



Ancient letters offer hidden messages

Scholar uses math, Kabbalah to unlock mysteries

By NATALIE WEINSTEIN

By fusing mathematics and Jewish mysticism, Stan Tenen believes he's uncovered an encoded path to God based on the order of Hebrew letters in the first verse of Genesis.

Aspects of his theory are serious enough to have won support from academicians, as well as rabbis who study Kabbalah.

Tenen has been developing his ideas for 25 years, working full time for the last dozen years out of the quarters of the Meru Foundation—a cluttered room in the basement of his San Anselmo home, where dozens of posters and three-dimensional, geometric models based on Hebrew letters fill tables, hang from the ceiling and cover the walls.

At 52, this modern Orthodox Jew wears a kippah over a thin, graying ponytail that reaches down his back. But his mystical journey started in the late '60s when Tenen was a "crew-cut engineer" who had been raised in a typical Conservative Jewish home and felt "uptight about weird stuff."

In 1967, however, he visited the Western Wall. The experience transformed Tenen, and he began looking for a Jewish path in order to improve the world. A year later, he got the urge to open the book of Genesis while watching "The Prisoner," a surrealistic TV spy thriller-psychodrama. That's when he first noticed a pattern to the Hebrew letters in the text.

He took the first verse of Genesis and laid out the Hebrew letters in a spiral until sets of the letters matched up in a visible pattern. With this string of letters, he built a mathematical bagel shape known as a torus. From that, he eventually extracted a corkscrew-like figure and then built a metal reproduction of it.

"It was all very New Agey," he said.

For years, Tenen believed the figure was a reproduction of a flame. But when he began laying tefillin, Tenen realized the corkscrew flame actually replicated a twist of a tefillin strap that wrapped around the human hand.

When he placed the metal figure in his hand and pointed it in different directions, Tenen was able to create the outlines of all the Hebrew letters. In addition, he discovered that the gesture used to create the shape of each letter also illustrated the letter's meaning. To view the shape of the letter peh, for example, he pointed to his mouth. Not so coincidentally, in Tenen's eyes, peh is also the Hebrew word for mouth.

Tenen believes that such hand gestures could have been the mode of communication referred to in the story of the Tower of Babel and that the Torah could actually be an encoded "science of consciousness" that God revealed to the Jews.

By contemplating these hand gestures as one follows the Torah, Hebrew letter by Hebrew letter, Tenen even believes one could retrace the spiritual experience of Moses.

Tenen does not believe his theory negates the Torah as either Jewish history or a set of morality tales, he said. Instead, it reclaims the idea found in the Kabbalah that the Torah's meaning goes far beyond the level of simple stories.

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Joseph Schultz, a Judaic Studies professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and a Meru advisory board member, called the research "mind-boggling."

The information's significance could eventually equal that found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Schultz said, noting that Tenen has only studied in depth the patterns in the first few verses of Genesis. "If the whole Bible is that way, there is an entire layer of understanding that will emerge," Schultz said.

Louis Kauffman, a professor of mathematics at the University of Illinois-Chicago and a Meru advisory board member, said Tenen's math is sound.

But Kauffman added it's difficult to determine the origin of the letter sequences and said it could be coincidental. "I think it's something else," he said, "But I'm not sure what."

Joking that his work contain[s] no ties to "flying saucers" or "Atlantian physics," Tenen readily acknowledges that most Jews will have a hard time understanding his findings. That's partly because his work combines many fields of study: Jewish mysticism, mathematics, physics, linguistics, biology and computer science. And it's partly because most Jews know so little about the Kabbalah.

[...*]

Tenen speculates that the applications of his discovery are almost endless. They include using the hand gestures to teach children Hebrew letters in two sittings; creating a universal sign language based on these hand gestures; and even applying the principles to communicate with elephants, dolphins and gorillas.

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