



THE FORTY-NINTH LEVEL OF TUMAH

Hashem had to rush to redeem *Klal Yisrael* from Mitzraim at exactly the time that he did; a second later and it would have been too late. *Klal Yisrael* had fallen to the forty-ninth level of the “*Mem-tes sh’arei Tumah*” — the “49 Gates of Impurity” — and were rapidly descending to the fiftieth level. Had they reached the fiftieth level, it would have been too late; it would not have been possible to extricate them from Mitzraim (*Beis Halevi, Derush 2*, quoting the Arizal).

Klal Yisrael merited rescue primarily because they performed two mitzvot: the Paschal offering and circumcision, (*Mechilta, Bo*). They were also meritorious because they did not abandon their heritage and they maintained the ancient traditions of their ancestors. They did not modernize their names, they did not modernize their dress, they did not forsake their language, and they did not engage in sexual immorality. The Jewish women in Mitzraim were especially righteous (*Sotah 11:*); *Klal Yisrael* avoided malicious speech and slander (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah 4:12; Mechilta Bo 9*). Many of them did not participate in idol worship; in fact the entire *Sheivet Levi* abstained from any *avodah zarah* at all (*Yoma 66:*). Most importantly *Klal Yisrael* never ceased studying the Torah, its traditions, and the customs handed down to them from Avraham Avinu; they maintained yeshivot throughout the exile (*Yoma 28:*); and they sustained their faith in Hashem (*Midrash Shemuel 3; Pirkei D’Rebbe Eliezer 48*).

B’nei Yisrael, in short, upheld standards of conduct while living amidst the totally corrupt Mitzriyim. However, if *Klal Yisrael* were considered to be at the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, and if there were only 50 levels, then weren’t the respective levels of the two nations close together? We know that the Egyptians were all sexually immoral (Rashi, *Bereishis 12:19; Vayikra 18:3*) and idol-worshippers (*Chupas Eliyahu*), so how could they be compared to *Klal Yisrael*?

The fiftieth level of *tumah* is the abyss of no return. Any nation reaching that depth of unholiness would have been destroyed, as were the wicked people of Sodom (*Bereishis 18:20*). Nowhere do we find any information regarding the imminent destruction of evil Mitzraim, which indicates that Egypt had not yet reached the fiftieth level. In fact, any punishment they did receive was due only to their maltreatment of *Klal Yisrael*. How can such an unworthy people be mentioned in the same breath as *Klal Yisrael*?

In order to properly comprehend what took place it is imperative to understand the concept of spiritual levels. The *Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 21; Nedarim 38.)* informs us that this creation contains fifty levels of understanding, and

ארבעים ותשעה שערי בינה נתנו למשה

Forty-nine levels of understanding were given to Moshe.

Rashi (*Nedarim 38•*) remarks:

שאותה אחת היה הקב"ה יתירה עליו

With that one level, Hashem exceeded [Moshe].

Hashem, the All-Knowing-Creator-of-All, invested fifty levels of understanding into this world. Hashem is so infinitely superior to mortals in terms of intellect, (as in every other area of endeavor) that it is totally impossible for us as humans to even begin to fathom Hashem.

לגדלתו אין הקר

To His greatness there are no limits (*Tehillim* 145:3).

Men, the creations of Hashem, do not possess the tools of imagination with which to even define the parameters of comparison. How is it, then, that Moshe *Rabbeinu*, even if he was the greatest genius of all time, is described as possessing only one rung of understanding less than Hashem? It would seem that at forty-nine levels of understanding, Moshe would be almost equal to Hashem (Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* 21). It is simply not possible for the created to vie for perfection with the Creator.

What must be understood is that each of the “fifty levels” are separated by large gaps, and that the gaps between the levels grow exponentially as one progresses upward. Level one is far below level two, which is farther still below level three, and so on. The gap between level one and level two is much smaller than the gap between levels two and three, which in turn is infinitely smaller than the gap between levels three and four, and so on. By the time we reach, for example, level forty-seven, we find that the gap between forty-six and forty-seven is so huge that it is greater than the total increase in level covered by all the levels and gaps which preceded it. Hence, when Moshe was awarded level forty-nine, he was very far from the greatness of his Creator. That level is so tremendously lofty, that the gap between levels forty-nine and fifty is far greater than the combined increase of all the gaps and gradients from level one through level forty-nine. Level fifty represents endless, limitless and infinite wisdom; only Hashem possesses this level.

The same distinction can be applied to understanding the relative positions of *Klal Yisrael* and Mitzraim on the “forty-ninth level of *tumah*.” The forty-ninth level is far greater than the preceding combined forty-eight levels, and the differential between the relative holiness of the two nations was huge. *Klal Yisrael* was at an early point on the forty-ninth level, while Mitzraim was at an advanced point on the spectrum of the forty-ninth level of *tumah*.

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