

The Significance Of The [Number](nchart.html) Twelve

By Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben [David](fathers.html) (Greg Killian)



In this [study](study.html) I would like to examine the significance of the [number](nchart.html) twelve (שתי עשר). It is important to understand [numbers](nchart.html) and their meanings since they constantly appear in all parts of the TaNaK.[[1]](#footnote-1) In general, when the Torah[[2]](#footnote-2) uses a [number](nchart.html), like twelve, it is connecting that particular item with all other ‘twelves’ in the Tanak.

The meaning of the [number](nchart.html) twelve is the meaning of maximum [number](nchart.html) of parts in a system. Twelve represents the borders, or supports of the [world](worlds.html). As we explore the [number](nchart.html) twelve, try to picture how this particular ‘twelve’ represents the border or the constraints of an item.

Twelve is the [number](nchart.html) of maximal differentiation. It is the [number](nchart.html) of lines that border a cube, and according to Chazal,[[3]](#footnote-3) all of reality. [HaShem](hashem.html) and His [Oneness](oneness.html) is manifested via twelve channels to the [world](worlds.html) we live in. Twelve is the level where the [oneness](oneness.html) is manifested in the [world](worlds.html). It is why we associate government with twelve. There are twelve who govern the many. All of [physical](physical.html) reality is constrained and restrained (as in government) by the 12 lines that mark the edges of the [physical](physical.html) [world](worlds.html).

Look carefully at the following picture of the lines that outline a cube. Notice that there are twelve lines.



The fact that the 12 are all connected in the center is the [thirteenth](thirteen.html). [Thirteen](thirteen.html) is the [number](nchart.html) that bonds multiplicity into [oneness](oneness.html). For example: There are twelve [tribes](tribes.html) that are bonded into their father [Israel](gen-jew.html) ([Yaaqov](jacob.html)). [Israel](gen-jew.html) is the [thirteenth](thirteen.html). The [number](nchart.html) twelve is associated with the concept of rule or government in that a government is the [oneness](oneness.html) which bonds the multiplicity of parts.

In Kabbala[[4]](#footnote-4) and Chasidut,[[5]](#footnote-5) it is explained that the [thirteenth](thirteen.html) *mazal* (constellation) transforms the entire set of *mazalot* (pl. constellations) into attributes of mercy. This is because numerically, twelve is a closed, rigid, perfect system; reflected in the [physical](physical.html) [world](worlds.html) by the twelve [lunar months](http://www.betemunah.org/chodesh.html) and the twelve [signs](signs.html) of the zodiac; in the [Jewish people](gen-jew.html), by the twelve [tribes](tribes.html); in the [spiritual](physical.html) realm, by the twelve permutations of the [letters](letters.html) of the Divine [Name](name.html) *Havaya*,[[6]](#footnote-6) and so on. In each of these sets, however, there is a (sometimes hidden) [thirteenth](thirteen.html) element that adds the flexibility and adaptive quality that makes the set alive, pliable and viable. This is perhaps most clearly evident with regard to the twelve lunar months. In the [Jewish calendar](gen-jew.html), a [thirteenth](thirteen.html) month is added in [seven](seven.html) out of every nineteen years in order to align the lunar year with the solar year. Here, the [thirteenth](thirteen.html) lunar month makes the twelve original ones into an empathic system that can coexist with its solar “mate.” Similarly, the [thirteenth](thirteen.html) [tribe](tribes.html), Levi, officiates at the [Temple](temple.html), reconciling the twelve [tribes](tribes.html) of the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people with their “mate,” [HaShem](hashem.html).

The [number](nchart.html) twelve never stands alone. It is always associted with a [thirteen](thirteen.html). Thus every list of the twelve [tribes](tribes.html) contains exactly twelve names, yet, the [one](one.html) who looks carefully always sees that they are the sons of [Israel](gen-jew.html) – the [thirteenth](thirteen.html).

This is also seen in the twelve months that are bonded into [oneness](oneness.html) by being the parts of a [solar year](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Ccalendar.html).

Twelve is itself also composed of a [number](nchart.html) of smaller parts. For example, each of the twelve [tribes](tribes.html) had many family members. Each of the [constellations](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Cmazaroth.html) was composed of many [stars](mazaroth.html).

# In Space

There are [three](three.html) dimensions to [physical](physical.html) space, which is typically represented by a cube. It takes twelve lines to draw a cube, just as the year has twelve months.

As we mentioned before, twelve is the [number](nchart.html) of maximal differentiation. It is the [number](nchart.html) of lines that border a cube, and according to Chazal, all of reality. All of [physical](physical.html) reality is constrained and restrained (as in government) by the twelve lines that mark the edges of the [physical](physical.html) [world](worlds.html).



Not only are their twelve [tribes](tribes.html), but there are twelve precious stones on the breastplate of the [High Priest](priests.html). There are also twelve loaves of [bread](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Cchametz.html) on the table of shewbread in the [Temple](temple.html).

We find that the [land of Israel](city.html) was divided into twelve parts.

The [Midrash](orallaw.html) recounts how Bne [Israel](gen-jew.html)[[7]](#footnote-7) [crossed the Red Sea](stages.html) via twelve different paths separated by towers of water.  Although each [tribe](tribes.html) had its own private path, each [tribe](tribes.html) could see with perfect clarity every other [tribe](tribes.html) during the passage.  The [Midrash](orallaw.html) recounts how the [experience](experience.html) was frightening and being able to see each other conforted the [tribes](tribes.html).

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah -*** [***Exodus***](exodus.html) ***XXIV:1*** *AND MOSES LED* [*ISRAEL*](gen-jew.html) *ONWARD (XV, 22). It is written, Do you thus requite the Lord? (Deut. XXXII, 6). R. Shasha, son of R. Abba, used to write the he below, and the lamed above, implying: Alas! ’Do you thus requite the Lord’ after all the miracles He hath performed for you, dividing the sea for you into twelve portions and drowning the Egyptians in the sea, drowning them with* [*one*](one.html)[*hand*](fourteen.html) *and saving you with the other, as it says, Thy right* [*hand*](mashal.html)*, O Lord, glorious in power, Thy right* [*hand*](mashal.html)*, O Lord, dasheth in pieces the enemy (Ex. XV, 6)?*

# Twelve stones

When the Bne [Israel](gen-jew.html) entered the [land of Israel](city.html) in the days of Joshua, they set up a monument of twelve stones.

[***Sotah***](hair.html) ***35b*** *In consequence [of what is related in the Scriptures], you must conclude that there were* [*three*](three.html) *sets of stones:* [*one*](one.html) *which Moses caused to be erected in the land of* [*Moab*](stages.html)*, as it is said: Beyond* [*Jordan*](stages.html)*, in the land of* [*Moab*](stages.html)*, began Moses to declare etc., and elsewhere it states: Thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this* [*law*](law.html) *[very plainly], and the inference is drawn from the use of the analogous word [that as in the latter passage stones were employed, they were similarly employed in* [*connection*](connection.html) *with what is narrated in the* [*first*](one.html) *passage]. The second set was that which Joshua caused to be erected in the midst of the* [*Jordan*](stages.html)*, as it is said: And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of* [*Jordan*](stages.html)*. The* [*third*](three.html) *set was that which he caused to be erected in Gilgal, as it is said: And those twelve stones which they took.*

The twelve[[8]](#footnote-8) stones that [Yaaqov](jacob.html) placed under his [head](body.html), on his way to Charan, fused into [one](one.html) stone. Whether on a conscious or unconscious level, the fact that [Yaaqov](jacob.html) [gathered](gather.html) twelve stones alludes to the twelve [tribes](tribes.html) that he will bring into the [world](worlds.html) as a result of his [marriage](mashal.html) in Charan. More specifically, the fusion of the twelve stones alludes to the fusion of the twelve [tribes](tribes.html). This unification of the twelve sons of [Yaaqov](jacob.html) occurred just prior to his death. Surrounding [Yaaqov](jacob.html)'s bed,[[9]](#footnote-9) his twelve sons proclaimed as [one](one.html):

“[Hear](mashal.html) O [Israel](gen-jew.html) ([Jacob](israelja.html)'s [name](name.html)) [HaShem](hashem.html) is our God, [HaShem](hashem.html) is [One](one.html)”

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah - Genesis LXVIII:11*** *AND HE TOOK OF2 THE STONES OF THE PLACE (XXVIII, 11). R. Judah said: He took twelve stones, saying: ‘The Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, has decreed that twelve* [*tribes*](tribes.html) *should spring forth. Now neither* [*Abraham*](avraham.html) *nor* [*Isaac*](isaac.html) *has produced them. If these twelve stones cleave to* [*one*](one.html) *another, then I* [*know*](daat.html) *that I will produce the twelve* [*tribes*](tribes.html)*.’ When therefore the twelve stones united, he* [*knew*](daat.html) *that he was to produce the twelve* [*tribes*](tribes.html)*.*

Elijah used twelve stones to build an altar on Mt. Carmel:

***I Melachim (Kings) 18:29*** *And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the* [*time*](time.html) *of the* [*offering*](korbanot.html) *of the evening* [*sacrifice*](korbanot.html)*, that there was neither* [*voice*](voice.html)*, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. 30 And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *that was broken down. 31 And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the* [*number*](nchart.html) *of the* [*tribes*](tribes.html) *of the sons of* [*Jacob*](israelja.html)*, unto whom the word of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *came, saying,* [*Israel*](gen-jew.html) *shall be thy* [*name*](name.html)*: 32 And with the stones he built an altar in the* [*name*](name.html) *of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain* [*two*](two.html) *measures of* [*seed*](flower.html)*.*

# In [Time](time.html)

Twelve is an integral part of [time](time.html). The solar year is composed of twelve lunar months. In [seven](seven.html) out of nineteen years we add a [thirteenth](thirteen.html) month.

[Jupiter](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Cmazaroth.html) (Tzedek) takes twelve years (144 months) to circle the [sun](hachama.html).

The [ecliptic](mazaroth.html) ([zodiac](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Cmazaroth.html)) contains twelve constellations that divide the night and day into twelve parts.

Our night consists of twelve hours, and our day consists of twelve hours. Thus we see that [time](time.html) seems to be bounded by twelve.

The [flood](noach.html) lasted 12 months.

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah - Genesis XXXIII:7*** *YEAR, IN THE* [*FIRST MONTH*](one.html)*, THE* [*FIRST*](one.html) *DAY OF THE MONTH. We learned: The* [*judgment*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5C4eclipses.html) *of the* [*generation*](toldot.html) *of the* [*Flood*](noach.html) *lasted twelve months. How is this deduced? (i) In the* [*six*](six.html) *hundredth year of* [*Noah*](noach.html)*'s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month... the windows of* [*heaven*](heaven.html) *were opened (Gen. VII, 11); and it is written, (ii) And the* [*rain*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Crains.html) *was upon the earth* [*forty*](forty.html) *days and* [*forty*](forty.html) *nights (ib. 12): this embraces the rest of Marheshwan and Kislew; (iii) And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days (ib. 24): this covers Tebeth, Shebat,* [*Adar*](feasts.html)*,* [*Nisan*](feasts.html)*, and* [*Iyar*](feasts.html)*; (iv) And the* [*ark*](ark.html) *rested in the* [*seventh*](seven.html) *month, on the seventeenth day, upon the mountains of Ararat (ib. VIII, 4): that means Siwan, the* [*seventh*](seven.html) *month from the descent of the rain. For sixteen days the water diminished at the rate of a cubit per* [*four*](four.html) *days, which is* [*one*](one.html) *and a half handbreadths per day. You may thus infer that the* [*Ark*](ark.html) *was* [*eleven*](eleven.html) *cubits in the water, and it all drained off in sixty days. Thus you read, And the waters decreased continually until the tenth months (ib. 5): that is* [*Ab*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Cfeasts.html)*, the tenth from the descent of the rain. Another interpretation: (v) And it came to pass in the* [*six*](six.html) *hundred and* [*first*](one.html) *year, in the* [*first*](one.html) *month [i.e.* [*Tishri*](feasts.html)*], on the* [*first*](one.html) *day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth (ib. VIII, 13): it became like a marsh. (vi) And in the second month, on the* [*seven*](seven.html) *and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dry (ib. VIII, 14): it became like parched soil, which they sowed, but nothing would grow. Why was that? Because it [the* [*Flood*](noach.html)*] had come as a curse, and a curse cannot turn into a blessings; so they waited until the next rainfall and then they sowed. Now should not Scripture have said, ‘On the sixteenth day of the month was the earth dry‘: why then is it stated, ’And in the second month, on the* [*seven*](seven.html) *and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dry'? Because of the* [*eleven*](eleven.html) *days by which the solar year exceeds the lunar year. R. Simeon b. Gamaliel said: If you wish to prove for yourself that the solar year exceeds the lunar year by* [*eleven*](eleven.html) *days, make a mark on a wall on the day of the* [*summer solstice*](calendar.html)*; the following year at that season the* [*sun*](hachama.html) *will not reach it until* [*eleven*](eleven.html) *days later, and from this you may* [*know*](daat.html) *that the solar year exceeds the lunar year by* [*eleven*](eleven.html) *days.*

\* \* \*

The twelve are always divided into [four](four.html) sets of [three](three.html).

The 12 sons of [Israel](gen-jew.html) ([Yaaqov](jacob.html)) are bonded into [oneness](oneness.html) in their Father [Israel](gen-jew.html). When they buried their father, [Israel](gen-jew.html), there were [three](three.html) [tribes](tribes.html) on each o the [four](four.html) sides of the [bier](burial.html), in exactly the same order as they [camped](stages.html) in the wilderness as [tribes](tribes.html).

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah -*** [***Numbers***](nchart.html) ***XIV:18*** *R. Phinehas b. Yair observed: The twelve silver dishes, the twelve silver basins, the twelve golden pans, the twelve bullocks, the twelve rams, the twelve he-lambs, and the twelve he-goats corresponded to the twelve constellations, the twelve solar months, the twelve lunar months, the twelve* [*tribes*](tribes.html)*, the twelve princes, the twelve controllers of life, and the twelve loaves of* [*shewbread*](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Cchametz.html) *on the table.*

Thus the [Midrash](orallaw.html) makes the following [connections](connection.html) between the gifts of the Princes and the other twelves:

twelve silver dishes = twelve constellations

twelve silver basins = twelve solar months

twelve golden pans = twelve lunar months

twelve bullocks - twelve [tribes](tribes.html)

twelve rams = twelve princes

twelve he-lambs = twelve controllers of life

twelve he-goats = twelve loaves of shewbread

The 12 [Tribes](tribes.html) are bonded into the [oneness](oneness.html) of the [nation](nations.html) of [Israel](gen-jew.html). There are [three](three.html) [tribes](tribes.html) to the north, south, [east](east.html), and west of the [Tabernacle](mikdash.html). See picture below.

The 12 constellation on the [ecliptic](mazaroth.html) (zodiak) are bonded into [oneness](oneness.html) on the [ecliptic](mazaroth.html). The constellations are divided into [four](four.html) sets by the [vernal equinox, the summer solstice, the autumnal equinox, and the winter solstice](calendar.html).

The 12 months are bonded into [oneness](oneness.html) in a solar year. The months are divided into [three](three.html) sets of [four](four.html) by the seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and fall.

The 12 Apostles are bonded into [oneness](oneness.html) as Apostles.

The 12 Loaves of showbread are bonded into [oneness](oneness.html) on the table of showbread.

The 12 gates in the [New Jerusalem](new.html) are bonded into the [oneness](oneness.html) of the wall. There were [three](three.html) gates in each of the [four](four.html) walls of the [city](city.html).

The 12 Daylight hours are bonded into the [oneness](oneness.html) of a day. There are [four](four.html) watches in a day.

The 12 Nighttime hours are bonded into the [oneness](oneness.html) of a night. There are [four](four.html) watches in a night.

The 12 Stones on the brestplate of the [Kohen Gadol](kohen.html), the [High Priest](priests.html).

The only other instance in the TaNaK of stones fusing together is when King [David](fathers.html) kills Goliath. In I Samuel 17:40. [David](fathers.html) takes [five](five.html) stones to put in his slingshot. Verse 49 describes him as killing Goliath with the [one](one.html) stone in his slingshot. Here too, the [five](five.html) stones fused into [one](one.html).

The [numbers](nchart.html) of these stones reflect a beautiful mathematical phenomenon that sheds a [new](new.html) light on the inner meaning of these [two](two.html) fusion [events](feasts.html). There is an important mathematical relation between 12 and 5. 12 squared equals 144, while 5 squared equals 25. 144 plus 25 equals 169, which is 13 squared. 13 is the numerical value of the word *echad* ("[one](one.html)"). This reflects the plurality of the many stones becoming [one](one.html).

The word echad is spelled [*alef*](http://www.inner.org/hebleter/alef.htm) (1), [*chet*](http://www.inner.org/hebleter/chet.htm) (8), [*dalet*](http://www.inner.org/hebleter/dalet.htm) (4). Together, the chet and dalet represent the twelve [tribes](tribes.html). They combine with their father, [Israel](gen-jew.html), represented here by the alef, in their proclamation that [HaShem](hashem.html) is [One](one.html). The 12 sons combine with their [one](one.html) father to manifest the unity of echad (13).

The twelve are always divided into [four](four.html) sets of [three](three.html).

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Twelve is the age of a Bat [Mitzva](cmds613.html) woman.

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There are twelve notes of the chromatic musical scale (piano's 7 white keys + 5 black keys), which are not arbitrary but based on the continual subdivision of a vibrating string by [two](two.html)-thirds, producing the "spiral of fifths".

\* \* \*

[Yeshua](yeshua.html) chose twelve apostles to carry on His ministry:

***Matityahu (Matthew) 10:1*** *And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.*

\* \* \*

There were twelve minor prophets: Hoshea, Yoel, Amos, Obadiah, [Yonah](jonah.html), Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

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The Arizal explains that [numbers](nchart.html) have their origins in the supernal [spiritual](physical.html) [worlds](worlds.html). Single digit [numbers](nchart.html) correspond to the [physical](physical.html) realm Asiyah, the sefirat Malkhut. Tens correspond to the angelic realm Yetzirah, the sefirat Tiferet. Hundreds correspond to the Neshama realm Beriah, the sefirat Binah, Imma. Being that hundreds emanate from the realm of Imma, they are the source of blessing. Therefore, all offerings are the rectification of 100% of the produce offered.

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1. Tanakh is an acronym for Torah ([law](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Claw.html)), Neviim (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings) which are the major divisions that Christians call the “Old Testament”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Torah is most often used when referring to the first [five](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Cfive.html) books of the Bible: Genesis (Bereshit), Exodus (Shemot), Leviticus (Vayikra), Numbers (Bamidbar), and Deuteronomy (Devarim). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Chazal is an acronym for the [Hebrew](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Chebrew.html) "Chachameinu Zichronam Livracha", (חכמינו זכרונם לברכה), literally "our sages of blessed memory". In rabbinic writings this generally refers to the sages of the [Talmud](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Corallaw.html) and of other rabbinic literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Kabbalah ([Hebrew](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Chebrew.html): קַבָּלָה‎, lit. "receiving") is a discipline and school of thought concerned with the mystical aspect of Judaism. It is a set of esoteric teachings meant to explain the relationship between an infinite, eternal and mysterious Creator and the finite and mortal universe of His creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Chasidut (Hebrew: חסידות) are the teachings, interpretations of Judaism, and mysticism articulated by the modern Hasidic movement. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The yod hay vav hay name of [HaShem](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CNumbers%5Chashem.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Children of Israel [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This concept was originally spoken by Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bereshit (Genesis) chapters 48 and 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)