THE TORAH CODES

EZRA BARANY

A Heart-Pounding Thriller
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Chapter 23

"Come in! Come in!" Rabbi Silverman said. He had been just as jolly on the phone as in person. It was no problem to come right over, the rabbi had said. Just knock loud. The doorbell didn't work.

His place was large but still seemed small from all the toys that covered the floor.

"How many children do you have?" Sophia asked.

"Eight," the rabbi replied.

"Eight?!"

"Yes. Five beautiful girls and three handsome boys, *baruch haShem*." He raised a finger, "And don't make a joke by mentioning that old TV show 'Eight is Enough.' It was funny the first time. Not so funny anymore. Please come with me."

We followed him through a narrow kitchen to a tiny study. Papers were strewn everywhere. Books were open and piled one on top of the other. Beside a desk were volumes of books on shelves.

"This is my office," the rabbi said. "Have a seat." He

pointed to two foldout chairs next to each other. "Do you two have children?"

"Oh, no," Sophia laughed. "We're not married. We just met last night."

"And are you Jewish?" The rabbi asked Sophia.

"Well, my mother was Jewish but I'm not really religious."

The rabbi nodded and looked at me as if asking the same question.

"Same with me," I said. "My mother was Jewish but I don't practice."

The rabbi nodded and smiled and looked back and forth between Sophia and me. Then he whispered to me in a not-so-subtle manner, "She's a beautiful girl, don't you think?"

I smiled. "Yes. She is."

"Yes. She is," the rabbi repeated. Then he turned to Sophia and said, "He seems like a nice man."

Sophia and I shared a glance. She blushed. I could tell by how hot my ears were that she saw the same thing on me.

"So!" the rabbi said. "What brings you here? You said something about a Bible code."

"What are the Bible codes?" I asked.

"Many believe that the history of the universe is written in the Bible. Not just the past, but the future as well."

"So it's just a belief," I said.

"Not exactly," the rabbi said. "Isaac Newton thought that the Bible was encoded. He spent more time

looking for the codes than he did studying science."

"Newton?" I asked. "Sir Isaac Newton?"

"The very same. He never found them but that was because he didn't have this." The rabbi tapped the computer. "But let's start at the beginning. Suppose you're a secret agent and you want to send a message to home base."

I scowled, not sure where this was going. "Okay."

"What would you need to do to make sure the message was sent safely?" The rabbi asked.

"Well, you'd have to have a way of making sure home base got it," I said.

"Yes, so you want to be sure it isn't intercepted by someone else," the rabbi said.

I nodded.

"Okay. Now should the message be intercepted, what steps would you take to make sure that didn't matter?" the rabbi asked.

I saw where this was going. "You'd want to make sure it was encoded."

"Fine, but supposing the enemy decodes it, sees the message, and then sends home base a different message to confuse them? How could you prevent that?"

"I'd use a key."

"A key?" Sophia asked.

"Yeah," I said. "When sending coded messages, typically the sender has a special way of letting the receiver know it was really from him. It's like he locked the message with his own personal key that only the receiver can unlock because the receiver has the same

key."

"He's a smart man," the rabbi whispered to Sophia. Sophia smiled. Louder, he said, "And that is what the Bible codes are for. The codes are hidden messages that are typically events that happened after the Bible was written. And this is how God lets us know that the Bible really comes from Him."

"You're saying the Bible predicts the future?"

"I'm saying God knows the future, and that is how we know God wrote the Bible."

I rolled my eyes. "So how does the Bible reveal the future?"

"There are many different ways to put codes in the Bible. When God gave the Torah to Moses, He gave it letter by letter, not word by word. So the first Torah was like a giant search-a-word. The letters evenly spaced. If you think of the Torah like that, like a search-a-word, then you get a better idea of how the codes work. Imagine playing the search-a-word game and finding…what's your name again?"

"Nathan Yirmorshy."

"Nathan Yirmorshy every 10th letter. And then say we find crossing it…what's your name?"

"Sophia Patai."

"Sophia Patai every 15th letter. And suppose we find the current year crossing both your names diagonally. And then the city you met. Was it Berkeley?"

"Emeryville," Sophia said.

"Emeryville crossing your names and the year diagonally the other way. The chances of all those significant

facts of your meeting appearing in the same vicinity of the Bible is too astronomical to be considered by random chance. If it's not a coincidence, then it must have been placed there purposefully. And who but the Divine could have known all those details about your meeting?"

I checked my watch. I didn't have any place else to be, but the internet probably had more useful information. It'd be rude to take out my phone, though.

"*Aba*! *Aba*!" A worried boy with long, curly locks of dark hair where his sideburns would be if he were older ran into the room holding a toy truck in one hand and a large battery in the other. "It broke, *Aba*." He looked to be about two years old. Four knotted fringes flailed from beneath the boy's shirt at his waist. "It broke."

"Ah, your poor truck needs a repairman, yes?" The rabbi took the truck and battery from his son's hands and easily put it back together. He flipped the switch and the wheels began to spin. After turning it off, he handed the truck to his son, "All fixed."

The boy inspected it, flipped the switch on and off himself.

"What do you say?" the rabbi asked.

"*Todah rabah*." And the kid ran off to play.

"A few questions," I said.

"Of course."

"How could a year appear as letters?"

"Ah!" The rabbi began burrowing in a pile of papers. "Every letter in the Hebrew alphabet has a numerical significance. Here it is." He pulled out a piece of paper. Looked at it. Then handed it to me.

א = 1 ב = 2 ג = 3 ד = 4 ה = 5

ו = 6 ז = 7 ח = 8 ט = 9 י = 10

כ = 20 ל = 30 מ = 40 נ = 50

ס = 60 ע = 70 פ = 80 צ = 90

ק = 100 ר = 200 ש = 300 ת = 400

Sophia excitedly said, "That's gematria, right? Hebrew numerology?"

"Eh,…in a manner of speaking. Each letter represents a number." He craned his neck and pointed out the letters on the piece of paper he had given me. "*Aleph* is one, *bet* is two, *gimel* is three, etc. But the numbers don't add up to the civil year, the year according to the Gregorian calendar. They add up to the equivalent of the Jewish year. Counting from Adam and Eve, we're already in the five thousands!"

"According to this," I said, "the highest number is..."

"*Tav*, four hundred," the rabbi said.

"It would take a lot of *tavs* to get to five thousand," I said, scanning the sheet.

"The millennia are counted separately using larger letters. The first thousand years are represented by the Hebrew letter *ALEPH*." He outstretched his arms as if to demonstrate the size of the letter. "From the years

1000 to 2000, the second thousand years, the Hebrew letter *BET* is used. So the year 1001 is written as *BET-aleph*." He had outstretched his arms again when he said *BET* and huddled over and put his hands close together when he said *aleph*.

His smile was contagious. I searched for a disinfectant.

"Finding our names and the year we met may sound statistically significant, but you gotta be careful with statistics. If you torture the numbers, they'll confess. It probably isn't scientific," I said.

"Great!" The rabbi said. "So what do you need for something to be scientifically valid."

"An experiment, for one thing," I said.

"Good, but before that. What do you need?"

Before that?

"An a priori hypothesis," the rabbi said.

Smart man.

"A what?" Sophia asked.

I told Sophia, "An a priori hypothesis is a kind of guess at what will happen in the experiment. It's only scientific, though, if it can be proved wrong. Saying 'I will fall if I jump off a cliff' is a testable guess that can be proved right or wrong. Saying 'An undetectable rabbit is spinning the Earth on its paw' is not a testable guess so it's not an a priori hypothesis."

Sophia laughed.

"Right!" the rabbi said. "So in 1994, Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg did the Great Sages experiment. These mathematicians made the a priori hypothesis that if a

computer randomly selected several historically well-known rabbis, the computer could find those names encoded in the book of Genesis. And not only their names, but near their names would be their birth or death dates encoded as well."

"And?" Sophia asked.

"And nearly all of the thirty-two names were found encoded in the Torah along with their dates."

"Thirty-two?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Why do you think the other names weren't there?" Sophia asked.

"I don't know. They found the other names in Exodus, a later book in the Torah, but not in Genesis."

"*Aba*!" An older boy, similar long locks of hair and fringes at the waist, bolted in the room holding a bendable action figure of Superman. "Yaakov won't let me play with the truck! He's had it for an hour."

"Excuse me," the rabbi said as he turned to his son. "What's the trouble?"

"Yaakov won't let me play with the truck," the boy said again. He looked about four years of age.

"Yaakov!" Rabbi Silverman called out.

"He's had it for an hour," the boy repeated, as the one named Yaakov came in.

"Yaakov," said the rabbi. "You've had the truck for a while, don't you think it fair to let Avraham have a turn?"

Yaakov looked down at the truck in his hand and said softly, "No."

"You can play with Superman," Avraham offered.

Yaakov just shook his head.

The rabbi turned to Sophia and wondered aloud, "Now what would the wise King Solomon do?" He stroked his beard. "Ah, yes! The truck, please?" He held out his hand toward Yaakov. Yaakov reluctantly gave the truck to his father. "Since neither of you will let the other have the truck all to himself," the rabbi said, "you'll have to share it." With that, he removed the battery from the truck and gave the battery to Avraham and the shell of the truck to Yaakov.

Yaakov flipped the switch a few times, saw the truck's wheels didn't spin, and grabbed the Superman action figure from Avraham while giving him the truck. Yaakov left the room.

"*Todah*, *Aba*." Avraham said and also left the room.

Sophia smiled.

"Nathan!" the rabbi faced me and beamed. "You look like you have a question. Good! Tell me what's on your mind!"

"Couldn't you find anything that way? Were there any controls to this experiment? Anything that showed it was really because of the Bible and not just some coincidence?"

"Of course! A senior cryptologist of the National Security Agency, didn't believe the codes were real. He tried sixty-six names and dates, and included the cities where they lived. He got the same positive effect."

"What was the P value?" I asked.

"The result of his experiment was less than 1 in

200,000 chance of it happening by coincidence."

I whistled. "The chances of getting hit by an asteroid next year are better than that. Probability like that can't be coincidence. Are they sure they did it right?"

"The experiment was peer-reviewed twice. Each time by five different statisticians. Speaking of computers, mine is all ready. Tell me what you want to search," the rabbi said.

"Try Nathan."

The rabbi paused. What was his problem?

"The problem is," the rabbi said, "that the Hebrew word for Nathan is 'Natan.' And since Hebrew is written without vowels, your name is written N-T-N. So the likelihood of finding a three-letter word encoded in the Torah is probably a hundred percent. I'm sure you could find it in any book."

I nodded. "Try Nathan Yirmorshy," I said.

"Great! That's N-T-N Y-R-M-R-SH-Y. In Hebrew there is a letter that has an SH sound, so that counts as one letter." The rabbi typed it into his Bible code software and let the search happen. An empty pop-up appeared on the screen with a small beep. "Well, it doesn't seem to be here."

Yep. A waste of time.

"Let me try something." The rabbi tapped the keyboard and waited. "Ah! There it is!"

"What?"

"Your name! In Hebrew the consonant V can have an O sound. So here your name is spelled N-T-N Y-R-M-*V*-R-SH-Y."

תאליפזוובשמתילדההאתרעואלואה
ליבמהילדההאתיעישואתיעעלמואת
קרחאלהבניעשואשרילדולובארץ
כנענוריקחעשואתנשיורואתבניור
אתבנתירוואתכלקנפשותביתוואתמ
קנהורואתכלבההמתוואתכלקניורא
שררכשבבארצכנעןורילכאלארצמפנ
יעעקבבאחיורכיהרכושמרכובמשבת
יחדורולאיכלהאךצמגורריהמלשאת
אתממפניומקניהמורישבעשובהרשע
ירעשוהורואאדומראלהתלדותהעשוא
ביאדומבהרשעירואלהשמותבניעש
ואליפזבנעדההאשתעשורעואלבנב
שמתאשתעשורויהורבניאליפזתימ
נאומרצפורוגעתמוקנזותמנעהית
הפילגשלאליפזבנעשורותלדלאלי
פזאתעמלקאלהבניעדההאשתעשורא

The rabbi looked at the screen for a moment longer. "Ha!" He clapped his hands together once.

"What? What is it?"

"Your name is encoded every 25 letters in Breisheet, chapter *lamed-vav*! That's Genesis chapter thirty-six! Out of all the chapters your name could be in, that's a praiseworthy chapter!"

"Why? What happens in that chapter?" I asked.

"It's not so much what happens in that chapter that's significant. It's the number! Thirty-six! *Lamed-vav*!"

"I don't get it," I said.

"You save the world!" The rabbi exclaimed.