

## REMARKS FOR EREV ROSH HASHANAH 5779

*Shanah tovah*. Happy new year. And now, time for some math! As some of you know, each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a numerical equivalent. For example, the letter aleph, the first letter of the *alef-bet*, has the numerical equivalent of 1; the second letter, bet, has the numerical equivalent of 2, and so on through the letter *yud*, the tenth letter, which is equal to 10. After that, letters are combined to make up the numbers 11 through 19 and then, beginning with the letter *kaf*, which is equal to 20, the letters go up by 10s, so that *lamed* is equal to 30 and *mem* to 40 and so on. Anyway, I do hope you're taking all of this in because there's a quiz following services tonight.

I'm just kidding, of course. There's no quiz! Instead, immediately following services, is our sweetest and one of the most delightful programs of the year, our annual Honey Oneg, but I digress.

Back to our mathematical discussion. This system of associating Hebrew letters with numbers is called *gematria* and there is a long custom of indicating the Hebrew year with a Biblical verse or phrase that is equal to that year in *gematria*. Such words or phrases are called *chronograms*.

Now this year is 5779, referred to תשע"ט. To make the chronogram, or figure out the *gematria* equivalent, the number of thousands in the year (currently 5000) is generally omitted, so we're looking for words, phrases or verses which add up to 779. Here are some possibilities:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה קוּמָהּ יְקֹוֹק Numbers 10:35

“And Moses said: ‘Rise up O LORD!’”

לֹא־דָבָר רַק הוּא מְכֹּם כִּי־הוּא חַיֵּיכֶם Deut 32:47

“For [this Teaching] is not a trifling thing for you; it is your very life.”

וְאָמַרְתָּ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֹדְךָ יְקֹוֹק Isaiah 12:1

“In that day, you shall say: ‘I give thanks to You, O LORD!’”

כִּי־לֹא תִבּוֹשִׁי Isaiah 54:4

“Fear not, you shall not be shamed.”

אֶזְמְרָה שִׁמְךָ עֲלִיּוֹן Psalms 9:3

“I will sing a song to Your name, O Most High!”

הִבִּינֵנִי וְאֶלְמְדָה מִצְוֹתֶיךָ Psalms 119:73

“Grant me understanding that I may learn Your *mitzvot*/commandments.”

וְאֵהָל רְשָׁעִים אֵינָנוּ Job 8:22

“The abode of the wicked will vanish.”

אַךְ־שׁוֹא לֹא־יִשְׁמַע Job 35:13

“Surely it is false that God does not listen.”

אָז יִרְנְנוּ עֵצֵי הַיַּעַר First Chronicles 16:33

“Then shall all the trees of the forest shout for joy!”

But my personal favorite of all these chronograms, these Biblical verses equaling 779, is also the shortest; it is a two-word phrase from the Book of Esther:

טוֹן נֶשֶׁתִּי Esther 2:9

“He treated her with kindness”, or more literally, “*Hesed*, lovingkindness, was raised up.”

May this new year of 5779 be one in which we are grateful for God’s blessings, and feel God’s Presence in our midst;

May it be a year in which the wicked find no shelter and we discover ever more opportunities to learn, to grow and to do mitzvot;

May it be a year with less shame and suffering;

May it be a year of more joy and connection, a year in which lovingkindness is raised up!

*Amen!*