The Spiritual Significance of Numbers
by Dr. Meir Tamari

The constant recurrence of certain numbers in the Torah surely invests them with spiritual significance making them messengers just as the words of the Torah. It is important and worthwhile therefore for us to understand and learn from them.

We can count either, first, second etc. or one, two etc. However in the latter case each number can stand on its own whereas the former is a string of connected numbers. One is independent of every other number whereas first is merely the beginning of a string of numbers. Why was Reuven not worthy of being the bechor to which his birth entitled him? “Bechor is first and must therefore stand independently since he has no one to rely on. However, this Reuven could not do, but was always dependent on others, therefore he lost the Kehuna to Levi, Malchut to Yehuda and the double portion of Eretz Yisrael to Yosef” (Shem MiShmuel).

I KNOW ONE

Hashem is One, Am Yisrael is One, Torah is one. However, the other basic and fundamental concept Eretz Yisrael, is surprisingly never referred to as being one.

The concept of one deity who is the source of reward and punishment or of good evil or of birth and death, has proven to be one of the most difficult religious issues facing people in every generation. This concept is our declaration of war both against polytheism, worship of many deities and against paganism, worship of any finite thing or being or force of nature.

Worship of many deities destroys our moral unity since each deity has their own standard thereby actually leaving us with no standard at all. Avimelech, recalling their society's cultural and moral views and standards, rebuked Avraham for suspecting their designs on Sarah. Avraham did not question, deny or mock the level of their moral standards. He simply spoke of their lack of the fear of Heaven. “There was no fear of Hashem in Greece so Aristotle and Plato could write books about morality and be yet be personally quite immoral” (Shem MiShmuel).

Some societies ranging from primitive cave-dwellers to the relatively sophisticated Persians conceived of the universe as the arena of perpetual conflict between the principles of good and evil. Our Sh’má contradicts this, announcing instead the belief in One Supreme Ruler who shapes the light and at the same time controls the darkness. Everything is superbly harmonized and evil is overruled and even made a new source of victory for the good. The Sh’má simultaneously rejects any shading of the belief that...
everything is divine, a belief which would remove the distinction between right and wrong. Hashem pervades everything yet He transcends everything: the heavens are His seat and the Earth His footstool.

Hashem is One and He created only Adam and Chava, only one pair of human beings, thereby being the deity of a united humanity. "No man can say my father was created before yours or from better materials than yours." Only a sole creator could lead to the concept of the Brotherhood of Mankind, only because He is the sole creator can we demand, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" or "you shall love the stranger among you" (Vayikra 19). These are the two groups most susceptible to discrimination and to unethical treatment and therefore the Unity of Hashem demands that we deal justly and equitably with them.

The belief in the Unity of Hashem teaches us that there is a unity in nature and a harmonious structure to everything. In all of Nature’s infinite variety there is one single power in control, one Adon Olam who existed before all of Creation and remains when all else ceases. One Adon Olam who is the sole Ruler of the universe and sets moral laws for everything in it. The Unity expressed in the Sh’mah is followed by “whose glorious kingdom is forever”; thereby justice and righteousness rules the world. This is why our Rosh Hashana which is His Coronation is Yom HaDin. Even though there is no mention of this aspect in the Torah itself, all the tefilot of the day are about His Kingdom over all the universe. It is only His sovereignty that makes possible our teshuva and only His Supremacy which assures atonement.