



BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV TORONTO TORAH

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Beneath the Sin of the Meraglim

Parshat Devarim returns us to one of the most painful moments in our history: the sin of the Meraglim. When Moshe Rabbeinu retells it in Devarim, he add the following line:

"וַיִּדְבֹּר הָזֶה אֵינְכֶם מֵאֱמִינָם בְּה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם" — "And in this matter, you did not believe in Hashem your God."

This is a powerful accusation. The sin of the Meraglim was not only the Lashon Harah that they spoke about the land, at its root, Moshe says, it was a failure of emunah.

That point was hinted to in Sefer Bamidbar. Kalev declares, "עָלֵה נָעֻלָּה" — "we can surely go up." The other spies respond, "לֹא נוֹכֵל לָעֹלֹת" — "we cannot go up." Their argument was not merely military. It was theological. Chazal sharpen this even further. When the Meraglim said "חֲזָק הוּא" — "for they are stronger than us" — the Gemara says: do not read it only as "stronger than us," but as "stronger than Him," כְּבִיכּוּל. The Meraglim spoke as if even the Master of the world could not bring His people into His Land.

And yet, when Chazal identify the main reason for the punishment of wandering the desert for 40 years, they emphasize something else: lashon hara. The Gemara in Arechin says that the punishment came because "וַיִּצְיֹאוּ דְבַר הָאָרֶץ" — "they spoke negatively about the Land."

This raises a deep question. If the root of the sin was lack of emunah, why does the Gemara place such emphasis on lashon hara? Perhaps the answer is that lashon hara is not merely one sin among many it is an expression of a broken worldview.

A person who lacks belief in Hashem's power can sometimes be lifted. He can be reminded of Yetziat Mitzrayim, the Yam Suf, the mann, the clouds of glory, and all the ways Hashem carried His people "כְּאִשׁ אִישׁ אֶת בְּנוֹ" — "as a father carries his child."

But lashon hara is deeper. Lashon hara is not only a mistaken conclusion. It is a corrupted lens. It is the habit of seeing what is broken, threatening, ugly, and disconnected. It takes one piece of reality and tears it away from the larger Divine story.

The Ramchal, in Da'at Tevunot, explains that when a person looks at creation superficially, the world appears scattered and fragmented. Everything seems separate. Every creature, every event, every detail appears to stand alone. But one who looks more deeply sees that all parts of creation are bound together. Every detail has a place in the larger Divine purpose. Everything is moving toward one ultimate tachlit.

Good, then, is not arbitrary. Good is when every part is seen in its rightful place, connected to the whole. Evil is fragmentation. Evil is when something is isolated, torn from context, and made to appear meaningless, hostile, or destructive.

This is the depth of lashon hara. Lashon hara separates. It separates a person from his community. It separates one Jew from another Jew. It separates the present moment from the larger story. And in the case of the Meraglim, it separated Eretz Yisrael from the promise of Hashem.

The giants were real. The fortified cities were real. The fear was understandable. But the Meraglim took those facts and detached them from their Divine context. They looked at the Land without the promise. They looked at the challenge without the mission. The root of the word רָע means broken, as the תְּרוּעָה sound we blow on the shofar or as the pasuk says, "תִּרְעִים בְּשִׁבְטֵי בְרֹזָל" — "You will break them with an iron rod. Lashon hara breaks apart what Hashem created to be whole.

To believe in Hashem is not only to believe that He is powerful. It is to believe that reality is connected. It is to believe that the pieces belong together. It is to believe that even when things appear fragmented, there is a Divine unity beneath them.

The opposite of lashon hara is lashon tov. Lashon tov does not mean pretending everything is perfect. Kalev did not deny the giants. Yehoshua did not deny the challenge. Lashon tov means speaking from within emunah. It means seeing the difficulty but refusing to detach it from the promise. It means seeing another person's weakness but refusing to detach it from their dignity. It means seeing a painful moment but refusing to detach it from the larger story Hashem is writing.

This was the tragedy of the Meraglim. They stood at the edge of Eretz Yisrael and saw giants, walls, danger, and death. But they did not see the Land as part of Hashem's covenant. They did not see themselves as a people being carried by God. They did not see the challenge as part of redemption.

Our task is to repair that speech by repairing that vision.



Flying on Tisha B'Av

Question: I'm a little embarrassed to ask this, but I'll be flying from New York to Israel on Tisha B'Av. Since Israel is seven hours ahead, the fast will technically end while I'm still in the air, making my fast much shorter than it would have been in New York.

Should I continue fasting until nightfall according to New York time, when my fast originally began, or does the fast end according to the place where I am at that moment?

And what about the opposite case—someone flying from Israel to New York, causing the fast to become much longer?

Answer: This fascinating question only became relevant in the modern era of air travel, requiring contemporary halachic authorities to apply classic Torah sources to an entirely new situation.

The overwhelming majority of leading

poskim—including Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, and Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky—rule that the fast ends according to **nightfall wherever the person is currently located**. This applies both leniently, shortening the fast for someone flying from North America to Israel, and stringently, lengthening it for someone traveling in the opposite direction.

One proof comes from the Talmud, which teaches: *"Any fast upon which the sun did not set is not considered a fast."* The Gemara defines the completion of the fast by sunset, implying that its conclusion depends on the local day where the individual is physically present.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef strengthens this principle with additional examples. A boy who was born in New York but celebrates his Bar Mitzvah in Israel becomes obligated in mitzvot according to the date

in Israel not New York. Likewise, a woman counting her seven clean days follows the calendar of the place where she is currently located. In halachah, one's present location is generally what determines the day's status.

Nevertheless, several noteworthy opinions exist. Rabbi Shmuel Vosner suggested that when traveling westward causes the fast to become exceptionally long, the added difficulty may, in some cases, qualify the person as ill enough to be exempt from fasting. It is also worthwhile to note that Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, suggested that someone flying from America to Israel should ideally continue fasting until the fast would have ended in America, at least on Tisha B'Av, because of its uniquely severe status.

Practically speaking: If possible, it is best to avoid scheduling flights on public fast days altogether. If travel is unavoidable, consult your personal rabbi or halachic authority for guidance based on your specific itinerary and circumstances.



The Setbacks Within Geulah

Based on Kima Kima by Rav Chaim Drukman

When we look at the return of Am Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael, there is much for which to be grateful. In our generation, we have seen Jews return to the Land, build it with love and mesirut nefesh, and restore Jewish national life after generations of exile.

Yet alongside these extraordinary developments, we also encounter painful setbacks. There are periods of weakening commitment to Eretz Yisrael, Jewish national identity, and the ideals that helped bring about the return to Zion. At times, this is reflected not only in attitudes but in practical decisions and the public atmosphere of Israeli society.

This raises a difficult question. If we are living through a process of geulah, should we not expect steady progress? Should the return to the Land and rebuilding of Jewish national life not naturally lead to deeper spiritual return as well?

Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, the Meshech Chochmah, writes that after a Jew returns to his people, *"בטח ישוב אל אלוהיו"* — he will surely return to his God. The expected path is that national return will become the basis for spiritual renewal.

But what do we make of moments when this seems not to be happening?

Rav Chaim Drukman explains that geulat Yisrael unfolds *"קמעה קמעה"*, gradually. Like sunrise, geulah does not arrive all at once. The first light of dawn does not mean that the world is already fully illuminated. Even after dawn begins, much remains dark.

The comparison is therefore more than an image of growing light. It teaches that

darkness can remain part of the process itself. Only when the sun rises fully is the entire world illuminated. So too, until geulah is complete, there may still be moments of descent and retreat.

Rav Druckman adds that these setbacks are not merely obstacles alongside geulah. At times, they themselves become part of the process that moves it forward. A decline can become the lever that produces a greater ascent. A retreat can prepare the ground for dramatic progress.

Chazal teach this through the words: *"אל תשמחי אויבתי לי כי נפלתי קמתי, כי אשב"* — *"Do not rejoice over me, my enemy, for though I have fallen, I have risen; though I sit in darkness, Hashem is a light for me."*

The Midrash explains: *"אילו לא שפלותי לא היה אור"*. *"Had I not fallen, I would not have risen. Had I not sat in darkness, I would not have had light."*

This does not mean that falling is good. It means that the rise which follows a fall can bring a person or a nation to a higher place than before. Confronting weakness and rebuilding can create deeper growth.

The challenges facing Am Yisrael must never be dismissed. We must strengthen Torah, ahavat Yisrael, commitment to Eretz Yisrael, and responsibility for the Jewish future.

But we must not conclude that every setback proves that the process has failed. The sunrise may still contain darkness. The road of geulah may contain descent. Yet even the descent may become the source of a greater ascent.