mountain. In *Sotah* 4b *three* replies are given to the question how could Ben Azzai, a bachelor, have known the details of the marital act. In *Ta'anit* 11b and *'Abodah Zarah* 34a it is related that when Mar Ukba came to Ganzaka they put *three* questions to him which he was unable to answer. The point to be noted here is that the three questions have no connection with one another and, it would seem, that they simply follow the demand of the three-fold pattern.[19] In *Pesahim* 119a the verses of Psalm 118 are said to have been uttered by David, his brothers, Jesse, Samuel or all them together. The distribution is: DJBS; BDJS; ASDA (Samuel, David, all of them). There are thus *three* sets of four and, moreover, David is the first in the first set, the second in the second set and the third in the third set.

FIVE

The significance of the number five in the Jewish tradition is undoubtedly to be attributed to the Pentateuch.[20] The following examples of its use in what appears to be a contrived manner in the Babylonian Talmud are taken at random. In *Hullin* 2a-3b an apparent contradiction is noted in the first Mishnah of the tractate. *Five* solutions are attempted: by Rabbah bar Ulla; Rabina; Abbaye; Raba and R. Ashi. In *Hullin* 16b a saying about the *five* acts for which a reed may not be used is attributed either to a Baraita or to R. Hisda. *Hullin* 27a-b discusses the Scriptural basis for the requirement that the act of *šehitāh* takes the form of a cut at the animal's neck. *Five* possible proofs are quoted: by R. Kahana; R. Yemar; the School of R. Ishmael; R. Hiyya and 'another Tanna'. In *Hullin* 29a there are *five* attempted proofs on the organ of a fowl to be severed in the act of *šehitāh*. In *Hullin* 29a there are *five* replies to the question, which clause of

19. Even if the correct reading is not Mar Ukba but R. Akiba (see Rashi and Malter, 1928, p. 79) this text is obviously Amoraic, not Tannaitic.

20. For the Tannaitic literature see, e.g., Mishnah *Baba Qamma* 1:4, a set of five; Mishnah *Baba Meci'a* 4:1, five instances; 4:7, five *perūtôt*; 4:8, five fifths; Mishnah *Megillah* 3:3, five matters in connection with a disused synagogue. In the Amoraic literature see e.g. *Šabbat* 60b, five and five are beautiful.

the Mishnah deals with a sacred animal and which with a non-sacred animal: by R. Kahana; R. Simi bar Ashi; R. Pappa; R. Ashi and R. Simeon b. Lakish. *Ḥullin* 43a records *five* different laws regarding *ṭerēp̄āh* stated by R. Isaac b. Joseph in the name of R. Johanan.

We have noted above the sermon of the Gallilean in *Šabbat* 88a in which there is a series of threes. Here it should be noted that there are *five* threes: 1) a three-fold Torah; 2) a three-fold people; 3) through three persons; 4)on the third day; 5) of the third month.

In *Nedarim* 6b-7a on the question of 'indication' (*yad*) *five* problems are set: 1) betrothal; 2) *Pe'ah*; 3) almsgiving; 4) *hepqēr*; 5) a privy. In *Yoma* 6b-7b in the debate between R. Nahman and R. Sheshet regarding a sacrifice when the community is in a state of ritual contamination *five* proofs are attempted. There are *five* different interpretations in *Sukkah* 6b of the debate between R. Simeon and the Sages. In *Ḥullin* 8b-9a the *sûg̱yā* is constructed around *five* sayings of R. Judah in the name of one of his teachers, Rab and Samuel. In *Megillah* 22a there are *five* attempted proofs on the question of whether it is permitted to sell a Scroll of the Torah in order to buy another.

SEVEN

Seven in the sacred number *par excellence*, appearing in such passages as the creation narrative; in Pentecost at the end of seven weeks; in the Sabbatical and Jubilee years; in the seven days of the Festivals and in many other instances in the Bible and the Rabbinic literature.[21] Apart from the explicit reference to 'seven rulings' (*šeb šema'tātā*)[22] and other passages

21. Gordis (1971) gives the following illustrations from the Mishnah where the number seven, though not stated explicitly, is clearly implied: seven who are beyond redemption, *Sanhedrin* 10: 3-6; seven punished by strangulation, *Sanhedrin* 11:1; seven types of idolatrous worship, *Sanhedrin* 7:6; fourteen (twice seven) who are punished by stoning, *Sanhedrin* 7:4; the fourteen ages of man, *'Abot* 5:21. Some further examples in the Tannaitic literature are: Mishnah *Pesahim* 3:1, seven items mentioned (see Pesahim 42b for how these are divided); *Qidduśin* 49a, list of 'on the condition that . . .' (seven items if *ʿaddiq* and *rāšā'* are counted as one, as logically they should be); *Pesahim* 117a, 'Who said this Hallel?' (seven opinions); *Pesahim* 54a, 'seven things created . . . seven things hidden . . .'; *Baba Qamma* 17a, seven creatures who change after seven years; *Sanhedrin* 56b, the seven Noahide laws. It is worth noting that the Mishnah *Makkot* 3:9 gives an example of one who carries out a single act of ploughing and yet transgresses in the process no less than eight negative precepts. The Gemara (*Makkot* 21b-22a) is hard put to find eight when there would appear to be only seven. Is it possible that seven is avoided intentionally by the Mishnah so as not to associate this 'sacred' number with transgression?

22. *'Erubin* 43a; *Ḥullin* 42a. Some further illustrations from the Amoraic literature are: *Šabbat* 31a, Resh Lakish and Raba, seven items; *Šabbat* 60b, seven and seven are beautiful. Friedman (pp. 89b-90b) gives: *Baba Batra* 127b-128b, seven cases; *Yebamot* 37b-38a, seven

in which the number seven is stated explicitly, it can be detected as present
implicitly in the structure of the *sūgyā*, as the following examples suggest.

In *Niddah* 13a there is a curious story about Samuel instructing his
disciple, R. Judah, on the roof of a synagogue, to take hold of his genitals
when passing water. It is objected, surely this is forbidden because it may
awaken lustful thoughts. Abbaye replies that lustful thoughts are banished
where there is fear or dread and it is, therefore, permitted. The question is
then asked, what fear or dread was there in those circumstances. To this
seven replies are given. Some of these are very artificial so that it is plau-
sible to suggest that the sole purpose of listing all of them is to make up
the number seven. In *Pesahim* 10b Raba sets a series of problems regarding
the search for leaven before Passover. These are: 1) the mouse; 2) the in-
fant; 3) the mouse enters; 4) 'If you will say'; 5) 'If you will say'; 6) 'If you
will say'; 7) a further problem set by Raba in three parts. There are thus
six items which together with the final unit of three make a total of *seven*.
In *Sotah* 17b-18a we find an almost identical pattern. Here there are six
statements regarding the scroll of a wife suspected of infidelity (*megillat
Sotah*): 1) at night; 2) backwards; 3) before the abjuration; 4) as a letter; 5)
two sheets; 6) one letter written, one erased; 7) then a further problem set
by Raba in three parts. It is hard to believe that two quite separate Tal-
mudic passages, dealing with totally different questions, should have had
their material arranged in precisely the same way unless it is by contrivance
and in obedience to the seven-fold pattern. In *Roš haššanah* 7a the ques-
tion is discussed, how do we know that Nisan is the first month. *Seven*
suggestions are advanced: 1) by anonymous Gemara; 2) by R. Hisda; 3) by
Rabina; 4) by Rabbah bar Ulla; 5) by R. Kahana; 6) by R.Aha bar Jacob;
7) by R. Ashi. In *Berakot* 6b there is a list of *seven* items each beginning
with the words: 'The reward of . . .': 1) R. Zera; 2) Abbaye; 3) Raba; 4)
R. Pappa; 5) Mar Zutra; 6) R. Sheshet; 7) R.Ashi. *Berakot* 7b records
seven sayings of R. Johanan in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai. The
lengthy *sūgyā* in *Baba Qamma* 56b-76b records the discussion between
Rabbah and R. Joseph on the legal status of one who looks after a lost
article he has found and *seven* attempted proofs are given. Similarly, in the
debate between Abbaye and Raba in *Qiddušin* 51a-52b *seven* attempted
proofs are recorded. Again, in the discussion around the debate between

cases; *Yebamot* 97b, seven cases. It is perhaps worth noting in passing that Strauss (1974,
pp. xi-xiii) claims to have detected the use of the heptad by Maimonides for his arrangement
of his *Guide* the work consists of seven sections, each divided into seven sub-sections, and
the only section which does not permit this arrangement is divided into seven chapters. And,
of course, Maimonoides' *Mišneh Tōrah* consists of fourteen books.

R. Haninah b. Rabban Gamaliel and R. Meir, on whether the statement
of a positive implies an automatic rejection of the negative, in *Qiddušin*
61b-62a, there are *seven* attempted proofs from Scripture. Yet again, in
Pesahim 46a-48b there is a lengthy debate between R. Huna and R. Hisda
regarding 'potentiality' and there are seven attempted proofs. *Pesahim*
102b-103a discusses the order of the benedictions when a Festival falls at
the termination of the Sabbath. The four benedictions to be recited are:
Yayin ('wine'); *Ner* ('light'); *Haḥadālāh* ('distinguishing') and *Qiddūš*
('sanctification'). *Seven* opinions are recorded in the Amoriac debate as to
the correct order of these benedictions: 1) YQNH; 2) YNHQ; 3) YHNQ;
4) QNYH; 5) QYNH; 6) NQYH; 7) NYHQ. In *Pesahim* 108a there are
seven discussions regarding reclining at the Passover Seder: 1) *maccāh*; 2)
mārôr; 3) wine; 4) lying down; 5) right hand; 6) women; 7) son. In *Šabbat*
118b-119a *seven* Amoraim boast of their special virtues, each beginning
with the same words: 'May I be rewarded'. A similar list of Amoraim in
Šabbat 119a, each of whom did something special as a personal prepara-
tion for the Sabbath, contains fourteen names, twice *seven*. Again, in *Me-
gillah* 27b-28a *seven* Amoraim explain the virtues to which they attribute
their long life. The majority of these are in threes and in the *seventh* one
there are *seven* items. In the lengthy *sûgyā* in *Baba Qamma* 2b-3b the dis-
cussion centers around the statement of R. Pappa that one of the deriva-
tives of the main categories of damage is unlike the category from which it
is derived. The Gemara, seeking to discover to which main category R.
Pappa refers, examines each in turn in the following order: 1) *qeren*
('horn'); 2) *šēn* ('tooth'); 3)*regel* ('foot'); 4) *bôr* ('pit'); 5) *mab'eh* ('spoil-
ator'); 6)*'eš* ('fire'). Unsuccessful in applying R. Pappa's statement to any
of these, the Gemara reverts to a more detailed examination of *regel*, which
then becomes the seventh in the list examined. In *Baba Qamma* 11a-b
there are *seven* rulings of Ulla in the name of R. Eleazar and these have no
connection with one another apart from the fact that they belong in a list
of *seven*.

TEN

The number ten is significant in Scripture in the Decalogue and the
tithing system; in the Rabbinic literature, in the quorum for prayer, the
minyān.[23] Obviously only the lengthier *sûgyôt* lend themselves to a se-
quence of ten but there are some apparent instances of this structure. In
the complicated *sûgyā* in *Yoma* 13a-b concerning the question of how the

23. Mishnah *Megillah* 4:3; *Berakot* 21b. *Cf. Sanhedrin* 74b. There is a series of ten in the
Mishnah *'Abot* 5:1 6 and ten *yohasin* in Mishnah *Qiddušin* 4:1

High Priest can have a wife in reserve, without having two wives at the same time, there is involved argument and counter-argument. A suggestion is put forward only to be refuted immediately. A careful examination reveals a series of *ten* suggestions and refutations. In *Hullin* 11a–b ten Amoraim give their suggestion as to how the principle of reliance on probability is derived from Scripture. *Berakot* 16b–17a contains a list of the private prayers which various Amoraim recited after their formal prayers. There are *ten* Amoraim in the list. *Pesahim* 9b–10b presents a number of problematical cases regarding the search for leaven before Passover, each of which is found to have a parallel in a Tannaitic source. The cases are: 1) nine heaps; 2) where one was separated; 3) two heaps; 4) one heap; 5) doubt of entry; 6) entered and searched; 7) entered and found; 8) he left nine; 9) he left ten; 10) he left one in a corner; making a total of *ten* problems. In the debate between Hezekiah and R. Abbahu in *Pesahim* 21b–23b *ten* attempted proofs are offered, all in favor of Hezekiah, after which it is suggested that their debate has been anticipated by Tannaim.

THIRTEEN

The number thirteen has special significance in Rabbinic thought in the thirteen attributes of divine mercy[24] and in thirteen hermeneutical principles of the School of R. Ishmael.[25] Naturally, with regard to such a large number as thirteen, even more than with regard to ten, it would be too much to expect to find many *sûgyôt* lengthy enough to adapt themselves to this sequence. The following, however, should be noted.

There are *thirteen* items in the list in *Qiddušin* 49a with the formula:

24. *Roš haššānāh* 17b. A famous instance of thirteen is the age for *micvot*, *'Abot* 5:21.
25. *Sifra*, Introduction. That there is a connection between the thirteen qualities (*middôt*) of mercy and the thirteen hermeneutical principles is noted in the Zohar (*Ra'yā Mehēmānā*) III, 228a. *Cf.* note of R. Margaliot (1973, pp. 217-219). Historically considered, it would appear that the whole notion of thirteen qualities of mercy is an Aggadic association with the thirteen hermeneutical principles. The latter are Tannaitic and hence the earlier of the two sets of *middôt*. (See the standard commentaries to *Roš haššānāh* 17b for the difficulty of finding thirteen qualities in the verse except by an artificial division of words.) On the question of thirteen as a specially significant number see the unhistorical but useful summary by Waldinberg (1978, pp. 13-15), where the following are noted: R. Simeon b. Yohai and his son spent thirteen years in the cave hiding from the Romans, *Šabbat* 33b; the thirteen siftings of the *'ōmer, Menahot* 76b; and, in post-Talmudic literature, the association by Horowitz (1963, *ša'ar ha'otiyyôt*, p. 42c) of the thirteen hermeneutical principles with Mimonides' thirteen principles of the faith. It is, indeed, plausible to suggest that this is the reason why Mimonides chose the number thirteen.

'Ten measures of . . . nine were taken by . . .[26]). In *Baba Qama* 4b R. Oshea teaches that there are *thirteen* main categories of damage. A particularly interesting example of *thirteen* is found in *Hagigah* 4b-5a. Here there is a list of *thirteen* Amoraim each of whom wept when he came upon a particular Scriptural verse speaking of God's judgements. The names are: 1) R. Huna; 2) R. Huna; 3) R. Eleaszar; 4) R. Eleaszar; 5) R. Ammi; 6) R. Ammi; 7) R. Assi; 8) R. Joseph; 9) R. Johanan; 10) R. Johanan; 11) R. Johanan; 12) R. Johanan; 13) R. Johanan. A pattern can be perceived in the list itself. There are five 'weepings' of R. Johanan and two each of R. Huna, R. Eleazar and R. Ammi. The odd ones out are: 7) and 8), one each of R. Assi and R. Joseph. But if we read 7) as R. Joesph (and there is, indeed such a reading[27]) we have four sets of two each and then the set of five of R. Johanan. It is easy to see how the incorrect reading came about—Assi is similar in sound to Ammi in 6) and to Yosef in 8). If this is correct we have an example of a highly artificial, carefully constructed list—four sets of teachers with two 'weepings' each and five of R. Johanan, totalling *thirteen*. It is going beyond the evidence but is it possible that there is a hint in thé structure of the *thirteen* qualities of divine mercy? This would be appropriate enough in connection with the teachers weeping when they came across Scriptural passages which speak of the divine sternness!

The implications of the above passage in *Hagigah*, and the other examples of a numbered sequence in which the names of Amoraim occur, are startling. That the editors of an anonymous passage structured their

26. *Cf.Baba Qamma* 27b on the fines for assault, *three, five* and *thirteen*. In Mishnah *Ta'anit* 1:4 there are three fasts; in 1:5 a further three; in 1:6 a further three and then seven, making a total of thirteen. A brief note on some other numbers in the Rabbinic literature is here in order. For the number one thousand see Sevin (1978, pp. 276-280). In *Ta'anit* 8a Resh Lakish states the significance of the number forty, because it corresponds to the forty days during which God taught Moses the Torah, and R. Ada bar Ahaba states the significance of the number twenty four, because it corresponds to the twenty four books of the bible. These two numbers are used in the Rabbinic literature in contexts dealing with the study of the Torah, e.g., 'He repeated the teaching forty times' in *Berakot* 28a and freq.; the twenty four questions and answers in the story of R. Johanan and Resh Lakish in *Baba Meci'a* 84a and the twenty four rows of disciples in *Megillah* 28b. The significance of the number forty eight in *'Abot* 6:5 (the forty eight ways by means of which the Torah is acquired) is probably because this number is twice twenty four, i.e., a double effort is required if the study of the Torah is to be effective. In *Baba Qamma* 92a-93a there is a lengthy list of sayings by Raba to Rabbah bar Mari but it is impossible to tell whether the number of these (seventeen) is intentional (seven and ten) or purely fortuitous.

27. Dimitrovsky (1979, Vol. II, p. 263).

material occasions no surprise. But when they use the names of Amoraim
it can only mean that they have re-worked the original sayings so as to fit
them into their structure. It is extremely unlikely that by pure coincidence
the saying happened to fit the pattern. It can only mean that they were
made to fit the patten either by a selective process or by attributing sayings
to certain teachers for the purpose of literary effect.[28] The detection of lit-
erary patterns thus not only assists in the task of textual criticism (as in the
above illustration from R. Assi and R. Joseph) but is important in deter-
mining how the Babylonian Talmud came to assume its present form and
how the final editors shaped their material.

We have produced some evidence for the existence of numbered struc-
tures as a literary device in the Babylonian Talmud. But, of course, this is
not the only structure used by the editors and it would be unreasonable to
expect to discover a consistent use of this type of structure. In the presen-
tation of the Talmudic arguments other considerations (such as a con-
trived development of the course of the debate) may have demanded that
an otherwise desirable sequence be abandoned. All we can claim is that the
numbered sequence is one of the literary devices used by the editors. There
does seem to be a preference for the 'sacred' numbers of three, five, seven,
ten and thirteen and an avoidance, where possible, of the even numbers,
two, four, six and eight, perhaps because of the belief in the baneful power
of even numbers —*zûggôt*[29]. It must also be added that, in any event, this
kind of inquiry is frequently hindered because of the uncertain state of the
text. At this late date it is often quite impossible to recover the original text
so that in some instances an original pattern may be obscured by a faulty
text. There is also the problem of editorial revisions of the original text, to
say nothing of editorial additions. A strong element of tentativeness must,
therefore, remain. But if this article has succeeded in providing a stimulus
for further investigation into an important but largely neglected field of
Talmudic study it will have fulfulled its purpose.

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28. On the pseudepigraphic nature of a good deal of the Babylonian Talmud see Jacobs
(1977, pp. 46-59).

29. On *zûggôt* the *locus classicus* is *Pesahim* 109b-110b. See especially 110a on ten as
immune from the baneful effect of even numbers and the discussion regarding four, six and
eight. *Cf.* '*Enciqlopidivah Talmüdit* (1967, pp. 16 19). Of some relevance may be the state-
ment in 110b that in Palestine they took no notice of *zûggôt*, the fear of them being only
entertained in Babylon.

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