**Numerical Sayings in the Literatures of the Ancient Near East, in the Bible, in the book of Ben-Sira and in Rabbinic Literature**

**Abstract:**

In this paper we follow the use of numbers, from its early use in the Bible and in Ancient Near Eastern literature, through its use in the book of Ben-Sira and ultimately to its use in Rabbinic literature. We will show that the Rabbis were familiar with the Biblical use of numbers as rhetorical device and used numbers in the same ways which the Bible did.

**Introduction:**

1. **Previous studies**

Numerical sayings are among the most well-known and most frequently attested rhetorical devices in the literatures of the ancient Near East, Hebrew Scripture, and Rabbinic Literature.

The use of numbers in general, and specifically the use of numerical sayings in the Bible and in the literatures of the ancient Near East has been studied frequently,[[1]](#footnote-1) and among others we can mention the discussions by Alt,[[2]](#footnote-2) Loewenstamm,[[3]](#footnote-3) Cassuto,[[4]](#footnote-4) Tur-Sinai,[[5]](#footnote-5) Segal,[[6]](#footnote-6) Paran,[[7]](#footnote-7) Haran,[[8]](#footnote-8) Avishur,[[9]](#footnote-9) Zakovitch,[[10]](#footnote-10) Kugel[[11]](#footnote-11), Gevirtz[[12]](#footnote-12), Yona[[13]](#footnote-13), Greenstein,[[14]](#footnote-14) and the comprehensive discussion by Roth.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Some scholars discuss the use numerical sayings in Rabbinic literature and among them we wish to mention Epstein,[[16]](#footnote-16) Gordis,[[17]](#footnote-17) Jacobs,[[18]](#footnote-18) Sharvit,[[19]](#footnote-19) Friedman,[[20]](#footnote-20) Valler,[[21]](#footnote-21) Melammed,[[22]](#footnote-22) Tropper,[[23]](#footnote-23) Gottlieb[[24]](#footnote-24), and Lerner.[[25]](#footnote-25)

There are only few essays that deal with numbers in different literatures. The essays by Roth, which we indicated earlier, Israel Zeligman’s book: “The Treasury of Numbers,”[[26]](#footnote-26) which compiles examples from the Bible and several works of Rabbinic literature but doesn’t discuss the examples, and can be used, mostly, as a concordance for numbers; and last, the dissertation of ShinAe Kim which discussed, inter alia, the use of numbers in the Biblical wisdom literature, in the book of Ben-Sira, in tractate Avot and in several more books.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Unlike most of the previous studies which focused on specific literature, such as the Bible, the book of Ben-Sira or tractate Avot, in this paper we will examine and diachronically compare the use of various patterns of numerical sayings in different literatures.

First we will discuss the biblical use of numerical sayings, and, when necessary, we will refer to some examples from the literatures of the ancient Near East. Subsequently we will discuss several examples from book of Ben-Sira, and finally we will analyze the use of numerical sayings in Rabbinic literature. In the last part of this paper we will try to understand the reasons for the differences between the different uses.

**Numerical sayings in the Bible**

1. **The Phenomenon**

The use of numerical sayings in the Bible is very frequent, and we can find numerical sayings in different genres such as law, wisdom literature, prophecy, biblical stories and other genres.

Numerical sayings usually have one of two forms:

1. Normal use involves a single number that contains one digit or more but never a pair of numbers. These numbers specify the number of people, ages, sizes, such as the dimensions of the Ark of the Covenant and the dimensions of the temple, years of a monarch's reign and other matters.

In this paper we will not present examples of this use, except a brief reference to the use of typological numbers.

The second type of numerical saying employs a pair of ascending numbers such as two - three, four – five and so on. This second type of numerical saying has many sub-types, which we shall discuss further on.

**Typological numbers**

Typological numbers are numbers with unique and special meaning that gives them importance that exceeds their numerical values.[[28]](#footnote-28) The prominent typological numbers in the Bible are the numbers: three, four, five, seven, ten, twelve, forty, sixty and seventy.

**Examples from the Bible**

There are many examples of the use of typological numbers in the numbers. For example the sons of Noah (Gn. 9:18-19):

וַיִּהְיוּ בְנֵי נֹחַ הַיֹּצְאִים מִן הַתֵּבָה שֵׁם וְחָם וָיָפֶת וְחָם הוּא אֲבִי כְנָעַן

**שְׁלֹשָׁה** אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי נֹחַ וּמֵאֵלֶּה נָפְצָה כָל-הָאָרֶץ

The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth; Ham being the father of Canaan.

These **three** were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole world branched out.

Other examples can be found in many stories such as: the number three in the promise to Abraham (Gn. 18:2); fourteen years of work by Jacob for Leah and for Rachel (Gn. 29: 18-28); the return of the numbers three and seven in the stories about Pharaoh’s Dreams (Gn. 40:1-41:8); the use of the number forty in the stories of the Flood (Gn. 7:17) the receiving of the Torah at mount Sinai (Ex. 24:18) and the story of Jonah the prophet (Jonah 3:4) and finally the use of the numbers fifty, forty five, forty, thirty, twenty, and ten in the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn. 18: 20-33).

Actually one of the most familiar biblical uses of typological number does not really use any number, and the intention is the Ten Commandments. In both stories in Exodus (Ex. 17-2) and in its equivalent in Deuteronomy (chapter five) there is no explicit reference to the number ten before the Commandments. Only in Deuteronomy 10:4 is the number ten mentioned (Dt. 10:4):

וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל הַלֻּחֹת כַּמִּכְתָּב הָרִאשׁוֹן אֵת **עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים** אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם בָּהָר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ בְּיוֹם הַקָּהָל וַיִּתְּנֵם יְהוָה אֵלָי

The LORD inscribed on the tablets the same text as on the first, the **Ten Commandments** that HE addressed to you on the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the Lord gave them to me.

**Graded numerical sayings:**

The use of a pair of numbers in the Bible will be, mostly, in one of these three ways:

1. “Normal” use, mostly in prose, to specify unknown or uncertain number or to specify small number. For example:

The description of the death of Jezebel during Jehu’s revolt (2Kg. 9:32):

וַיִּשָּׂא פָנָיו אֶל הַחַלּוֹן וַיֹּאמֶר מִי אִתִּי מִי וַיַּשְׁקִיפוּ אֵלָיו **שְׁנַיִם שְׁלֹשָׁה** סָרִיסִים, He looked up toward the window and said, “Who is on my side? Who?” And **two or three** eunuchs leaned out toward him.

The description of the death of Elisha (2Kg. 13:19):

וַיִּקְצֹף עָלָיו אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְהַכּוֹת **חָמֵשׁ אוֹ שֵׁשׁ פְּעָמִים** אָז הִכִּיתָ אֶת אֲרָם עַד כַּלֵּה וְעַתָּה שָׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים תַּכֶּה אֶת אֲרָם, The man of God was angry with him and said to him “If only you had struck **five or six** times! Then you would have annihilated Aram; as it is, you shall defeat Aram only three times.”

In both verses the exact number is unknown, and the writer uses a pair of numbers.

1. The second way of using graded numerical sayings is poetic parallelism with a pair of numbers. This parallelism separates the pair of numbers, and each number is situated in different stichs. We can find this kind of parallelism in different literatures from the ancient Near East, and especially in Ugaritic literature. For example (Is. 17:6):

וְנִשְׁאַר בּוֹ עוֹלֵלֹת כְּנֹקֶף זַיִת **שְׁנַיִם שְׁלֹשָׁה** גַּרְגְּרִים בְּרֹאשׁ אָמִיר

**אַרְבָּעָה חֲמִשָּׁה** בִּסְעִפֶיהָ פֹּרִיָּה נְאֻם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Only gleaning shall be left of him, as when one beats an olive tree, **two** berries or **three** on the topmost branch, **four or five** on the boughs of the crown, declares the Lord, the God of Israel.

This verse combines the prosaic use of graded pair of numbers and the poetic use of numbers in parallelism. In each stich there is internal rating of numbers. First two and three, and then four and five. The entire verse describes the lack of agricultural products after God's punishment. The description, therefore, is used as kind of minimal merismus.

A similar example can be found in Haggai 2:16:

מִהְיוֹתָם בָּא אֶל עֲרֵמַת **עֶשְׂרִים** וְהָיְתָה **עֲשָׂרָה**

בָּא אֶל הַיֶּקֶב לַחְשֹׂף **חֲמִשִּׁים** פּוּרָה וְהָיְתָה **עֶשְׂרִים**

If one came to a heap of **twenty** measures, it would yield only **ten**; and if one came to a wine vat to skim off **fifty** measures, the press would yield only **twenty**.[[29]](#footnote-29)

1 Sam. 18:7:

וַתַּעֲנֶינָה הַנָּשִׁים הַמְשַׂחֲקוֹת וַתֹּאמַרְןָ הִכָּה שָׁאוּל **בַּאֲלָפָו** וְדָוִד **בְּרִבְבֹתָיו**

The women sang as they danced, and they chanted: Saul has slain his **thousands**; David, his **tens of thousands**.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Lev. 26:8:

וְרָדְפוּ מִכֶּם **חֲמִשָּׁה מֵאָה**

**וּמֵאָה** מִכֶּם **רְבָבָה** יִרְדֹּפוּ

וְנָפְלוּ אֹיְבֵיכֶם לִפְנֵיכֶם לֶחָרֶב

**Five** of you shall give chase to a **hundred**,

And a **hundred** of you shall give chase to ten **thousand**;

Your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.[[31]](#footnote-31)

The last example of this use (Dt. 19:15):

לֹא יָקוּם עֵד **אֶחָד** בְּאִישׁ לְכָל עָוֹן וּלְכָל חַטָּאת בְּכָל חֵטְא אֲשֶׁר יֶחֱטָא

עַל פִּי **שְׁנֵי** עֵדִים

אוֹ עַל פִּי **שְׁלֹשָׁה** עֵדִים יָקוּם דָּבָר

A **single** witness is not sufficient to prove a person's guilt or blame for any offense that one may have committed. A suspect can be convicted only on the testimony of **two** or **three** witnesses.

In this example the numbers one, two and three are in ascending order, as a part of chiastic parallelism

1. The third way of using a pair of numbers is graded numerical parallelism.

This kind of parallelism is found mostly in wisdom literature, but it can be found also in prophecy and other genres.

In this kind of parallelism we find two numbers, X and X+1 (meaning three and four; six and seven and so on). Sometimes the verse specifies the entire list of X and X+1, and sometimes only X+1 will be specified. In some cases there is no explicit reference to numbers at the beginning of the verse or unit, and we will not discuss these cases in this paper.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The graded numerical parallelism originates in the literatures of the ancient Near East,[[33]](#footnote-33) and it can be found, *inter alia*, in Sumerian, Accadian, Egyptian and Ugaritic literature. For example in the Ugaritic Ba'al epic:

KTU 1.4 III, 17-21:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **שני** זבחים שנא בעל  **שלושה** רוכב ערבות:  זבח בושת  וזבח ריב  וזבח פטפוט אמהות | tn. dbḥm. šn’a. b’l  ṯlṯ. rkb. ‘rpt.  dbḥ. bṯt.  wdbḥ. <wdbḥ.> dnt.  wdbḥ. tdmm. ‘amht. | **Two** (kinds of) banquets Ba'al hates  **three** the Rider on the clouds  A banquet of shamefulness  And a banquet <banquet> of baseness  And a banquet of maidservants’ lewdness |

This example detailed three different sacrifices that Ba'al, the head of the Canaanite pantheon hates. The second part of this parallelism uses one of the nicknames of Ba'al - and omits the word 'sacrifices' to create balance between the first two parts.

In the words of Ahiqar the Wise we find another example:[[34]](#footnote-34)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **שנים** (הם) דברים יפים,  **והשלושה** (השלישי) אהוב לשמש:  ש[ותה] יין ומיניקהו/מנסכהו,  כובש חכמה [ומלמד/שומר אותה]  ו(מי ש)ישמע דבר ולא יגיד | **תרתין** מלן שפירה  וזי **תלתא** רחימא לשמש  ש[תה] חמרא ויניקנהי  כבש חכמה[ויאלפנה]  וישמע מלה ולא יהחוה | **Two** things which are appropriate  And **three** pleasing to Shamash:  One who dr[inks] wine and gives it to others to drink it,  One who masters wisdom [and teaches it],  And one who hears a word and does not tell it. |

This example lists two nice things: a person who drinks wine and shares it with others and a person the gains wisdom and shares it with others. But greater than the value of these two things, and that is what Shamash, the Mesopotamian god of justice and the god of the sun likes: a person that heard something and keeps it in his heart. [[35]](#footnote-35)

As we said earlier, some of the graded numerical parallelism specifies the entire list of X and X+1 and sometimes only the X+1 will specify.

In Amos's Oracles against the Nations (Amos 1:3-2:16) we0 find use of both types. Most prophecies in this unit list only one sin, probably the worst one. For example, the prophecy about Damascus (1:3):

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה עַל **שְׁלֹשָׁה** פִּשְׁעֵי דַמֶּשֶׂק וְעַל **אַרְבָּעָה** לֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ עַל דּוּשָׁם בַּחֲרֻצוֹת הַבַּרְזֶל אֶת הַגִּלְעָד

Thus said the Lord: For **three** transgressions of Damascus, For **four**, I will not revoke it:  
Because they threshed Gilead With threshing boards of iron.

The prophecy about Israel (2:6-8), on the other hand, lists all four, or according to some scholars, all seven sins that the people of Israel did:

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה עַל **שְׁלֹשָׁה** פִּשְׁעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל **אַרְבָּעָה** לֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ עַל מִכְרָם בַּכֶּסֶף צַדִּיק וְאֶבְיוֹן בַּעֲבוּר נַעֲלָיִם הַשֹּׁאֲפִים עַל עֲפַר אֶרֶץ בְּרֹאשׁ דַּלִּים וְדֶרֶךְ עֲנָוִים יַטּוּ וְאִישׁ וְאָבִיו יֵלְכוּ אֶל הַנַּעֲרָה לְמַעַן חַלֵּל אֶת שֵׁם קָדְשִׁי וְעַל בְּגָדִים חֲבֻלִים יַטּוּ אֵצֶל כָּל מִזְבֵּחַ וְיֵין עֲנוּשִׁים יִשְׁתּוּ בֵּית אֱלֹהֵיהֶם

Thus said the Lord: For **three** transgressions of Israel, for **four**, I will not revoke it:   
Because they have sold for silver those whose cause was just, and the needy for a pair of sandals.

[Ah,] you who trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the ground, and make the humble walk a twisted course!  
Father and son go to the same girl, and thereby profane my holy name.

They recline by every altar on garments taken in pledge, and drink in the House of their God  
Wine bought with fines they imposed.

In the examples from wisdom literature that we will discuss now, numbers are used mostly for stylistic reasons but also as mnemonics that make it easier to remember different things. For example (Prov. 30:18-20):

**שְׁלֹשָׁה** הֵמָּה נִפְלְאוּ מִמֶּנִּי וארבע (**וְאַרְבָּעָה**) לֹא יְדַעְתִּים

דֶּרֶךְ הַנֶּשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם

דֶּרֶךְ נָחָשׁ עֲלֵי צוּר

דֶּרֶךְ אֳנִיָּה בְלֶב יָם

וְדֶרֶךְ גֶּבֶר בְּעַלְמָה

**Three** things are beyond me;  
**Four** I cannot fathom:

How an eagle makes its way over the sky;  
How a snake makes its way over a rock;  
How a ship makes its way through the high seas;  
How a man has his way with a maiden

In this example there is a comparison between four things that do not leave as they move along on their way. The eagle during its way over the sky, the snake during its way over a rock, the ship during its way through the high seas and the man who engages in sexual intercourse with a woman. This parallelism is the basis for the next verse which deals with an adulteress who hides her actions: כֵּן דֶּרֶךְ אִשָּׁה מְנָאָפֶת אָכְלָה וּמָחֲתָה פִיהָ וְאָמְרָה לֹא פָעַלְתִּי אָוֶן, This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I've done nothing wrong.'[[36]](#footnote-36)

Other examples from wisdom literature are found in Proverbs 6:16-19, which uses the numbers six and seven, in Proverbs 30:15-16 and more.

Prov. 6: 16-19:

**שֶׁשׁ** הֵנָּה שָׂנֵא יְהוָה **וְשֶׁבַע** תועבות (תּוֹעֲבַת) נַפְשׁוֹ...

**Six** things the Lord hates; **seven** are an abomination to Him

Prov. 30:15-16:

**שָׁלוֹשׁ** הֵנָּה לֹא תִשְׂבַּעְנָה **אַרְבַּע** לֹא-אָמְרוּ הוֹן…

**Three** things are insatiable; **four** never say, “Enough"…

In Proverbs 30:24-28 we can find other example, in which there is only one number at the opening of the unit, and not a pair of numbers:

**אַרְבָּעָה** הֵם קְטַנֵּי אָרֶץ וְהֵמָּה חֲכָמִים מְחֻכָּמִים

הַנְּמָלִים עַם לֹא עָז וַיָּכִינוּ בַקַּיִץ לַחְמָם

שְׁפַנִּים עַם לֹא עָצוּם וַיָּשִׂימוּ בַסֶּלַע בֵּיתָם

מֶלֶךְ אֵין לָאַרְבֶּה וַיֵּצֵא חֹצֵץ כֻּלּוֹ

שְׂמָמִית בְּיָדַיִם תְּתַפֵּשׂ וְהִיא בְּהֵיכְלֵי מֶלֶך

**Four** are among the tiniest on earth, yet they are the wisest of the wise:

Ants are a folk without power, yet they prepare food for themselves in summer;

The badger is a folk without strength, yet it makes its home in the rock;

The locusts have no king, yet they all march forth in formation;

You can catch the lizard in your hand, yet it is found in royal palaces.

In this unit the number is stylistically unnecessary and its contribution is mainly for mnemonic purposes. None of the animals that are listed in the unit is preferred over the others, and this is probably the base form from which the graded numerical parallelism developed.

**Ben-Sira**

In the book of Ben-Sira we can find several graded numerical parallelisms. For example: (23:24-27, Segal ed.): [[37]](#footnote-37)

**שני** מינים ירבו חטא **ושלשה** יעלו אף

נפש חמה באש בוערת לא תכבה עד תבלע

איש נואף בשאר בשרו לא יעבר עד תבער בו אש

לאיש נואף כל לחם ינעם לא יחדל עד ימות

**Two** types of people multiply sins, a **third** stirs up wrath:

Burning passion is a blazing fire, not to be quenched till it burns itself out;

The man who is lewd with his own kindred never stops till the fire breaks forth;

The rake to whom all bread is sweet is never through until he dies.[[38]](#footnote-38)

This unit uses the numbers two and three, and unlike some examples from the Bible that we discussed earlier, lists all three things, in this case all three sins and not only the last and severe item, i.e., the sin of adultery with a married woman.

(25:9-15, Segal ed.):

**תשע** מעלות אִשרתי בלבי **ועשר** אמר בלשוני…

There are **nine** who come to my mind as blessed; a **tenth**, whom my tongue proclaims…

In this example Ben-Sira uses the numbers nine and ten for the graded numerical parallelism. The first nine virtues are only praised in Ben-Sira heart, but the tenth virtue, with the highest value – the fear of God– his saying out load.[[39]](#footnote-39)

In addition, Ben-Sira uses simple numbers in his sayings. For example:

(25:1-4, Segal ed.):

**בשלש** חפצה נפשי ונאות הן לפני אלהים ואדם

אחות אחים ורֵעוּת רֵעים ואיש ואשה והם שלמים

With **three** things I am delighted, for they are pleasing to the Lord and to humans:

Harmony among kindred, friendship among neighbors, and the mutual love of husband and wife.

This saying is followed by the following dictum:

**שלשה** מינים שנאה נפשי וקצתי מאוד בחייהם

דל גאה ועשיר מכַחֵש וזקן מְנָאֵף/סָכָל [חסר מדע][[40]](#footnote-40)

**Three** kinds of people I hate; their manner of life I loathe indeed:

A proud pauper, a rich dissembler, and an old person lecherous in his dotage.

The dual use of the number 'three' in the last example seems unnecessary. We can replace it with the word ' those', without spoiling the sentence, or even to omit the number three completely. In our opinion these numbers enable Ben-Sira to compare more easily verses 1-2 and verses 3-4 while creating [antithetic](http://literarydevices.net/antithesis/) parallelism, although the subject of the two units is completely different and only the opening sentences: 'With **three** things I am delighted' and

'**Three** kinds of people I hate' are similar.

The first unit talks about three types of human relationships: between brothers, between friends and between husband and wife. The second unit talks about three types of sinners, which act contrary to their status: a proud poor, a rich man that denies his debts and an old man who didn’t learn from his life experience, or an old man that commits adultery although he doesn't desire other women.[[41]](#footnote-41)

**Numerical sayings in Rabbinic literature:**

**Introduction**:

In Rabbinic literature we will find multiple uses of numbers. In some cases the uses will be identical to the Biblical uses, vis-à-vis different use as a mnemonic editing device as we will show later on.

R. Abahu noted the use of numbers in Rabbinic sayings when he said (Y. She. 5, 1):[[42]](#footnote-42)

אמ' ר' אבהו

כת' משפחות סופרים יושבי יעבץ מה ת"ל סופרים אלא שעשו את התורה ספורות ספורות

**חמשה** לא יתרומו

**חמשה** דברים חייבין בחלה

**חמש** **עשרה** נשים פוטרות צרותיהן

**שלשים ושש** כריתות בתורה

**שלשה עשר** דבר לנבלת העוף הטהור

**ארבע** אבות נזיקין

אבות מלאכות **ארבעים חסר אחת**

Rabbi Abbahu said:

It is written: The families of the scribes that dwelt in Jabez. Why does Scripture state ‘Scribes’?

This means that they turn the Torah into numbers:

**Five** do not set aside heave-offering,

Dough is separated from **five** [cereals],

**Fifteen** women exempt their sisters-in-law from levirate marriage,

**Thirty-six** offences in the Torah carry the penalty of excision,

There are **thirteen** rules about the remains of a clean bird,

**Four** kinds of tort,

**Forty** minus one categories of work [forbidden on the Sabbath]

In its opening line this unit referred to the families of the scribes that dwelt in Jabez (1 Chron. 2:55) that "they turn the Torah into numbers". Actually, according to the examples in this unit and many other examples from Rabbinic literature,[[43]](#footnote-43) the rabbis, and not the scribes that dwelt in Jabez, turn the Torah (and the Oral Torah) into numbers.

This unit specifies seven cases in which the rabbis use numbers in their sayings and it demonstrates the use of numbers as a mnemonic device. Four out of the seven examples in this unit refers to thirteen, or more, different things. It is clear that the indication of the exact number at the beginning, or at the end of the unit, makes it easy to remember the list of things, and it also provides the rabbis an excellent tool to confirm that their memory didn’t mistake them.[[44]](#footnote-44) M. Ker. (1:1), for example, begins with the words: שלושים ושש כרתות בתורה or thirty-six *keritot*, meaning: thirty-six instances of excommunication, in the Torah. Subsequently the Mishnah provides the entire list. Another example can be found in M. Sha. 7:2-4. This unit lists all thirty-nine categories of work, אבות מלאכה, which are forbidden on the Sabbath:[[45]](#footnote-45)

ב

אבות מלאכות **ארבעים חסר אחת**:

החורש, הזורע, הקוצר, המעמר, הדש, והזורה, הבורר, הטוחן, המרקד, הלש, והאופה, הגוזז את הצמר, המלבנו, והמנפסו, והצובעו, והטווהו, המסך, והעושה שני בתי נירים, האורג שני חוטים, והבוצע שני חוטים, הקושר, והמתיר, והתופר שתי תפירות, והקוריע על מנת לתפור שתי תפירות.

ג

הצד צבי, השוחטו, והמפשיטו, והמולחו, והמעבדו, והמוחיקו, והמחתכו, הכותב שתי אותות, והמוחק על מנת לכתוב שתי אותות.

ד

הבונה, והסותר, והמכבה, והמבעיר, והמכה בפטיש, והמוציא מרשות לרשות.

אלו הן אבות מלאכות **ארבעים חסר אחת**.

2:

The primary [categories of] labors are **forty less one**:

Sowing, plowing, reaping, gathering sheaves, threshing, winnowing, sorting, grinding, sifting

kneading, baking, shearing wool, bleaching [the wool], combing [the wool], dyeing [the wool], spinning, mounting the threads, threading two warp-threads into the harness, weaving two [weft] threads, removing two [weft or woof] threads, tying [a knot], untying [a knot], sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches.

3:

Trapping a deer, slaughtering, skinning, salting [its skin], tanning its hide, scraping it [of its hair], cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters.

4:

Building, pulling down, extinguishing [a fire], kindling, striking the finishing blow with a hammer, carrying out from one domain to another.

These are the **forty primary** [categories of] **labors less one**.

The number 'forty minus one', or less one, acts as a typological number, while replacing the neutral number 'thirty-nine'.[[46]](#footnote-46) The repeated sentence "the primary [categories of] labors are **forty less one**", which appears at the beginning and at the end of the unit creates envelope figure (Inclusio) that helps the rabbis to memorize the Mishnah.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Accurately counting is very important, and if needed the rabbis updated their previous counts. For example (B. Yeb. 3b):[[48]](#footnote-48)

מיכאן אמרו חכמים **חמש עשרה** נשים פוטרות צרות וצרות צרותיהן מן החליצה ומן היבום עד סוף העולם

**Fifteen** [categories of] women exempt their rivals and their rivals’ rivals, from the *Halisah* and from the Levirate marriage ad infinitum.

This origin of this quote is in the opening Mishnah of tractate Yebamoth. However, after a long discussion in the Babylonian Talmud the rabbis update the number to sixteen and actually object and reject the counting that was made by the Tannaim (B. Yeb. 10b):[[49]](#footnote-49)

ואע"פ ששנו חכמ' במשנתינו **חמש עשרה** נשים יש לנו להוסיף **שש עשרה** כגון זו

And though the sages taught in our Mishnah **fifteen** we must add a case like this as a **sixteenth**.

In some cases, unlike the last two examples which specify many items, the use of numbers looks unnecessary, and their contribution is mainly to the style, or related to their typological value. Many examples can be found in tractate Avot, such as the first Mishnah in this tractate (Avot 1:1): [[50]](#footnote-50)

הם אמרו **שלשה** דברים

היו מתונין בדין

והעמידו תלמידים הרבה

ועשו סייג לתורה

They [the men of the Great Assembly] said **three** things:

Be deliberate in judgment,

And raise up many disciples,

And make a fence around the Torah.

The use of the number three by this well-known Mishnah seems unnecessary. This short list can be memorized easily without the indication of the number three, and it seems that the number serves other purposes apart of its mnemonic value. Other examples from tractate Avot can be found at the beginning of Avot 2:1 and 3:1 which use the identical words, namely: השתכל/היסתכל **בשלשה** דברים..., meaning: Reflect upon **three** things, and in Avot 2:10: הם אמרו **שלשה** דברים, They [each] said **three** things.

Likewise, there are many examples for this use in different tractates of the Mishnah, the Tosefta, and the Talmud. We shall now survey some more examples, which we shall treat only briefly, to show the wide use of typological numbers in Rabbinic literature:[[51]](#footnote-51)

M. Pes. 10:5: [[52]](#footnote-52) רבן גמליא' או' כל שלא אמ' **שלושה** דברים אלו בפסח לא יצא ידי חובתו פסח מצה ומרורים, Rabban Gamliel says: “Whoever has not referred to these **three** matters connected to the Passover has not fulfilled his obligation, and these are they: Passover, unleavened bread and bitter herbs.”

M. Git. 3:4: [[53]](#footnote-53) **שלשה** דברים אמ' ר' לעזר בן פרטה לפני חכמ' וקיימו את דבריו, **Three** things did R. Eliezer b. Parta say before the sages and they confirmed his opinion.

M. Tam. 5:6: [[54]](#footnote-54) **ושלשה** דברים היתה משמשת, And **three** purposes did it serve.

B. Sha. 77b:[[55]](#footnote-55) תנו רבנן **שלשה** כל זמן שמזקיני' מוסיפין גבורה אלו הן, Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: There are **three** who get stronger as they get older.

M. Kel. 12:7-8: [[56]](#footnote-56) **שלשה** דברים ר' צדוק מטמא וחכמ' מטהרין; **ארבעה** דברים רבן גמליאל מטמא וחכ' מטהרין, **Three** things does R. Zadoq declare unclean and the sages do declare clean; **Four** things does Rabban Gamliel declare unclean and the sages do declare clean.[[57]](#footnote-57)

M. She. 5:4: [[58]](#footnote-58) **ארבעה** חותמות היו במקדש... בן עזי או' **חמישה** היו וארמית כתוב עליהם

**Four** seals were in the Temple…Ben Azzai says: “there were **five**, and they were written in Aramaic.”

T. Sot. 6:6: [[59]](#footnote-59) ר' שמעון בן יוחי אומ' **ארבעה** דברים היה ר' עקיבא דורש וכך אני דורש ודבריי אני רואה מדבריו, Said R. Simeon b. Yohai: “**Four** lessons did R. Aqiba expound, and my lessons are better than his lessons.”

B. Sha. 23a: [[60]](#footnote-60) א"ר שמע בשביל **ארב'** דברי' אמ' תור' יניח אדם פיאה בסוף שדהו, R. Simeon said: “On account of **four** considerations the Torah ordered pe'ah to be left at the end of the field.”

M. Pes. 7:4: [[61]](#footnote-61) **חמשה** דברים באים בטומאה ואינן נאכלים בטומאה, **Five** things are offered in a state of cultic uncleanness but are not eaten in a state of cultic uncleanness.

M. Ta'a. 4:8: [[62]](#footnote-62) **חמשה** דברים ארעו את אבותינו בשבעה עשר בתמוז **וחמשה** בתשעה באב, **Five** events took place for our fathers on the **seventeenth** of Tammuz, and **five** on the ninth of Ab.

M. Avot 2:8b: **חמשה** תלמידים היו לר' [יוחנן בן זכיי ואילו הן], **Five** disciples were there to R. [Johanan b. Zakkai and these are they.]

B. Sha. 121b:[[63]](#footnote-63) חמשה נהרגין בשבת אלו הן, **Five** things [may be] killed on the Sabbath, and these are they.

In our opinion, these examples, which are only a representative examples, show how common the use of typological numbers was in Rabbinic literature. Nevertheless, it shows that sometimes typological numbers were used as mnemonic device, while sometimes they appear only because of their unique value.

**Graded numerical sayings in Rabbinic literature:**

The use of Graded numerical sayings in Rabbinic literature is almost equal to the biblical use of these patterns and can be divided in the same way.

1. "Normal" use to specify an unknown or uncertain number or to specify a small number. For example (M. Sha. 18:1):[[64]](#footnote-64)

מפנים אפילו **ארבע וחמש** קופות של תבן ושל תבואה מפני האורחים ומפני ביטול בית המדרש...

One may clear away even **four or five** baskets of straw or of produce to make room for guests or on account of neglect of the *beit Midrash*…

In Rabbinic literature we can find many examples for this use, and that is in opposition to the Rabbinic preciseness in regard to accurate counting that we mention earlier. How can these two approaches fit together in the same literature by the same sages? It seems that in some cases, like the last example, the number is uncertain or even irrelevant. It could be four, less than four, five and even more than five, all respective to the number of the guests. In cases like this, the rabbis cannot and should not indicate an exact number, and the pair of numbers only serves as an example for the ruling.[[65]](#footnote-65)

In other cases it seems that although the rabbis didn't set exact and injective number, one of the numbers is used as a "borderline," which is impossible to cross, while the other number "represents" several numbers. For example:

Y. Eru. 3:3: [[66]](#footnote-66)

שמואל אמ' כבן **תשע** כבן **עשר** עירובו עירוב

Samuel said, “[If one has made use, in sending his meal of commingling to the Sabbath limit,] of a child **nine** or **ten** years old, his meal of commingling is valid.

According to Samuel, a child at the age of nine and/or ten is fit to do "*Eruv techumin*". It is obvious that if a ten year old child is old enough to do "*Eruv techumin*" an eleven year old child is also capable to do it, while an eight year old child or a child that is younger than eight is not allowed to do "*Eruv techumin*" at all.

That is to say, that the number 'nine' is firm and it used as "borderline", while the number 'ten' "represents" other numbers such as eleven and twelve.

T. Ber. 3:22:[[67]](#footnote-67)

הכותב את השם אפי' המלך שואל בשלומו לא ישיבנו היה כותב **חמשה** **ששה** שמות כיון שגמר אחד מהן משיב שאילת שלום

If a person is writing God’s name, even if a king greets him, he should not answer him.

If he was writing **five or six** divine names [one after the other, then] he may answer a greeting after he finished one of them.

This ruling by the Tosefta exceed the main topic of the chapter – praying. The parallel Mishnah (Ber. 5:1), on the other hand, corresponds to the subject, while using some of the words of the Tosefta: אין עומדין להתפלל אלא מתוך כובד ראש חסידים הראשנים היו שוהים שעה אחת[[68]](#footnote-68) ומתפללים כדי שייכוונו את לבם למקום **ואפילו המלך שואל בשלומו לא ישיבנו** אפילו נחש כרוך על עקיבו לא יפסיק, One may stand to pray only in a solemn frame of mind. The early pious ones used to tarry one hour [before they would] pray, so that they could direct their hearts to the Omnipresent. [While one is praying] even if the king greets him, he may not respond. And even if a serpent is entwined around his heel, he may not interrupt [his prayer].

Y. Ber. 5: 1 integrate between the Mishnah and the Tosefta and deals with the Tosefta ruling in its discussion of M. Ber. 5:1:[[69]](#footnote-69) תני היה כותב את השם אפי' מלך שואל בשלומו לא ישיבנו היה כותב **שנים** או **שלשה** שמות כגון אל אלהים י'י הרי זה גומר את אחד מהן ומשיב שאילת שלום, It was taught: If one was writing God's name [in a Torah scroll], even if a king extends to him a greeting, he should not respond. If one was writing **two** or **three** consecutive divine names – such as El, Elohim, Yahweh – he should finish writing one and return the greeting.

The version in the Y. changes the numbers five and six to two and three. In both versions, the exact number is not important. The idea is that you should not stop in the middle of writing God's name, but if you write several names of God, you can stop between them.

Some more examples can be found at:

T. T.Y. 2:17: [[70]](#footnote-70)

היה תורם **ארבע** **וחמש** חביות...

[If] he was raising up as heave-offering **four or five** jugs

M. Par. 2:6: [[71]](#footnote-71)

... ר' עקיבה או' אפילו **ארבע** אפילו **חמש** והן מפוזרות יתלוש...

R. Aqiba says: “even **four**,even **five** [hairs] and they are scattered…”

Y. Nid. 1: 5: [[72]](#footnote-72)

אם היה מושך ויונק **ארבע** או **חמש** שנים

If [the infant] went on nursing for **four** or **five** years

1. **Poetic parallelism with a graded pair of numbers:**

The second way of using graded numerical sayings is poetic parallelism with a pair of numbers. This parallelism separates the pair of numbers, and each number is situated in different stiches. This formulation is very common in Rabbinic literature, in "pure" prosaic units and in units whose language is more poetic. We should note that we used the term "parallelism" in this part of the paper in the broadest sense of the word. [[73]](#footnote-73)

M. Mei. 4: 2:[[74]](#footnote-74)

**חמשה** דברים בעולה מיצטרפין זה עם זה הבשר והחלב הסלת והיין והשמן

**ששה** בתודה הבשר והחלב הסלת והיין והשמן והלחם

**Five** things in a burnt-offering can combine with one another: the flesh, the fat, the fine flour, the wine and the oil.

And **six** in a thank-offering: the flesh, the fat, the fine flour, the wine, the oil and the bread.

The number five counts the items in the first of the two parallel clauses while the number six counts the items in the second clause. The detail writing in the second row seems unnecessary. The text could have been less specific and the sages could refer to the first clause while minimize the length of the second clause.[[75]](#footnote-75) An example for this kind of wording can be found in M. Ket. 3:5: [[76]](#footnote-76)

המפתה נותן **שלושה** דברים והאונס **ארבעה**

המפתה נותן בושת ופגם וקנס

מוסיף עליו האונס שהוא נותן את הצער

The one who seduces a girl pays on **three** counts and the one who rapes [a girl pays] on **four**:

The one who seduces a girl pays for: the shame, the damage, and a fine.

And the one who rapes a girl adds to these, for he in addition pays for the suffering [which he has inflicted.]

The second clause in this Mishnah specifies the things that the one who seduces a girl need to pay: the shame, the damage, and a fine. The third clause does not include the detail description from the second clause, and only adds the fourth count of payments: the suffering which he has inflicted, although different writing versions were possible. For example: The one who rapes a girl pays for: the shame, the damage, the suffering and a fine.

Moreover, M. Mei. 4:2 includes in addition to the parallelism another pattern: the 'gaping', or in Hebrew *‘hamshakhah’*, specifically double *hamshakhah*. The words 'דברים' and 'מיצטרפין זה עם זה', meaning, 'things', and 'can combine with one another' are missing in the second sentence and the reader "drag" them from the first sentence. This rhetoric device was frequently used in the Bible and in Rabbinic literature as well, and its contribution to the syntax of these literatures had been discussed many times in the past.[[77]](#footnote-77)

All in all, it seems that the rabbis could choose several ways of wording. It both examples that we discussed above, there is deliberate words omitting (gaping), multiple use of *hamshakhah* and use of numbers as mnemonic device.

B. Ket. 65a**:**[[78]](#footnote-78)

תנא

כוס **אחד** יפה לאשה

**שנים** ניוול הוא לה

**שלשה** תובעת בפה

**ארבעה** אפילו חמור בשוק תובעת ואינה מקפדת

A Tanna taught:

**One** cup is becoming to a woman

**Two** are degrading

**Three** she solicits publicly

**Four** she solicits even an ass in the street and cares not.

This unit deals with the prohibition of wine drinking by women. According to this unit, drinking wine may lead a woman to promiscuous behavior, which became more extreme with every additional cup. That is to say, as the numbers are ascending the reckless and even slutty behavior of the woman is increasing. As we can see, the rabbis used four consecutive numbers in ascending order, each number in a different stich. This unit also uses several rhetorical patterns: the gaping (of the word 'cup' in stiches two-four), *hamshakhah*, and concluding deviation. The latter term refers to the rhetorical device of setting apart the last part of a verse or pericope from the other parts by changing the order of the words, the number of the words, the place of the verb, etc. [[79]](#footnote-79)

M. Hag. 2:1: [[80]](#footnote-80)

אין דורשים בעריות **בשלושה**

ולא במעשה בראשית **בשנים**

ולא במרכבה **ביחיד**

אלא אם כן היה חכם והבין מדעתו...

Forbidden sexual relations are not expounded before **three persons**;

The Works of Creation [are not expounded] before **two**;

And the Divine Chariot [are not expounded] before a **one**; unless he is a sage who understands from his own knowledge.

This Mishnah deals with the maximum number of the sages which is permitted for learning about three different subjects. According to this Mishnah it is forbidden to teach at the same time more than two sages the ruling of Forbidden sexual relations. Likewise, it is forbidden to teach more than one sage about the acts of creation. The study of the Divine Chariot is possible only to one sage who understands from his own knowledge the material under discussion.

The numbers in this Mishnah can be understood as minimum numbers. Meaning, that one cannot teach less than four sages about forbidden sexual relations, before less than three the acts of creation and before less than two the Divine Chariot. Comparison to T. Hag. 2:1 proves that these are maximum numbers:[[81]](#footnote-81)

אין דורשין בעריות **בשלשה** אבל דורשין **בשנים**

ולא במעשה בראשית **בשנים** אבל דורשין **ביחיד**

ולא במרכבה **ביחיד** אלא אם כן היה חכם מבין מדעתו

Forbidden sexual relations are not expounded before **three**, but they do expound before two;

Or about the Works of Creation before **two**, but they do expound before one;

Or about the Divine Chariot before **one**, unless he was a sage and understands from his own knowledge.

All the numbers in the Mishnah and in the equivalent Tosefta were arranged in descending order. Like the previous example from B. Ket. 65a this unit also uses: the gaping (of the word ‘expound’ in stiches two and three) and forward *hamshakhah* of this word.

We shall now survey a few examples, which we shall treat only briefly:

Y. Ta’a. 4: 8: [[82]](#footnote-82)

אמ' ר' חנינה בריה דר' אבהו

**שבע מאות** מיני דגים טהורים

**ושמונה מאות** מיני חגבים טהורים

ולעוף **אין מספר**

כולהם גלו עם יש' לבבל וכשחזרו כולהם חזרו עמהן חוץ מן הדג הנקרא שיבוטא

Said R. Hanina, son of R. Abbahu:

“**Seven hundred** species of clean fish,

**Eight hundred** species of clean locusts,

And fowl **without number**,

All went into exile with the Israelites to Babylonia. And when they came back, all of them came back with them, except for the fish called: ‘Shibuta.’”

According to this saying by R. Hanina, which was arranged in ascending order, when the people of Israel were exiled to Babylon, and when they came back to the land of Israel, they were accompanied by different species of fishes, locusts and fowls, except from the fish that named ‘Shibuta’ that didn’t came back from Babylon. The animals in this unit were arranged in ascending order. Although the number of the fowls was not specified, and according to this unit, is too large to be numbered, it is clearly larger than eight hundred. [[83]](#footnote-83)

T. Meg. 3:5: [[84]](#footnote-84)

ביום טוב **חמשה** ביום הכפורים שבע"ה[[85]](#footnote-85) **ששה** בשבת **שבעה** אם רצו להוסיף אל יוסיפו דברי ר' ישמעאל

רבי עקיבא אומ' ביום טוב **חמשה** וביום הכפורים **שבעה** ובשבת **ששה** ואם רצו להוסיף מוסיפין

On the festival day **five** [are called to read the Torah], on the Day of Atonement **six**, on the Sabbath **seven**. “And if they wanted to call more [then these numbers], they may not call more,” the words of R. Ishmael.

R. Aqiba says:” On the festival day **five**, on the Day of Atonement **seven**, on the Sabbath **six**. And if they wanted to call more, they do call more.”

According to R. Ishmael five people are called to read the Torah on ordinary festival day. On Day of Atonement there number increase to six, and on Sabbath there number should be seven. It seems that the arrangement of R. Ishmael’s saying is according to the number of people that read the Torah, i.e. five, six and seven. The saying by R. Aqiba, on the other hand, is referring to the previous order (of days) and the numbers in his saying were not arranged in a particular order.

In some cases the same number is used in both of the two parallel clauses, as in the example we cited before from Ben-Sira 25:1-4 (Sagel ed.). This use will be mostly in antithetic parallelism but can be found in other kinds of parallelism. For example:

B. Pes. 113b:[[86]](#footnote-86)

**שלשה** הקב"ה אוהבן מי שאינו כועס מי שאינו משתכר ומי שאינו מעמיד על מדותיו

**שלשה** הקב"ה שונאן המדבר אחת בפה ואחת בלב והיודע עדות ואינו מעיד והיודע דבר בחבירו ומעיד בו יחידי

**Three** the Holy One, blessed be He, loves: he who does not display anger; he who does not become intoxicated; and he who does not insist on his [full] rights.

**Three** the Holy One, blessed be He, hates: he who speaks one thing with his mouth and another thing in his heart; and he who possesses evidence favorable to his friend and does not testify for him; and he who sees something indecent in his friend and testifies against him alone.

The use of the number three in this unit seems unnecessary. Each line details three different people, whose behavior God likes or dislikes, while the connection between these people is not prominent. The author of this unit could have replaced the number three with the word אלה, these, without harming the comparison. Nevertheless the use of the same number unifies all three men in each line, and creates a “stronger” comparison between the lines.

M. Pes. 4:9: [[87]](#footnote-87)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Six** rules did the men of Jericho make. For **three**, [the sages] reproved them, and for **three** they did not reprove them.  ]These are the three for which they did not reprove them:[  They grafted palms [on the fourteenth of Nisan] the whole day; they did not make the prescribed divisions in the Shema; and they reaped and stacked [wheat] before the [offering of] the sheaf of first barley [*omer*] and they did not reprove them.  And these are the three for which they reproved them:  They permit use of Egyptian figs [from stems which had been] dedicated to the Temple; they eat on the Sabbath fruit which had fallen under a tree; and they leave the corner of the field [peah] in the case of vegetables and the sages did reprove them. | **ששה** דברים עשו אנשי ר'[[88]](#footnote-88) יריחו על **שלשה** מיחו ועל **שלשה** לא מיחו בידם  מרכיבים דקלים כל היום  וכורכין את שמע  וגודשין לפני העומ'  ולא מיחו בידם  ואילו שמיחו בידם  מתירי' גמזיות של [ה]קדש של חרוב ושל שקמה  ואוכלין מתחת הנשר בשבת  ונותנין פיאה לירק  ומיחו בידם חכמים |
| King Hezekiah did **six** things. On account of **three** of them [the sages] praised him, and on account of **three** they did not praise him.  ]On account of three they praised him:[  He dragged the bones of his father on a bed of ropes and they praised him. He pulverized the copper snake and they praised him. He hid away the book of cures and they praised him.  ]On account of three they did not praise him:]  He cut off the gold from the doors of the Temple and sent it to the king of Assyria, and they did not praise him. He shut off the waters of *Gihon*, and they did not praise him. He intercalated the month of Nisan during the month of Nisan itself and they did not praise him. | **ששה**[[89]](#footnote-89) דברים עשה חזקיהו המלך על **שלשה** הודו לו ועל **שלשה** לא הודו לו  גירר עצמות של אביו במיט' של חבלים והודו לו  וכיתת נחש הנחשת והודו לו  גנז ספר רפואות והודו [לו]  קיצץ דלתות ההיכל ושגרם למלך אשור ולא הודו לו סתם את מוצא מי גיחו' ולא הודו לו  עיבר ניסן בניסן ולא הודו לו |

Both sayings were construed as antithetic parallelisms, and although initially they might seem similar, there are some differences in the wording between them: The repetition of the words praised and not praised, which, with the required respective, is missing in the first saying; the internal order with regard to the opening line. To first saying specify the deeds of the men of Jericho in reverse order to the order in the opening line, while the second saying maintains the original order.

These sayings can be found in several other places in the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud, but most appearances of this in addition to parallelism in Rabbinic literature quote only one of the two sayings, and they rarely appear together. The first saying can also be found, with some changes, in T. Pes. 3:16, while the source of the second saying is unclear. Its origin, or at least, its source of influence, may be in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan A, 2, 42-49:[[90]](#footnote-90) חזקיה מלך יהודה עשה ארבעה דברים והסכימה דעתו לדעת המקום גנז ספר רפואות והסכימה דעתו לדעת המקום כתת נחש הנחשת...סתם מי גיחון..., Hezekiah, king of Judah, carried out four actions, and his plan coincided with the plan of the Omnipresent. He suppressed the remedies, and his plan coincided with the plan of the Omnipresent…He pulverized the copper snake…He stopped up the stream of *Gihon*…

Most of the fourth chapter in Mishnah Pesahim deals with labors which are forbidden on the eve of a holiday. The first saying starts with the work that the men of Jericho used to do on the fourteenth of Nisan during the whole day so the connection between this saying and the entire chapter is clear. It seems that the second saying, unlike the first one which is partly related by content to the entire chapter, was only added on the base of stylistic imagination, i.e., the use of the same rhetoric pattern: six X were made by Y: three are “positive”; three are “negative”.[[91]](#footnote-91)

B. Hag. 16a: [[92]](#footnote-92)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority:  **Six** traits have been stated with respect to demons, **three** like human beings, and three like ministering angels.  **Three** like ministering angels:  They have wings, like ministering angels; they go from one end of the world to the other, like ministering angels; they know what is going to happen, like ministering angels.  “They know” do you imagine? Rather: they hear from behind the veil, like ministering angels.  **Three** like human beings:  they eat and drink like human beings,  they procreate like human beings,  and they die like human beings.  **Six** traits have been stated with respect to humanity, three like traits of ministering angels and **three** like traits of a beast.  **Three** in which humanity is like ministering angels:  People have understanding like ministering angels, they walk standing up, like ministering angels, and they make use of the Holy Language, like ministering angels.  **Three** in which humanity is like the beast: people eat and drink like a beast,  procreate like a beast,  and shit like a beast. | תנו רבנן  **ששה** דברים נאמרו בשידים **שלשה** כמלאכי השרת **ושלשה** כבני אדם  **שלשה** כמלאכי השרת  יש להן כנפים כמלאכי השרת  ושטין מסוף העולם ועד סופו כמלאכי השרת  ויודעין מה שעתיד להיות כמלאכי השרת  יודעין סלקא דעתא אלא אימא שומעין מה שעתיד להיות כמלאכי השרת  **שלשה** כבני אדם  אוכלין ושותין כבני אדם  ופרין ורבין כבני אדם  ומתין כבני אדם  **ששה** דברים נאמרו בבני אדם  **שלשה** כמלאכי השרת  **ושלשה** כבהמה  **שלשה** כמלאכי שרת  יש בהן דעה כמלאכי השרת  ומהלכין בקומה זקופה כמלאכי השרת  ומספרין בלשון הקדש כמלאכי השרת  **שלשה** כבהמה  אוכלין ושותין כבהמה  ופרין ורבין כבהמה  ומוציאין רעי כבהמה |

This unit contains two sayings that were construed as complementary or synthetic parallelism, although these sayings can also be considered, in a way, as antithetic parallelism.[[93]](#footnote-93) The first saying deals with demons that have some characters of ministering angels and some characters of humans. The second saying deals with humans that have some characters of ministering angels and some characters of beasts. The internal order of each unit is as follows:

Demons

Ministering angels **Humans**.

**Humans**

Ministering angels Beasts.

This order is not random. In the first saying the human’s traits could have been written before the Ministering angels traits, but it was placed it at the end of the first saying because humans are the subject of the second saying. The repeated element creates connection and even a sort of concatenation between the two sayings and bound them together. [[94]](#footnote-94) This might also be the reason for the positioning of the “demons” saying before the “humans” saying.

All in all, we can identify a descending order of “holiness” in these units. The demons, which are half humans and half angels, are in a “higher” status than the humans, which are half angels and half beasts. In every saying the “higher” or better traits appears at the beginning. That is Contrary to the ascending “holiness” order in the equivalent version in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan.[[95]](#footnote-95)

We shall now survey two more examples in which the same number is used in both of the two parallel clauses:

T. Bes. 3:14: [[96]](#footnote-96)

**שלשה**[[97]](#footnote-97) דברים נאמרו בפתילה **שלשה** להחמיר **ושלשה** להקל

אין עושין אותה בתחלה ואין מהבהבין אותה באור ואין חותכין אותה לשנים

אילו שלשה להקל שורין אותה בשמן ומעכבין אותה באור וחותכה באור לשני נירות

**Three** [should by **Six**] rules were stated with reference to a wick, **three** on the strict side, and **three** on the lenient side:

[These are the three on the strict side:] They do not make it to begin with, and they do not singe it with fire, and they do not chop it into two.

These are the three on the lenient side: they soak it in oil, rub it by hand, and cut it with fire [when it is] in two lamps.

This example was construed as antithetic parallelism. The completion ‘אילו שלשה להחמיר’, ‘These are the three on the strict side’ in MS Erfurt emphasize the contradiction between the two lines, while the number three, once again, unifies all three things in each line, and create “stronger” comparison between the lines.

M. Zeb. 6:2: [[98]](#footnote-98)

**ושלושה** דברים היתה אותה הקרן משמשת מלמטן

**ושלושה** מלמעלן

מלמטן חטאת העוף והגשות ושירי הדם

מלמעלן ניסוך המים והיין ועולת העוף כשהיא רבה במזרח[[99]](#footnote-99)

And three purposes did that [southwestern] corner serve below, and three above:

Below: the sin offering of fowl, and bringing near [of meal offerings], and [for pouring out] the remnants of the blood.

Above: [for] the water offering, and [for] the wine offering, and [for] the burnt offering of fowl, when it [the burnt offering of fowl] was [too] abundant in the east.

This Mishnah discusses the uses of the southwestern corner of the altar, and it was construed as synthetic parallelism, while the words’היתה אותה הקרן משמשת’, ‘that corner serve’ are missing in the second line and the reader may “draw” them from the first line.

1. **Graded numerical parallelism**.

Except for one example we did not find a distinct use of the Graded numerical parallelism in Rabbinic literature. There are some examples that are similar in style but they are not identical to the biblical use, although the rabbis were surely familiar with this pattern and even discussed its biblical use from time to time. For example, in B.Yoma 86b the sages deals with Amos's words (2:6): כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה פִּשְׁעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל אַרְבָּעָה לֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ, Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment. R.Yose b. R. Judah explains that the meaning of Amos’s prophecy is: אדם עובר עבירה פעם ראשונה מוחלין לו שניה מוחלין לו שלישית מוחלין לו רביעית אין מוחלין לו, implying, when a person does a transgression once, he is forgiven, a second time he is forgiven, a third time, he is forgiven. But when he does it a fourth time he is not forgiven.

The only example of Graded numerical parallelism that we find in Rabbinic literature is in B. Nid. 16b: [[100]](#footnote-100)

כדכת' בספר בן סירא **שלשה** שנאתי **וארבעה** לא אהב'

שר הנרגל בבית המשתאות ואמרי לה הנרגז בבית המשתאות [ואמרי ליה הנרגן]

והמושב שבת שבת[[101]](#footnote-101) במרומי קרת

והאוחז באמה ומשתין מים

והכונס[[102]](#footnote-102) בבית חבירו פתאום א"ר יוח' אפילו לביתו

As written in the book of Ben Sira: Three types I hate, and four I do not love:

An official who frequents wine-shops, and some say, an official who is angry, and some say, an official who is a common gossip;

A person who calls a session in the high part of town,

One who holds his penis when he urinates,

And one who appears in his fellow’s home without warning

Said R. Johanan, “Even [one who appears] in his own home [without warning.]

This saying, like several others, was attributed by the rabbis to Ben-Sira,[[103]](#footnote-103) although the entire unit is missing from all known versions of the Book of Ben-Sira, and we can find only a partial similarity between some lines from this unit to some sayings of Ben-Sira.

The opening line of this unit uses the numbers three and four that are common in graded numerical parallelism, in this case as Positive - Negative parallelism:[[104]](#footnote-104)

'שלשה שנאתי וארבעה לא אהב', meaning: There are three [types] that I hate, yea, four that I do not love.[[105]](#footnote-105) We should note that in many cases this pair of words, i.e., hate and love, will appear in two different lines of antithetic parallelism.[[106]](#footnote-106)

Although the first line is faulty it is clear that it deals with a man, maybe a scholar or a sage, and according to Segal, the head of the feast or the prime banquet,[[107]](#footnote-107) that is present in a pub.

Because of the faulty text, that actually contains all three possible versions: נרגל, נרגן ונרגז, the exact accusation against this man is unclear. Rashi, in his commentary to this Talmudic unit, deals with all three options. He suggest that the word 'נרגל' means frequent visitor, the word 'נרגן' means prattler, a man that talks a lot, and the word 'נרגז' means a person that anger the other guests at the drinking house.

All three versions נרגל, נרגן or נרגז, may reveal immoral behavior which takes place at the drinking house and probably involves drinking wine. Literally and based on the content we can find only a faint resemblance between this line and the Greek and Syrian versions of Ben-Sira which was translated back to Hebrew by Segal (for example: Ben-Sira 31:41, 32:1, 32:5). The Talmudic use of the words: שר, נרגל and בית המשתאות and the discussion about the person who sits at the head of the table and his desired behavior, were maybe based upon the words of some version of Ben-Sira but sometimes with a late adaptation. For example, the expression ‘בית המשתאות’ reflect Babylonian pronunciation, while in the Jerusalem Talmud it is written ‘בית משתיות’[[108]](#footnote-108) and Ben-Sira uses another term - ‘משתה יין’.[[109]](#footnote-109) Moreover, it is obvious that the original text, like the other stiches of this unit, contained only four words.[[110]](#footnote-110)

The second line was probably based upon R. Aqiba’s recommendation to his son R. Joshua in B. Pes. 112a: [[111]](#footnote-111) אל תשב בגובהה של עיר ותשנה, meaning, don’t take up residence at the high point of a town and study there [because passersby will disturb you], although it may also influenced literally from Prov. 9:14: וְיָשְׁבָה לְפֶתַח בֵּיתָהּ עַל כִּסֵּא מְרֹמֵי קָרֶת, She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the high places of the town.[[112]](#footnote-112)

It is difficult to understand what exactly the accusation in this stich is. [[113]](#footnote-113) However, the lack of explicit accusation, and the differences between the immoral behaviors in the other three lines of this unit, may indicate that this stich is an adaptation of other sources, from which only a part was reworded in this unit. Linguistically speaking, this is the only line in this unit that could be attributed to Ben-Sira.

The subject of the third stich appears, with slight changes, in B. Sha. 41a and in B. Nid. 43a:[[114]](#footnote-114) כל האוחז באמה ומשתין כאילו מביא מבול לעולם, anyone who holds onto his penis when he urinates is as though he brought the flood upon the world. All equivalents use the word 'אמה', literally: forearm, as a euphemism for the male organ. The origin of this euphemism is maybe in M. Nid. 5:2: 'אוחז באמה', meaning, holds on to the penis.[[115]](#footnote-115) The Hebrew version of Ben-Sira, does not use the word ‘אמה’, forearm (or a euphemism for the male penis) or the word ‘משתין’, urinates. The verb ‘אוחז’, hold, is typical of Babylonian Hebrew, while in the Land of Israel the equivalent verb is ‘תופש’.[[116]](#footnote-116) That is to say that the language used in this line is also not applicable to the time of Ben-Sira.

The fourth and last line deals with a person who enters his friend's house, or according to R. Johanan, even to his own house, suddenly. This line, like the second line inthis unit, was probably influenced by the saying of R. Aqiba inB. Pes. 112b: ואל תיכנס לביתך פתאום כל שכן לבית חבירך, meaning: and don’t enter your own home suddenly, all the more so your neighbor’s home, although we can find some similarity to Ben-Sira 21:24: רגל נבל מהרה אל בית, the fool steps boldly into a house [while the well-bred person remains outside.] [[117]](#footnote-117)

The third and fourth recommendations in this unit also appear in the following unit, which was attributed in Talmudic manuscripts and prints to various sages such as R. Simeon, R. Simeon b. Yohai, R. Simeon b. Laqish and R. Samuel:

א'ר שמע' ארבעה הקב'ה שונאן ואף אני איני אוהבן

הנכנס לביתו פתאום ואין צריך לומ' לבית חברו

והאוחז באמה ומשתין מים

והמש' מים בפני מיטתו ערום

והמשמש מטתו בפני כל חי

There are four sorts that the Holy One, blessed be He, hates, and I don’t love them either:

One who appears in his own home without warning, and, it goes without saying, his fellow’s home;

One who holds his penis when he urinates water;

One who urinates water naked before his bed;

And one who has sexual relations in the presence of any living creature whatsoever.

The opening of this unit is literally, and in a way also stylistically, similar to the previous unit: שלשה שנאתי וארבעה לא אהב'compared to ארבעה הקב'ה שונאן ואף אני איני אוהבן. As we can see, the words four, hate and don't love appear in both sentences.

The first two stiches are almost identical to the last two stiches in the first unit but in chiastic order: והאוחז באמה ומשתין מים which followed by והכונס בבית חבירו פתאום א"ר יוח' אפילו לביתו, compared to הנכנס לביתו פתאום ואין צריך לומ' לבית חברו which followed by והאוחז באמה ומשתין מים.[[118]](#footnote-118)

The second unit seems more coherent than the first unit. All four recommendations which it summarizes deal with similar subjects: modesty and things which are related to possible sexual arousal and to proper sexual behavior.

The inner order is also coherent. The words 'משתין מים', urinates water, which ends the second line begins the third line. The words 'בפני מיטתו', before his bed, which appears in the third line appears again, in reverse order, in the fourth line. The arranging of the last three sentences was done correspondingly to key words, as follows:

משתין מים

מש' מים *בפני מיטתו*

והמשמש *מיטתו בפני*

Urinates water

Urinates water *before his bed*

Has sexual relations *before his bed* [[119]](#footnote-119)

In our opinion, it seems that the first unit, which contains the graded numerical parallelism, was compiled from, or at least influenced by, several different sources, to which the common opening of the graded numerical parallelism was prefaced. The different subjects in the first unit, combined with the use of Hebrew words from different times, may indicate that it was construed and inspired by several different sources.

The opening sentence and the first stich were probably influenced from some version of Ben-Sira[[120]](#footnote-120) (and so is the opening sentence of the second unit.) The second and fourth stiches are connected to B. Pes. 112b, while the language of the second line is close to the language of the Hebrew Ben-Sira and in a way to biblical Hebrew. The fourth line, like the third one, is also connected to the following unit and there is no doubt that these units are connected in a way.[[121]](#footnote-121) Although we can find some similarities between the different versions of Ben-Sira and the first unit, and especially in regard to the first half of this unit, it is quite obvious that this unit, entirely, is not an exact quote of Ben-Sira. The language of most lines is different from the language of Ben-Sira, and the Talmudic reference to Ben-Sira is doubtful. The use of Babylonian pronunciation and the early introduction with B. Pes. 112b should indicate that this unit was compiled in Babylon in the Amoraic era. In our opinion, although this is the only example of Graded numerical parallelism that we find in Rabbinic literature, it could confirm that the rabbis were familiar with this rhetorical device, and it was in use hundreds of years after the time of Ben-Sira.

In addition to the previous example, we can find examples that are similar in style, specifically to the biblical use of this pattern. For example (Avot 4: 13b):

ר' שמעון או'

שלשה כתרים הן

כתר תורה

וכתר כהונה

וכתר מלכות

וכתר שם טוב על גביהן

There are three crowns:

The crown of Torah,

And the crown of priesthood,

And the crown of kingship;

But the crown of a good name exceeds them all.

Although this unit does not begins with the numbers three and four the similarity to graded numerical parallelism is easy noticeable. At first, three crowns are represented, each in different line, and then, in the last line, the fourth crown, the crown of 'שם טוב', good name', appears.[[122]](#footnote-122)

**Conclusion**

In this paper we have surveyed the use of numbers in different literatures from different places and different times. Like other rhetorical patterns that we have analyzed in previous papers which developed and changed through the years, so did the use of numbers. The basic biblical use of numbers as mnemonic device increased in Rabbinic literature.

The use of typological numbers in Rabbinic literature is no different from its use in the Bible. Moreover, in some cases the rabbis use typological numbers such as forty (less one) instead of ordinary numbers like thirty-nine. This adherence to typological numbers cannot be found in the Bible.

The use of graded numerical sayings, both in the Bible and in Rabbinic literature, is divided into three sub categories. The first use, to specify unknown or uncertain numbers, creates sometimes difficulties for the Rabbis that become entangled with uncertain numbers.The second use, in poetic parallelism, is widespread and can be found in different types of parallelisms, but in many cases the numbers helps memorizing, and their contribution to the style is insignificant. The third use, i.e., the graded numerical parallelism, is very rare and we found just one prominent appearance of this rhetorical device in Rabbinic literature. The graded numerical parallelism is used mostly as a matter of style, and like other rhetorical features, for example, the "Stylistic Anadiplosis"[[123]](#footnote-123) was almost abandoned be the rabbis.

That is to say that the use of numbers as a stylistic device, and especially their use in graded numerical parallelism, almost vanished. It will require a long discussion to explain why the rabbis abandoned the stylistic use of this pattern, but at this point we can say that the rabbis preferred to use rhetorical patterns that help the memorization of their texts, and rarely used rhetorical patterns that contribute only to the aesthetic appeal of the text. Is seems that the rabbis were familiar with the Biblical use of numbers and like other rhetorical devices adopted them, sometimes with some changes, and used them in different ways. As we will show in the second part of this paper,[[124]](#footnote-124) one of this ways is the use of numbers as an editing device.

1. In some cases the scholars who dealt with this phenomenon treated different aspects of the use of numbers in the Bible. For example, as we shall see later on, some scholars referred to a specific genre such as the Biblical law, while others referred only to the use in Biblical poetry, and others only dealt with one of several sub patterns of numerical saying. In this paper, however, we did not limit ourselves to specific genre, book or place of writing. That is to say, that we will deal with examples from different literatures, times and authors. Moreover, we should note that our discussion in this paper is stylistic and literary and sometimes philological. Meaning, we will not discussed the numerical value of the numbers (*gematria*), their mystical significance (numerology) or their authenticity. For example, 2Kg. 19:35 mention that one of the Lord’s angels killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. The Historical reliability of this number will not be discussed, and so is the number of people that Saul or David has slain (1Sam 18:7.) And last, in most cases we will refer to number which appears explicitly in the text and will not deal with “hidden” numbers such as number of words, number of verses or chapters, Biblical code, steganography, equidistant letter sequences, Biblical Numerology, etc. That in on the contrary to some contemporary studies, for example see: C.J. Labuschagne, ”Significant compositional techniques in the Psalms: evidence for the use of number as an organizing principle,” *Vetus Testamentum* 59, 4 (2009), pp. 583-605; M. Bar-Ilan, *Biblical Numerology* (Rehovot: Association for Jewish Astrology and Numerology, 2005) [Heb.]; I. Knohl, *The Holy Name* (Or Yehuda: Dvir, 2012) [Heb.]; idem,”[Sacred architecture: the numerical dimensions of biblical poem](javascript:open_window(%22http://aleph.nli.org.il:80/F/NRIK5NDYPGU1QGE4N4KAQKFT7TRJYFC2429KR7A5RVM5TNPMYT-18483?func=service&doc_number=000519721&line_number=0008&service_type=TAG%22);),” *Vetus Testamentum* 62, 2 (2012), pp. 189-197, and see also the book review by M. Bar-Ilan in *Beit Mikra* 58, 1 (2013), pp. 153-166 [Heb.] and Knohl’s response in *Beit Mikra* 58, 2 (2013), pp. 130-134 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ## A. Alt, "Die Ursprünge des israelitischen Rechts,” in: *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, I (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1959), pp. 278-332 [Ger.] (cf. A. Alt, *Essays on Old Testament history and religion* (R.A. Wilson trl.)(Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), pp. 101–171). In his pioneering research Alt distinguished between two types of Biblical law: the [casuistic](http://www.bible.gen.nz/amos/sounds/casuistic.mp3) law and the [apodictic](http://www.bible.gen.nz/amos/sounds/apodictic.mp3) law, and during his discussion he referred to the use of numbers in the apodictic law series.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. S. E. Loewenstamm, “remark on stylistic patterns in Biblical and Ugaritic literatures,” *Leshonenu* 32 (1968), pp. 33-35 [Heb.]; idem, “the graded number,” in: *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968), vol. 5, col. 185-186 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. M.D. Cassuto, *The goddess Anat* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 19654), p.84 [Heb.]; idem, “Biblical and Canaanite literatures,” *Tarbiz* 13, 4 (1942) , pp. 203-205 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. N.H. Tur-Sinai,*The Proverbs of Solomon* (Tel-Aviv: Yavneh Press, 1947), p. 62 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ## M.H. Segal, *The Book of Ben-Sira* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1953), pp. 142-143[Heb.]; idem, *Introduction to the Bible*, book 1(Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sepher, 1977), pp. 58-60 [Heb.]; idem, “On the Poetical Forms of Ancient Proverbial Literature,” *Tarbiz* 1, 4 (1930), pp. 16-17[Heb.]; idem, “On certain Forms of Biblical Poetry,” *Tarbiz* 18, 3/4 (1947), pp. 142-145 [Heb.]

   [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. M. Paran, *Forms of the Priestly Style in the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989), pp.16-17, 136 [Heb.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. M. Haran, “Biblical Studies: The model of the incremental number in its various forms and its relationship to the formal models of parallelism,” *Tarbiz* 39 (1969), pp. 109-136 [Heb.]; idem, “The graded numerical sequence and the phenomenon of "automatism" in biblical poetry,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 22 (1972), pp. 238-267.  [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Y. Avishur, *Phoenician Inscriptions and The Bible* (Jerusalem: E. Rubenstein, 1979), vol. 1, pp. 53-54, vol. 2, pp. 247, 254 [Heb.]; idem, *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1981), vol. 2, pp. 1-9 [Heb.]; idem, *Comparative studies in Biblical and Ugaritic languages and literatures* (Tel-Aviv: Archaeological Center Publication, 2007), pp. 84-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Y. Zakovitch, *The pattern of the numerical sequence three-four in the Bible* (Heb. PhD Diss. Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1977). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. J.L. Kugel, *The idea of biblical poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. S. Gevirtz, *Patterns in the early poetry of Israe l*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) , pp. 15-34 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. S. Yona, “Shared stylistic patterns in the Aramaic proverbs of Ahiqar and Hebrew wisdom,” in: ANES (*Ancient Near Eastern Studies)* 44 (2007), pp. 43-46; idem,”Milestones in the Study of the Style, Structure and Rhetoric of the Proverbs of Ahiqar,” in *Beer Sheva* 20 (2011), pp.135-136 [Heb.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. E.L. Greenstein, “Finding One’s Way in Proverbs 30:18-19,”in: S. Yona et al. (ed.): *Marbeh Hokma* [in print.] [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. W.M.W. Roth, “the Numerical Sequence x/x+1 in the Old Testament,” *Vetus Testamentum* 12 (1962), pp. 300-311; idem, *Numerical sayings in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1965). The discussion by Roth is divided into three different usages of numerical sayings: the narrative, the reflective and the hortative. In each chapter Roth discussed several examples, which includes various types of numerical sayings such as: “normal” use of one number, different uses of graded numerical sayings like poetic parallelism with a pair of numbers, graded numerical parallelism, etc’. However, in this paper, which focuses more on style, except for its last part that deals with the influence of numbers upon the editing process of rabbinic literature, we will divide the discussion according to the stylistic forms of use and not according to the content. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. J.N. Epstein, "Kelim chapter 24,” in: S. Lieberman et all (ed.), *Louis Ginzberg jubilee volume* (New York, American Academy for Jewish Research, 1946), vol. 1, pp. 65-74. [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. R. Gordis, “The Heptad as an Element of Biblical and Rabbinic Style,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 62, 1 (1943), pp. 17-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. L. Jacobs, “The numbered sequence as a literary device in the Babylonian Talmud,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 7 (1983), pp. 137-149. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. S. Sharvit, *Language and Style of Tractate Avoth Through the Ages*(Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), pp. 27-31 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. S. Friedman, *A critical study of Yevamot X with a methodological introduction* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1977), pp. 316-319, 346-351 [Heb.]; idem, Some Structural Patterns in Talmudic *Sugiot*, in: A. Shinan (ed.), *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*(Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1977), vol. 3, pp. 389-402 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. S. Valler,”The number fourteen as a literary device in the Babylonian Talmud,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 26, 2 (1995), pp. 169-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. E.Z. Melammed, “Text, Number, and Meter in tractate Avot” *Sinai* 50 (1962), pp.154-165 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. A.D. Tropper, *Wisdom, politics, and historiography:* [*Tractate Avot in the context of the Graeco-Roman Near East,*](javascript:open_window(%22https://lib20.bgu.ac.il/F/7JXE9N3IA9DRR53TT3YT8BS7AFXKVCNJAVV78D6VRHEJH1N9NM-45788?func=service&doc_number=002084533&line_number=0012&service_type=TAG%22);) (Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 26-27, 31, 45-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. # I. Gottlieb, “Pirqe Avot as Wisdom Literature,” in: S. Yona and V.A. Hurowitz (eds.), *Wisdom, her pillars are seven* (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2011), pp. 98-100 [Heb.]; idem, “Pirqe Abot and Biblical Wisdom,” [*Vetus Testamentum*](http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/15685330;jsessionid=1ih9sk5sf09p8.x-brill-live-03) 40, 2 (1990), p. 159.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. M.B. Lerner, “The Tractate Avot,” in: S. Safrai (ed.), *The Literature of the Sages I* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987), pp. 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. I. Zeligman, *The Treasury of Numbers* (Baltimor: B.E. and. R. Zeligman, 1942.) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. S. Kim, *Continuity and discontinuity between Biblical and post-Biblical wisdom texts (*PhD Diss. Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, 2014.) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Gad Ben-Ami Zarfati, “The meaning of numbers and their symbolic value,” in: *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968), vol. 5, col. 181-185 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. It seems that the prophet leveled his prophecy. In the first part of the verse the amount (of grain) was reduced by half, while on the second part it was reduced to two-fifths of the expected amount (of wine). In the *Massora*h text the measures are missing, and that might be on purpose. Only the differences between the expected amount of agricultural products and the actual amount are important. Therefore the measurements in the Greek translation of the Bible should be considered as an addition. See: M. Zer-Kavod, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1957), pp. 22-23 [Heb.]; H. W. Wolff, *Haggai: A Commentary* (trans. M. Kohl) (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), pp. 58, 64-65; D.L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 86, 90-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See: Haran, “Biblical Studies: The model of the incremental number in its various forms and its relationship to the formal models of parallelism,” (see n. 8), pp. 122-123; Loewenstamm, “remark on stylistic patterns in Biblical and Ugaritic literatures,” (see n. 3), pp.33-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The number hundred that ends the stich and begins the second stich creates continuation between the stiches. This rhetorical pattern is very common in biblical and rabbinical literature, and contributes to the texts, stylistically and syntactically. For further discussion see A.R. Pasternak and S. Yona, "Concatenation in Ancient Near East literature, in Hebrew Scripture and in Rabbinic literature" [in print.] [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For example, in Ho. 7:3: בְּרָעָתָם יְשַׂמְּחוּ מֶלֶךְ וּבְכַחֲשֵׁיהֶם שָׂרִים, “In malice they make a king merry, And officials in treachery,” the Prophet is talking about a single king but several, and at least two, officials.

    For further discussion and examples see: Zakovitch (see n. 10), pp. 35-40. We should mention that Zakovitch includes in his Dissertation many examples in which a “hidden” graded numerical parallelism patterns, in most cases of the numbers three and four, can be found. These examples, from various genres, and several assumptions and conclusions by Zakovitch can be discussed and disagreed, and one should compare it to the list of examples from the Bible and from the book of Ben-Sira in W. Roth’s article about this phenomenon in VT 12 (see n. 15), pp. 301-303. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. According to Cassuto in his paper “Biblical and Canaanite literatures,” (see n. 4), pp. 204-205, the Bible espoused the graded numerical parallelism from the Canaanite literature, and the Canaanite language is the origin of this pattern. Haran, on the opposing side, mentioned that we can find this pattern in Sumerian and Hittite which are not Semitic, and suggested that the origin of the graded numerical parallelism is the poetry of the Ancient Near East. See: Haran, “Biblical Studies: The model of the incremental number in its various forms and its relationship to the formal models of parallelism,” (see n. 8), pp. 111-112. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The Aramic text is according to: B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993), vol. 3, pp. 48-49, lines 187-189 [Heb.]; cf. A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 215, lines 92-94a, p.223. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. For further discussion about these examples see: Haran, “Biblical Studies: The model of the incremental number in its various forms and its relationship to the formal models of parallelism,” (see n. 8) pp. 134-136; Yona, “Shared stylistic patterns in the Aramaic proverbs of Ahiqar and Hebrew wisdom,” (see n. 13), pp. 43-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For different interpretation see Greenstein (see n. 14). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The Hebrew texts and references are from: M.H. Segal, *The Book of Ben-Sira* (see n. 6). The English translations are from: P.S. Skehan and A.A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB) (New York: Doubleday, 1987.) [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Segal identified in this unit an ascent in the severity of the act. All three sinners are involved in sexual relations which are not appropriate. In the first case the woman is single, in the second case she is single but a relative of the sinner, and in the last case she is a married woman. In this unit, according to Segal, the rhetorical structure matches to the content of the unit.

    The imagery between bread and sexual intercourse can be found in Gn. 39: 6: וַיַּעֲזֹב כָּל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ בְּיַד יוֹסֵף וְלֹא יָדַע אִתּוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי אִם הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר הוּא אוֹכֵל, "So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for **anything but the food that he ate**,” where, according to verse nine, it is euphemism to sexual intercourse: לֹא חָשַׂךְ מִמֶּנִּי מְאוּמָה כִּי אִם אוֹתָךְ בַּאֲשֶׁר אַתְּ אִשְׁתּוֹ, "nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife." Another example can be found in Prov. 9:17: מַיִם גְּנוּבִים יִמְתָּקוּ וְלֶחֶם סְתָרִים יִנְעָם, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."

    See: Segal, *The Book of Ben-Sira* (see n.6), p. 143. See also B. Ned. 91b and Rashi's commentary to Prov. 9:17, s.v. 'מים גנובים ימתקו'. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The unit reflects the approach of Ben-Sira whereby the fear of God is on a higher level than the wisdom that we know from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, i.e. the Biblical wisdom literature. For further discussion about the changes of the term ‘wisdom’ from is early use in the Bible until is use in rabbinic literature see: A. Rofe, *Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2006), pp. 411-416; Segal, *The Book of Ben-Sira* (see n.6), introduction pp.22-25, p. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Some manuscripts read: 'זקן מנאף', some read 'זקן סכל' and some read 'זקן מנאף וסכל'. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See: Segal, *The Book of Ben-Sira* (see n.6), pp. 152-153. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The Hebrew text and reference are according MS Leiden.inB. Qid. 30a there is another reference to the *Sofrim* which remind the work of the authors of the *Massorah*: לפיכך נקראו ראשנים סופרים שהיו סופרים כל אותיות שבתורה, Therefore the early masters were called *Sofrim* [scribes or, literally, those who are engaged in counting], because they would count up all the letters in the Torah. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See for example: T. Zeb. 13:3: ימי אהל מועד שבמדבר **ארבעים חסר אחת**, The days of the tent of meeting which was in the wilderness were **forty [years] less one**; T. Sot. 8:11: אין לך כל דבר ודבר בתורה שלא נכרתו עליו **חמש מאות אלף ושלשת אלפים וחמש מאות וחמשים** כריתות כיוצאי מצרים, You have nothing whatsoever in the Torah for which **five hundred three thousand and five hundred and fift**y covenants were not made, equivalent to the number of people who went forth from Egypt; T. She. 3:1: **שלשה עשר** שופרות היו במקדש, **Thirteen** *shofar*-chests were in the sanctuary; M. Oha. 18:11: **עשרה** מקומות אין בהן משום מדור גוים, **Ten** places are not subject to the law applying to the dwelling of gentiles; B. Suk.52A: **שבעה** שמות יש לו ליצר הרע, The Evil Inclination has **seven** names, and many other examples that can be found all over the Mishnah, the Tosefta and the Talmud. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. For further discussion about the source of these *mishnayot* see: M. Weiss, “Mishnah Tractates which Open with Numbered Lists,” *Sidra* 1 (1985), pp. 33-44 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann and include the copyist's marginal notes with corrections to the text. The punctuation marks were added by us. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. The number thirty-nine is very rare in rabbinic literature. An unusual example can be found in B. Sha 70a: 'אלו **שלשים ותשע** [אבות] מלאכות שנאמרו למשה בסיני ', there were thirty-nine distinct classifications of labor that were taught to Moses at Sinai, while the number forty less one appears dozens of times, for example: T. Mak. 3:10: מכת תורה **ארבעים חסר אחת**, the law of the Torah is **forty** stripes **less one**; M. Miq. 7:2: מקוה שיש בו ארבעים סאה חסר אחת, an immersion pool which contains forty *seahs* less one, and Y. Naz. 4, 3: מלקות תורה **ארבעים חסר אחת**, the flogging of [which] the Torah [has spoken] involves **forty** stripes **less one**, to mention a few. Likewise is the use of seventy less one instead of sixty-nine in B.B.B. 123a. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The phenomenon of the Inclusio can be divided into two main categories: limited Inclusio, which contains only a few words, in most cases one, two or three, for example, the repetition of the words: ואכלו, יאכלהו, they shall eat,inEx.12:8; and expand Inclusio which contain an entire sentence, for example verses 20 and 23inLev.11. The second type, i.e., the expand Inclusio, is used as a framework for the entire unit.

    For further discussion about the use of Inclusio in prose see: Paran (see n. 7), pp. 49-97, 150-162.

    For further discussion about the use of frameworks in biblical stories see: F. Polak, *Biblical Narrative: Aspects of Art and Design* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1994), pp 212-214. For further reading see: S. Yona, *The Many Faces of Repetition* (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2013), p. 28, n.70 [Heb.], and see also the discussion about the historical development of the study of Inclusio by: A. Chapman, *Inclusio in the Hebrew Bible* (M.A. Thesis, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The Hebrew text and reference are according MS Vatican 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The Hebrew text and reference are according MS Vatican 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. The Hebrew texts and references from tractate Avot in this paper are according to: S. Sharvit, *Tractate Avoth Through the Ages: A Critical Edition, Prolegomena and Appendices* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2004) [Heb.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. The following examples include the numbers three, four and five. We didn’t refer to other examples which use typological numbers that are higher than five, such as seven, ten, twenty-four and forty, due to the mnemonic value of these numbers. In our opinion, which is subjective, it is easy to remember three, four and probably five different things or items, and the use of typological numbers in those examples seems unnecessary. On the other hand, as the list of items becomes longer and the numbers ascend, typological numbers, such us seven and ten eases the memorization and are not used only for their typological value but also for their mnemonic value. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Parma 3173. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Munich 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. The Hebrew text and references from the Mishnah in the following discussion are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. The summary of the differences between R. Zadoq and the sages and between Rabban Gamliel and the sages, which also appears in M. Edu. 3:10-11, includes, in practice, several disagreement from Mishnah Kelim and from Tosefta Kelim, that were summed up as follows:

    T. Kel. M 2:4: Rabban Gamliel disagrees with the sages about the cleanness of a metal basket cover of householders.

    T.Kel. M 2: 5: The Tosefta tries to define what are the unfinished metal utensils which are clean. In this part the Tosefta does not mention Rabban Gamliel or any disagreement between him and the sages; R. Nathan refers to the disagreement between Rabban Gamliel and the sages concerning the hook of the scrapers of the bathhouses and the scraper of metal of householders; R. Judah refers to the disagreement between Rabban Gamliel and the sages concerning a plate which was divided into two.

    M. Kel. 12:4: Rabban Gamliel disagrees with the sages about the cleanness of a metal basket cover of householders.

    M. Kel. 12:5: R. Zadoq disagrees with the sages about the cleanness of the nail of the sundial and about the ark of the grist dealer.

    M. Kel. 12:6: R. Zadoq disagrees with the sages about the cleanness of a nail of money changer.

    M. Kel. 12:7: The summary of the disagreement between R. Zadoq and the sages in reverse order (the nail of money changer, the ark of the grist dealer, the nail of the sundial.)

    M. Kel. 12:8: The summary of the disagreement between Rabban Gamliel and the sages appears in this order: metal basket cover of householders, the hook of the scrapers of the bathhouses, unfinished metal utensils and a plate which was divided into two.

    As we can see, these summaries refer to the discussions in Mishnah Kelim and Tosefta Kelim. The first summary refers to R. Zadoq and came just after three disagreements with the sages. Tracking the origins of the second summary is more complicated. Two of the disagreements were said by other sages, and the original disagreement between Rabban Gamliel and the sages is missing in the Mishnah and the Tosefta. One item, i.e., the unfinished metal utensils, appears in the Tosefta but is not in disagreement at all. Only the first item in the summary, i.e., the metal basket cover of householders, is controversial and the sages and Rabban Gamliel disagree about is cleanness.

    Both summaries disrupt the consecutive character of the text, and can be removed without harming it. It is unclear why an unknown hand decided to lump together the disagreements between R. Zadoq and Rabban Gamliel and the sages and did not summarize the disagreements between R. Aqiba and the sages in this tractate (the summary in T. Edu. 1:7 doesn’t refers to the disagreements in tractate Kelim.), although one of these disagreements appears between two of R. Zadoq disagreements with the sages.

    In our opinion, it is possible that both summaries are from different source, and they were placed in M. Kelim. One way or the other, it seems that the summaries in M. Kelim were arranged in ascending order and the order in the Mishnah is as follows: Rabban Gamliel’s disagreement, R. Zadoq’s disagreements, summary of R. Zadoq’s disagreements and summary of Rabban Gamlie’sl disagreements. And last, as we will show later on, it is obvious that M. Edu. 3:10-11 only duplicates the summaries from M. Kel. 12:7-8, or from a third source, and not the other way around. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann and includes the copyist's marginal notes with corrections to the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Erfurt [Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Or. fol. 1220 (159)]. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Vatican 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Vatican 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. The sages of the Talmud (B. Sha. 126b-127a) also found it difficult to understand the vague expression ‘four or five’. According to R. Hisda, it depended upon the number of baskets of straw in the storeroom, while Samuel says that the number could be four, five or, if needed, even more than five. Another example can be found in M. Qin.3:2: אחת לזו, ושתים לזו ושלש לזו ועשר לזו ומאה לזו, [If] one belongs to this woman, and two to that, and three to that, and ten to that, and a hundred to that, and see the discussion by: M. Koppel, “Tractate Kinnim’s Composition: A Philological-Mathematical Analysis,” *Netuim* 13 (2005), pp. 12-13 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Leiden. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. The Hebrew text is according to MS Vienna (National Library, Heb. 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Leiden and include the copyist's marginal notes with corrections to the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Vienna (National Library, Heb. 20). A similar example can be found in Y. Hal. 3, 5: היה צריך לתרום ארבע חמש חביות, meaning: [If] he needed to raise up four or five kegs [of wine.] [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Leiden. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Most of the examples of parallelism in this part are close to the "pure" poetic parallelism style that we know from the Bible, and unlike other examples of "pure" prosaic parallelism that we can find in Rabbinic literature, such as M. Hal 1:8; M. B.M. 1:5 and M. Ber. 7:1, can be categorized, in our opinion, as poetic parallelism or as prosaic parallelisms which are close to poetic parallelism.

    For further discussion and examples of prosaic parallelism see: E.Z. Melammed, “The Parallelism in the Mishnah,” in: A. Shinan (ed.), *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1977), vol. 3, pp. 275-291 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. For example: And thank-offering adds to these the bread. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. The “Gaping” in biblical Hebrew is discussed frequently by medieval commentators and by modern commentators as well. See for example Abraham Ibn Ezra's comments on Gen. 32:12; Num. 17:23; Deut. 32:5; M.H. Segal, “A Contribution to the Study of the forms of Hebrew poetry,” in *Tarbiz* 18 (1947), pp. 139-142 [Heb.]. A discussion of the Gaping in Tractate Avot can be found in: S. Sharvit (see n. 19), pp. 23-24.

    Modern commentators dealt with this phenomenon in other Semitic languages like Ugaritic, Aramaic and Phoenician. See for example: D. Sivan, *A Grammar of the Ugaritic language* (Brill: Leiden, 2001), pp. 215-216; S. Yona, “Milestones in the Study of the Style, Structure and Rhetoric of the Proverbs of Ahiqar,” (see n. 13), pp.133-136; Avishur, *Phoenician Inscriptions and the Bible* (see n. 9), vol. 1, p. 19, vol. 2. pp. 191, 266, and Pasternak and Yona (see n. 31). A further bibliography concerning this rhetorical feature can be found in: S. Yona, “Rhetorical features in Talmudic literature,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 77 (2006), p. 94, n. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Vatican 113. Similar text can be found in tractate Kallah Rabbati 2: 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. For further discussion concerning this rhetorical feature see: Yona, “Rhetorical features in Talmudic literature,” (see n. 77), pp. 95-98; Paran (see n. 7) pp. 179-237; A.R. Pasternak and S. Yona, “The ‘better’ proverb in rabbinic literature,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 17, 1 (2014), pp. 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Kaufmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Vienna (National Library, Heb. 20). MS Erfurt reads: לשלשה, לשנים, ליחד, meaning for three, for two and for one. The change from ב to ל excludes the teacher from the list of people who are allowed to study those materials. For further discussion see: S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah* (New York and Jerusalem: the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 20023), vol. 5, pp. 1286-1287 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Leiden. A different version, from the name of Abimi, the son of R. Abbahu, can be found in B. Hul. 63b: תני אבימי ברי' דר' אבהו שבע מאו' מיני דגים טמאין ושמנה מאות מיני חגבים ולעופות אין מספר Taught Abimi the son of R. Abbahu,”There are seven hundred kinds of unclean fish and eight hundred kinds of [unclean] locusts. And there is an infinite number of the kinds of [unclean] birds.” [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Unlike the fishes and the fowls, since the counting of their species might surpass the numbers in this unit, there are only few species of pure or “kosher” locusts, which can be recognized by name, and their number in this unit seems exaggerated.

    For further discussion of the locusts and their different species see: Z. Amar, *The Locust in Jewish Tradition* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2004), pp. 102-130, 132 n.1, 133 n.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. The Hebrew text is according to MS Vienna (National Library, Heb. 20). MS Erfurt [Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Or. fol. 1220 (159)] attributed to the words of R. Ishmael to R. Aqiba, and the words of R. Aqiba to R. Ishmael. For further discussion about the differences between the manuscripts of this chapter see: Lieberman (see n. 81), vol. 5, pp. 1175-1176. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. This word was probably added by mistake. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Vatican 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Munich 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. The letter ‘ר’,’ r’, was probably added by mistake. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. This part, i.e., the second saying which deals with the deeds of Hezekiah, is missing in MS Kaufmann and MS Parma and it is, probably, a Baraita that was added to this Mishnah. See: J.N. Epstein, *Introduction to the Text of the Mishnah* (Jerusalem: Magnes press, 1948), vol.2, pp. 950-951 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. The Hebrew text is according to MS New York 10484 (Epstein). The references from Avot de-Rabbi Nathan in this paper are according to: H.J. Becker and C. Berner, *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006.) [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. The intercalated the month of Nisan by Hezekiah appears also in T. San. 2:10-11, and it does not necessarily relate directly to Passover but more to the laws of intercalation of the year. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Munich 6. A similar version with some changes can be found in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan A 37, 5-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. The first three traits represent “good” and almost “holy” characters, while the last three traits represent physical and almost “bad” characters. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. The use of concatenation, or anadiplosis, for unification of different sayings can be found in several places in rabbinic literature. For further discussion and examples see: Pasternak and Yona (see n. 31). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. The order in all versions of Avot de-Rabbi Nathan is as follows: humans-beasts-angels; demons-humans-angels, as we can see, the discussion about humans is prior to the discussion about demons. In both discussions the first traits represent the “corporeal” characters and afterwards the “spiritual” characters. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. The Hebrew text is according to MS Vienna (National Library, Heb. 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. The number three which commences the unit should probably be replaced by the number six. MS Erfurt [Berlin, Staatsbibliothek , Or. fol. 1220 (159)] reads this text with several changes: its opening line is: 'שלשה דברים נאמרו בפתילה להחמיר ושלשה להקל'; the words 'אילו שלשה להחמיר' were added at the beginning of the second row, and the words 'וממעכין אותה ביד' instead of 'ומעכבין אותה באור'. The English translation of the last line is according to the text in MS Erfurt. For further discussion about the differences between the manuscripts see: Lieberman (see n. 81), vol. 5, pp. 994-995. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. The Hebrew text and reference are according to MS Parma 3173. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. The letter 'ר' in the word 'במזרח' is written above the word as a replacement to the second appearance of the letter 'ב' that was written by mistake. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. The Hebrew texts and references from B. Nid. in this discussion are according to MS Vatican 111 (the first unit) and according to MS Vatican 113 (the second unit). We should note that the text is faulty in most manuscripts and even in some prints. We would like to thank Dr. Haim Dihi for his illuminating notes about this unit. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. The second 'שבת' is probably a dittography, and was added by mistake. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Most manuscripts read 'והנכנס ל'. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. For further discussion concerning the quotes in rabbinic literature that were attributed to ben-Sira see: S. Schechter, "The Quotations from Ecclesiasticus in Rabbinic Literature,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 3, 4 (1891), pp.682-706; Segal's introduction to the book of Ben-Sira (see n. 6), pp. 37-39; Pasternak and Yona (see n. 31). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. M. Held, "The Action-Result (Factitive-Passive) Sequence of Identical Verbs in Biblical Hebrew and Ugaritic," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 84 (1965), pp. 272-282; Kugel (see n. 11) p.14; A. Berlin, *The dynamics of biblical parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp.56-57; C. Cohen, “ The Phenomenon of Negative Parallelism and its Ramifications for the Study of Biblical Poetry,” *Beer-Sheva* 3 (1988), pp. 69-107 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Compare to Ben-Sira 12:8 that uses the words אוהב, שונא, love, hate, 25:3 that uses the words three and hate, and 26:5 that uses the graded numerical saying with the numbers three and four. See also: Segal, *The Book of Ben-Sira* (see n. 6), introduction, p.39 and p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. See for example: Prov. 9:8, 12:1, 13:24, 14:20, 27:6; Ps. 119:163; M. San. 3:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Segal, *The Book of Ben-Sira* (see n. 6), pp.199- 201, compares this sentence with Ben-Sira 31:41 and 32:1 and argues that the placing of a person at the head of the banquet was customary in Greek culture and even permeated the culture of the Jews of that period. R. Nathan b. Yehiel in *Sefer Arukh haShalem*, (ed. Alexander Kohut, (Vienna: Menorah, 1926), vol. 8, p.161) on the other hand, suggests that the word 'שר' should be understood as ruler. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Y. Ket. 1:1. See: A. Bendavid, *Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew* (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1967), vol. 1, p.215. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. See for example: Ben-Sira 31:31, 49:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. See also: Schechter (see n. 103), pp. 693, 702. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. The Hebrew texts and references from B. Pes. 112b in this discussion are according to MS Vatican 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. The word 'קרת' or 'קרתא' is very rare in the Babylonian Talmud and only appears seven times, three of those include the word 'שבת': the saying under discussion and two quotes from Proverbs in B. San. 38a. The Hebrew Ben-Sira uses the word ‘קריה’ twice, while the word ‘קרת’ does not appear in the Hebrew version. The verb י.ש.ב, sit, and the word ‘מרום’, high part, appear in the Hebrew version of Ben-Sira. It seems that unlike all other lines of this unit, the language of this line is close to the language of Ben-Sira. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Rashi's commentary on this stich (*s.v.* 'והמושיב שבת'), similarly his commentary on B. Pes. 112a, *s.v.* 'אל תשב בגובהה של עיר ותשנה', suggest that it is forbidden to teach your disciples where the studying will interrupt by passersby. That is to say that although it shows literary influence, it seems unlikely that this stich is related, thematically or conceptually, to Prov. 9:14 that deals with the strange woman that tries to seduce young men. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. The Hebrew text and reference are according MS Munich 95 to Bavli Shabbat. Another equivalent can be found in tractate Kallah Rabbati 2, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Although the phenomenon is used already in the Bible the expression 'לשון נקיה', meaning, euphemism, is used from the time of the Mishnah (San. 8:1; Nid. 6: 11): אלא שדיברו חכמ' בלשון נקייה, meaning, but the sages spoke in chaste language. See: E.Z. Melammed, “Taboos in Mishnaic Hebrew,” *Leshonenu* 47, 1 (1983), pp. 3-17 [Heb.]; idem, “Euphemisms and Textual Alterations of Expressions in Talmudic Literature,” in: E.Z. Melammed (ed.), *Benjamin De Vries Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem: Tel Aviv University Research Authority, 1968), pp. 137-143 [Heb.] [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. See: Bendavid (see n. 108), vol. 1, p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. See: Segal, *The Book of Ben-Sira* (see n. 6), p. 129. We should note that the Hebrew Ben-Sira does not use the verb כ.נ.ס,, to enter. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. The internal order at this stich—a person’s own home and afterwards his fellow’s home—is identical to the order in B. Pes. 112b. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. MS Modena reads: והמשמש מטתו ערום והמשמש מטתו לעיני כל חי, meaning: and one who has sexual relations naked and one who has sexual relations in the presence of any living creature whatsoever. This version creates substantial connection between the third and fourth lines, while there is a distance between the second and the third line. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Other possible references from the book of Ben-Sira such as 12:8, 23:24, 26:5, that maybe also impacted this unit were not discussed due to space limitations. It seems that the influence of Ben-Sira upon some parts of this unit, like the influence of B. Pes. 112a-112b on other parts is unshakable. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. We would like to suggest that both units were construed from opening sentences which contain Positive-Negative parallelism, and from four short sentences, each containing three or four words. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. See also: I. Gottlieb, “Pirqe Avot as Wisdom Literature,” (see n. 24), pp. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. See: Pasternak and Yona (see n. 31). [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. A.R. Pasternak and S. Yona, “The use of numbers as an editing device in Rabbinic literature” [in print.]

     [↑](#footnote-ref-124)