

Fascinating INSIGHTS

יב' שבט תשפ"ו
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L'Refua Shleima Gutzya Bryna bas Perel Chaya, Danielle bat Lucie and Rafael ben Danielle

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The Year the Gemara Was Printed

In 1483 Joshua Solomon Soncino opened a Hebrew press in Soncino, Italy. The press, one

of the first Hebrew presses, printed almost twenty books in approximately five years. Among the books he published were



volumes of gemara.¹ He began printing with Mesachta Brachos, fascinatingly completed in the year 1484, the year גמרא. That is to say, גמרא has a numerical value of 244 which is the Hebrew year 5244 (you add 1240 to figure out the Hebrew year). This corresponds to the secular year 1484.²

One Level Higher

The gemara³ says חמישים שערי בינה נבראו בעולם, fifty gates of understanding were created in the world; all were given to Moshe except for one. Why does the gemara phrase it this way, instead of simply stating that Moshe received forty-nine gates?



The Shelah⁴ teaches that Moshe Rabbeinu learned the Torah in its entirety, including the *shaar nun*, the fiftieth level of wisdom. When he ascended Har Sinai, no aspect of Torah was withheld from him.

However, following the sin of the eigel, golden calf, Moshe lost the fiftieth level. Hashem said to him, לך ד, go down.⁵ The word לך has a gematria of 50, indicating that Moshe was being told to descend from the fiftieth level. Now, he had only forty-nine levels of Torah. This answers our question as Moshe originally received all fifty gates. Only afterward, following the sin of the eigel, did he lose one.

At the end of Moshe's life, the Torah relates, ויעל משה מערבת מואב אל הר נבו, Moshe ascended from the plains of Moav to Har Nevo.⁶ Moshe ascended from the plains of מואב, whose gematria is 49, symbolizing the level at which he stood throughout his life after the eigel. Now, at the very end, he ascended once more toward the fiftieth level.

The name of the mountain, נבו, is understood as נ' בו, the fiftieth level is within it. This hints that the fiftieth gate was returned to

Moshe before his passing, and he once again possessed all fifty levels of Torah.

The Chassam Sofer writes that Moshe's student Yehoshua is specifically called יהושע בן נון, Yehoshua bin Nun, rather than ben Nun. The word *bin* relates to *binah*. Yehoshua had contemplated the שער הנון, the fiftieth level of Torah, which he had learned from his rebbi, Moshe Rabbeinu before it was lost through the sin of the eigel.⁷



Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years and received semichah from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written thousands of Torah articles on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of ten books including the recently released "Astounding Torah Insights about the Human Body." His writings, many of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German, Spanish and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. His shiurim can be found on various websites including Kol Halashon's. Rabbi Alt lectures, writes and teaches, and is passionate about inspiring Jews of all levels of observance.

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¹ Interestingly, R' Meir Zlotowitz, founder of Artscroll, was 73 years old when he passed away and there are 73 volumes of English Artscroll gemaras.

² His nephew Gershon Soncino went on to print more mesachtos but did not complete the entire Shas. The first edition to publish all of shas in full was printed in Venice in 1520 by a Christian, Daniel Bomberg.

³ Rosh Hashanah 21b.

⁴ Vaeschanan, os 12.

⁵ Shemos 32:7.

⁶ Devarim 34:1.

⁷ Moshe brought the fiftieth level of Torah into the world. Though he lost it after the eigel, R' Akiva later accessed it, and transmitted it to R' Shimon bar Yochai. The Torah of the *shaar nun* was ultimately recorded in the Zohar, and it is this dimension that makes the Zohar singular and unique.