

On Reaching the Forty-Ninth: A Meditation on Lack

In a somewhat subversive statement, the Sages (Tb. Rosh Hashana 21b) have described the reach of Moses' wisdom while simultaneously delimiting its boundaries. "Fifty gates of understanding were created in the world, and all were given over to Moses lacking one."

While there are numerous explanations- reaped from the four corners of the PaRDeS- on the significance of the number 49, the essence of this statement by the Sages lay beyond the homiletic message, concealed in its apparent revelation. Similar to the Freudian economy of dream-work where the concealed meaning is to be found in the revealed structure of the dream; one must truly read the statement of the Sages before plumbing her depths for imaginative meaning.

The quest for transcendence, the ancient dream of reaching beyond the threshold in the hopes of beholding the limit, of grasping some fabled end, has propelled us to gaze upwards.

Seeking transcendence in the concealed we have forgotten the wonder of the revealed. The depths of meaning are not to be found in the visible invisible; they are to be found in that which remains invisible within the visible.

As Levinas- the prophet of impossibility- taught us, to come upon meaning one must find the transcendent within the immanent, one must behold the miracle of the more within the less.

If Moses was gifted "49 gates understanding", why the curious language of "fifty... lacking one"?

Beyond the mere mathematics of subtraction, the Sages are depicting the elusiveness of totality. Moses was gifted the 50th gate as well, a gate that is inherently tied up in its essential quality: "lacking one".

This constitutive lack, to borrow Lacan's term, prevents a full assimilation of knowledge as it opens the space for seeking beyond the sought.

Faced with this lack one may surge forward, anxiously anticipating a future plenitude in which the void separating lack and fullness is bridged; or one may choose the path of remembrance. The common thread uniting the 49 wanderings in the desert, the 49 days of

counting and the 49 years preceding the Jubilee is the capacity to gaze back towards the source. In beholding the space of origin- a childhood home, a grandparent- we remember our dependence, our innocence and the beauty of imperfection.

Blanchot, whose fragmentary texts efface more than they create, saw in the writing-act the passive embrace of all that will remain perpetually elusive. Choosing to write while acknowledging the impossibility of writing what needs to be written.