



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Devarim | Sichah 1

## The Easy Way Out

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## 1.

### ELEVEN DAY JOURNEY IN THREE DAYS

The Torah says,<sup>1</sup> “Eleven days from Chorev, by way of Mount Seir, to Kadesh-Barnea.” Our Sages say, and Rashi cites them in his Torah commentary, that the Jewish people travelled from Chorev to Kadesh-Barnea (an eleven day journey) in **three** days.

Moshe Rabbeinu mentions this in order to add another element in his rebuke to the Jewish people, as Rashi explains:

Moshe said to them: “See what you did. There is no shorter route from Chorev to Kadesh-Barnea than the route of Mount Seir, and even it is a journey of eleven days, yet you traversed it in three” (as Rashi calculates). “The *Shechinah*<sup>2</sup> exerted itself on your behalf, to hasten your arrival to the land. But because you acted improperly, He took you roundabout Mount Seir for forty years.”

Rashi’s wording indicates that Moshe’s **primary** emphasis in his rebuke is [not so much “because you acted improperly” and caused Hashem to decree that you would remain in the desert for forty years instead of entering Israel immediately. But rather,] “because you acted improperly,” the pace of the journey was radically altered. The pace now moved at a speed **contrary** to the way that “the *Shechinah* {had initially} exerted itself.. to **hasten** your arrival to the land,” with supernatural speed. On this basis, the words “eleven days from Chorev” — which teach that the distance between Chorev and Kadesh-Barnea is an eleven-day journey — serve only to **introduce** the actual rebuke.<sup>3</sup>

But this interpretation is not completely smooth:

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<sup>1</sup> *Devarim* 1:2. {The context: “These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel, across the Jordan, in the plain, opposite the sea of reeds, between Paran and Tophel and Laban, and Chatzeros and Di-zahav....” The verse identifies the precise location where Moshe began his final speech to the Jewish nation. This speech spans the entire book of *Devarim*.}

<sup>2</sup> {Imminent presence of Hashem.}

<sup>3</sup> Whereas if we conclude that Moshe primarily rebuked them for causing the delay of forty years in the desert, instead of traveling directly to Israel; the words, “eleven days...,” are part of the very rebuke itself.

True, we must conclude that Moshe includes **this** fact — that the Jewish people travelled the distance between Chorev and Kadesh-Barnea in three days as part of his rebuke (that “you traversed it in three days”). But why must we say that **this** was the **primary** aspect of the rebuke, and the detail written **explicitly** in the verse (that it was an eleven-day journey from Chorev to Kadesh-Barnea) serves only to **introduce** the main point of the rebuke?

The above {difficulty} implies that an “average” speed of travel was not possible. The journey of the Jewish people could be either in a manner that the *Shechinah* would “**hasten** your arrival to the land,” or in the **opposite** manner — their journey would be prolonged to take an **unnatural** duration of forty years, (as a result of the Jewish people’s sins). Therefore, Moshe connects these two ideas, placing one after the other: If they would not journey in a miraculous manner, then automatically the journey would happen in the opposite way.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.

### TWO EXTREME OPTIONS

The above-mentioned idea — that the Jewish nation’s travels through the desert could have taken place in only one of two diametrically opposed ways — also helps explain *Tosafos*, who resolves a perplexing statement in the *Talmud*.

The *Talmud* records:<sup>5</sup>

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai debated a certain Baitusi<sup>6</sup> over their opinion that Shavuot always falls “after Shabbos” {i.e., on a Sunday}. (For the Baitusim interpret the intent of the verse,<sup>7</sup> “You shall count for yourself from the morrow of **Shabbos**” as referring to *Shabbos Bereishis* {i.e.,

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<sup>4</sup> As *Rabbeinu Bachya* says, *ibid.*, “If not for your sins, the route would have shortened. But as a result of the sins, it lengthened.”

<sup>5</sup> *Menachos* 65a ff.

<sup>6</sup> {The Baitusim (so called after their leader Baitus who was a student of the Sage Antigonus of Socho) were a sect of Jews who were active during the Second Temple period. They overtly demonstrated their disbelief in the Oral Law, and deliberately perverted Torah practice. Throughout the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, we find debates between the mainstream Sages of Israel (known as *Prushim*) and the *Tzdukim* and *Baitusim*.}

<sup>7</sup> *Vayikra* 23:15, and 23:11.

Saturday}.) The Baitusi claimed, “Moshe Rabbeinu loved the Jewish people, and he knew that Shavuot is only one day. Therefore, he fixed it for the day after Shabbos so that the Jewish people would enjoy themselves for two days.” Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai retorted with the verse, “eleven days from Chorev,” arguing: “If Moshe Rabbeinu loved the Jewish people, why did he delay them in the wilderness for forty years?”

*Tosafos*<sup>8</sup> explains that based on Rashi’s interpretation mentioned above [that the Jewish people travelled this distance in three days], we can understand why Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai chose **this** verse specifically (“Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai responded with **this** verse”) to prove that Moshe delayed them in the wilderness for forty years. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai meant to say that “if Moshe Rabbeinu loved the Jewish people, why did he delay them in the wilderness for forty years; why hadn’t they succeeded in traveling as fast as they did during those three days?”

However, we still need to clarify: Why is it relevant that they weren’t able to travel as quickly as they did during those three days? The claim against Moshe for delaying them “in the wilderness for **forty years**” holds true even if the Jewish people had travelled from Chorev to Kadesh-Barnea (not in three days, but) in eleven days.<sup>9</sup>

However, based on the above explanation {i.e., that the Jewish nation’s travels through the desert could have taken place in only one of two diametrically opposed ways}, this claim is understandable. Had Moshe not **delayed** them in the wilderness for forty years, they would have **succeeded** in traveling as fast as they did during those three days.”

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<sup>8</sup> *Menachos*, ibid, s.v., “*Ahad asar yom.*”

<sup>9</sup> As in fact, Rashi, in his commentary on *Talmud*, ibid. [s.v., “*Yud aleph yom vegomer*”] writes: “For if Moshe had led the Jewish people by way of Mount Seir, they would have arrived at Kadesh, next to Israel, within eleven days.”

### 3.

#### FORTY YEARS INSTEAD OF A MIRACULOUSLY SPEEDY JOURNEY

Seemingly, however, we need to clarify further:

True, had Moshe not **delayed** them in the wilderness, they would have travelled (not at a regular pace, but) at a speed that would have “**succeeded** in traveling as fast as they did during those three days.” But why did Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai deem it necessary to emphasize this in his response to the **Baitusi** to the extent that “Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai responded” with **this** verse?

We must conclude, therefore, that his refutation of the Baitusi’s claim (that “he (Moshe) fixed it for the day after Shabbos...” because of Moshe’s love of Israel) emerges specifically from this idea. That is, by delaying the Jewish people in the wilderness for forty years, Moshe precluded (not only their journeying towards Israel at a **regular** pace, but also) their successful journeying at a miraculous pace.

### 4.

#### NEGOTIATING THE CALENDAR

Previously, we have discussed at length<sup>10</sup> the many debates recorded throughout the *Talmud* and *Midrash* between the Sages of Israel and non-Jews (or similarly, between the Sages and the Baitusim). The very fact that the *Tannaim*,<sup>11</sup> etc., engaged non-Jews in debate, and moreover, the fact that (the details of) these debates are recorded in Torah (the Torah of **truth**) undoubtedly proves that their debates have merit within the framework of **Torah reasoning**. And certainly, the Sages’ responses (are not merely vague or paltry dismissals of their argument, but rather they) are legitimate according to the truth of Torah.

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<sup>10</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 18, pg. 240 ff.

<sup>11</sup> {Sages of the *Mishnah*.}

With this in mind we can understand the nuanced wording of the Baitusi's argument in this case: "Moshe Rabbeinu loved the Jewish people... he fixed it for the day after Shabbos." Meaning, the Baitusi did not attribute it {its date} to Hashem, but to **Moshe Rabbeinu** (i.e., because **he** loved the Jewish people, **Moshe instituted** that Shavuot should take place the day after Shabbos {i.e., Sunday}). This seems unclear: The Baitusi's argument was based on the **verse**, "from the morrow of Shabbos" (*Shabbos Bereishis*); it was **not** Moshe who **fixed** the date as such!

The explanation:

Our Rabbis offer **many** inferences and proofs that Shavuot falls out fifty days after the morrow of the first day of Pesach {i.e., the second day of Pesach}. Therefore, **this** interpretation (that "the morrow of Shabbos," refers to *Shabbos Bereishis*) has no **scriptural** support.

But the Baitusi argued that Moshe Rabbeinu **fixed** Shavuot to always fall on Sunday. Meaning, the calendar should be set up so that the first day of Pesach always falls out on Shabbos, as the well-known expression goes,<sup>12</sup> "The month is made full when necessary." This should be done so that both issues are resolved — on the one hand the count is "from the morrow of Shabbos" (*Shabbos Bereishis*), and from the day after *Yom Tov*. [The **reason** for this ordinance is "in order that the Jewish people would enjoy themselves for two days," as we will explain in section 6 and 7.]

In response, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai (after refuting the alleged **rationale** behind this ordinance by pointing out that Moshe had delayed them in the wilderness for forty years, as will be explained in section 9) proves from the verse that such an ordinance could not have been instituted in the first place. For from the verse we see that there are **two** possible ways the calendar could be

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<sup>12</sup> *Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh*, ch. 3, section 17. See there. {The idea here is as follows: The Jewish court maintains the liberty to negotiate the size of the months slightly where necessary.}

set up:<sup>13</sup> (This refers to) when *Yom Tov* {the first day of Pesach} falls on Shabbos; and (this refers to) when *Yom Tov* falls in the middle of the week.

## 5.

### ADMONISH THOSE WHOM ARE BELOVED

Based on the above (that there is also an allowance for the details of this debate within the framework of Torah logic), a most surprising matter emerges regarding the point of debate. The **Baitusi's** opinion was based on the fact that “Moshe Rabbeinu loved the Jewish people,” and **Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai** said, “If Moshe Rabbeinu loved the Jewish people...” in the form of a question.

The crux of the explanation is:

“If Moshe Rabbeinu loved the Jewish people” means that Moshe Rabbeinu loved the Jewish people differently than the way the **Baitusi** had imagined (i.e., Moshe’s love compelled him to enact an ordinance so that the Jewish people would enjoy themselves for two days). Rather, Moshe loved the Jewish people in an entirely different and much deeper way. This love would not (always) result in the Jewish people enjoying themselves **in a revealed sense**.

To prove this, Rabbi Yochanan responded with the verse, “eleven days from Chorev.” This verse was part of Moshe’s **rebuke** to the Jewish people; **externally**, it appears punitive, etc. However, the truth is that specifically (these words of) this rebuke expressed Moshe’s great and deep love for the Jewish

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<sup>13</sup> {The full context is as follows: Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai cites a proof that Shavuot does not need to occur specifically on a Sunday. One verse states: “Until the day after the seventh week, when there will be a total of 50 days. On that 50th day you may present new grain as a meal offering to Hashem.” (*Vayikra* 23:16), and one verse, the preceding one, apparently contradicts this when it states: ““You shall count for yourself from the morrow of Shabbos, from the day that you brought the *Omer*; seven weeks shall there be complete.” Is the festival of Shavuot seven full weeks after Pesach, i.e., counting from Sunday through Shabbos seven times; or is it fifty days after Pesach?

The Gemara explains: How can we reconcile these two verses? The verse that mentions seven complete weeks, refers to a year when the first day of Pesach occurs on Shabbos. In such a year, the fifty-day period between Pesach and Shavuot contains seven complete weeks, from Sunday through Shabbos. The verse that defines the period as fifty days, refers to a year when the first day of Pesach occurs in the middle of the week.}

people. As the *Midrash* puts it,<sup>14</sup> “**Moshe rebuked them because he loved them.**”

## 6.

### SHABBOS AND SHAVUOS DESCENDING FROM ABOVE

Shavuos<sup>15</sup> is connected with counting. The Jewish people count forty-nine days, and on the fiftieth day, they celebrate Shavuos. As well known,<sup>16</sup> the forty-nine counted days correspond to levels (the forty nine gates) that a person can reach **through his own effort and *avodah***. (For this reason, we must count the days.) In contrast, the fiftieth day — **not** part of the Jewish people’s count — corresponds to a level (the fiftieth gate) which descends and is bestowed **from On High**, after a person has accomplished and worked through all the levels attainable through his own effort and *avodah*. This idea is encapsulated by the rabbinic aphorism,<sup>17</sup> “If a person sanctifies himself minimally down below {in this material world}, they sanctify him and assist him greatly from Above.”

This, then, was the Baitusi’s argument: The {spiritual} substance of the *Yom Tov*, the fiftieth day, descends from On High. Consequently, the **preparation** for this festival should also be undertaken in a manner that emphasizes (not so much the **person’s *avodah***, but rather) the holiness that is bestowed **from On High**, i.e., Shabbos, which is inherently already sanctified<sup>18</sup> (resulting in Shabbos being a day of pleasure, without effort and toil).

The previous levels (corresponding to the days of counting) prepare a person to become a **vessel** for the level of (the fiftieth day, Shavuos) which is bestowed from On High (the fiftieth gate). However, **Shavuos itself** is beyond a person’s *avodah*. Therefore, the **day before** Shavuos, the closest day to Shavuos, which possesses a superior quality similar to the quality of Shavuos, must fall on Shabbos.

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<sup>14</sup> *Devarim Rabbah*, parshas *Devarim*, ch. 1, sec. 4.

<sup>15</sup> {“*Atzeres*,” in the original Hebrew.}

<sup>16</sup> *Likkutei Torah*, parshas *Bamidbar*, 10d, 12a ff. *Shir Hashirim*, 35c.

<sup>17</sup> *Yoma* 39a.

<sup>18</sup> {As opposed to festivals, the dates of which depended on the *Sanhedrin* establishing the lengths of months and the frequency of leap years.}



## THE WRITTEN TORAH AND THE ORAL TORAH

The festival of Shavuos celebrates the time of the Giving of the Torah.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the way the Baitusim viewed Shavuos was also the way they viewed all of Torah.<sup>20</sup>

The Baitusim only believed in the Written Torah,<sup>21</sup> not the Oral Torah.<sup>22</sup> The difference between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah is: **Hashem dictated** the Written Torah, and Moshe transcribed it. That is, it was bestowed entirely **from On High**, and a student's ability to grasp and understand its meaning is not (so) germane.<sup>23</sup> As opposed to the Oral Torah, which requires that the Torah, as revealed and relayed through the Sages of Israel in every generation, be drawn into a person's knowledge and understanding. This must be done by studying Torah **with great diligence**,<sup>24</sup> i.e., a student's mind must toil to grasp and innovate within Torah. In contrast, in the Written Torah, nothing may be added nor subtracted.

The Baitusim only believed in the Written Torah. Meaning, they maintained that Torah is only composed of what is revealed from On High.

The same applies, they held, to the Giving of the Torah. This, then, explains the Baitusi's argument: (As a result of his **love of the Jewish people**, Moshe fixed) Shavuos, the Giving of the Torah, to fall after Shabbos. Shavuos follows a day not of labor and toil but rather of a day of {spiritual} delight, when everything is bestowed from Above.

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<sup>19</sup> Prayer liturgy of Shavuos. See *Pesachim* 68b.

<sup>20</sup> Interesting to note: The Rabbis say (*Lekach Tov, parshas Pinchas* 29:11) "The *Tzdukim* maintain that the Torah was not given on Shavuos."

<sup>21</sup> {The written law, including all scripture.}

<sup>22</sup> {The oral law, including all of the Rabbinic teachings, decrees and traditions.}

<sup>23</sup> See *Shulchan Aruch Harav, Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 2, sec. 12, 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Zohar*, vol. 1, ch. 12, sec. 2. See *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 2, sec. 2, where he adds the word, "and to innovate." See also Tanya, *Iggeres Hakodesh*, epistle 26, pg. 145a. See also *Torah Ohr* 38c.

## 8.

### TORAH ENTERING THE LOWER REALMS

The truth is, however, that the Oral Torah was also bestowed {from Above} at Sinai. Meaning, even the aspect of Torah that people grasp through **their own** intellect is part of Hashem's Torah. But this aspect of Torah descended and was invested into the lower realms, so that people would be able to understand it.<sup>25</sup>

This aspect of Torah achieved Hashem's ultimate objective behind the Giving of the Torah — connecting the higher and lower realms.<sup>26</sup> When a person labors using his own intellectual capacities, and fathoms Torah logic, **Hashem's Torah** is now attributed to the person, "his Torah." That is, it becomes an aspect of **who he is**.<sup>27</sup> True, its value is less than the "nine *kav* of another's produce"<sup>28</sup> (which is bestowed from Above), but it is "**his own *kav***." Furthermore {by studying Torah in this way}, his essence becomes united with Hashem's *chochmah*<sup>29</sup> in a wondrous union.<sup>30</sup>

Since the purpose of the Giving of the Torah is to connect the higher and lower realms, matters that are (higher and) **beyond** human ability must, at the end of the day, be grasped by human intellect (the lower realms).

Thus, preparing for the Giving of the Torah by counting the *Omer* (i.e., a person's *avodah* and toil to become fit to receive the Torah) is crucial to the Giving of the Torah itself. In fact, this is true to the extent that *Chassidus* explains the verse,<sup>31</sup> "*tisperu* {you shall count} fifty days" as follows: The Jewish people create and illuminate the **fiftieth** day ("*tisperu*" is etymologically related

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<sup>25</sup> See *Tanya, Likkutei Amarim* ch. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Based on the *Midrash Tanchuma, parshas Va'era* 15. *Shmos Rabbah*, ch. 12, sec., 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Avodah Zarah* 19a. {The full context is as follows: Rava says: Initially the Torah is called by the name of Hashem, but ultimately it is called by the name of the one who studies it. As the verse states (*Tehillim* 1:2): "His delight is in Hashem's Torah," and in the continuation of the verse it states: "And in his Torah he meditates day and night." This teaches that through study, one acquires ownership, as it were, of the Torah.}

<sup>28</sup> *Bava Metzia* 38a. {The full quote is as follows: "A person prefers a *kav* of his own produce to nine *kav* of another's produce." A *kav* is a measurement of grain.}

<sup>29</sup> {Lit., "wisdom," the *sefira* following *kesser*, the highest of the intellectual faculties.}

<sup>30</sup> *Tanya, Likkutei Amarim* ch. 5; see there.

<sup>31</sup> *Vayikra* 23:16.

to the word “*sapir-stone*” {sapphire}). Meaning, the Heavenly outflow of the fiftieth gate (that was bestowed at the Giving of the Torah) also is **brought about** through the Jewish people’s *avodah* of counting the *Omer*. Therefore, this is the appropriate preparation for the Giving of the Torah.

## 9.

### MOSHE DELAYS THE PURIFICATION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

To buttress this explanation, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai cited a source that Moshe delayed the Jewish people in the wilderness for forty years.

The punishments of Torah — which is a Torah of **kindness** — serve to purify the sinner from the blemishes caused by a sin.<sup>32</sup> The same reasoning applies to the decree to remain in the desert for forty years. The purpose of the Jews remaining in the desert was (primarily) not to punish the Jewish people for the sin of the Spies. Rather, it was to bring the Jewish people to have a stronger and deeper connection with Hashem (which certainly would prevent them from repeating this sin).

This was accomplished through the many trials that confronted the Jewish people in the desert. These they endured and overcame — and repented. All this awakened a deeper, unbreakable connection to G-dliness within the Jewish people. As *Rambam*<sup>33</sup> describes at length, the great virtue of a person who overcomes a test is similar to the virtue of a *baal teshuvah*,<sup>34</sup> etc.

Meaning: It was specifically Moshe’s great love for the Jewish people that motivated him to want to delay the Jews in the desert and bring this plan to fruition, so that the Jewish people would enter the land about which the Torah says, “the eyes of **Hashem, your G-d**, are always upon it,”<sup>35</sup> “cleaving to

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<sup>32</sup> *Likkutei Torah, parshas Matos* 86b. See also *Likkutei Torah, parshas Naso* 25c, *parshas Korach* 53d.

<sup>33</sup> *Shmonah Prokim le’haRambam* ch. 6.

<sup>34</sup> {A *baal teshuvah* is an individual who sinned in the past, but has regretted his behavior, and turned himself around, resolving never to repeat his sins.}

<sup>35</sup> *Devarim* 11:13.

**Hashem, your G-d.**<sup>36</sup> This was brought about through **their *avodah* and toil** circumventing and travelling through the “wilderness of the nations.”<sup>37</sup> They were cleansed of their sins and blemishes, when Moshe delayed them in the wilderness for forty years.

## 10.

### THE EASY WAY OUT AND THE TOUGH ROUTE

Based on all the above, we can appreciate why Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, “responded (specifically) with this verse, ‘eleven days from Chorev...’” In so doing, he meant to say (as *Tosafos* writes, as mentioned above), “If Moshe loved the Jewish people... why weren’t they able to travel...?”

The Jewish people needed to cross the desert in order to enter *Eretz Yisrael* because by travelling through the desert (and refining the “wilderness of the nations”) they were elevated, as mentioned. This, then, prepared them, and made them worthy to enter the Holy Land. However, this goal could have been achieved in two ways:

a) Initiated by the ***Shechinah*** — from Above — whereby none of the limitations of the lower realms would have obstructed them. Thus, their elevation and refinement would happen rapidly, without hindrances. But by this method, their achievement would have been considered {unearned} “the bread of shame,” because it was not achieved by their own *avodah*.

b) Initiated by the **Jewish people** — from below. In this way, in order for the journey in the desert to have affected the Jewish people properly, Moshe had to “delay them in the wilderness for forty years.” Specifically through confronting all the trials (and likewise, the *avodah* involved in overcoming these trials, etc.) could the refinement and elevation they achieved permeate all the particular aspects {of existence}.

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<sup>36</sup> *Devarim* 4:4.

<sup>37</sup> See also *Likkutei Torah*, beginning of *parshas Naso*, *parshas Masei* 91b ff., and other places.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai told the Baitusi exactly this: “According to your opinion, Moshe should have chosen the method {referred to by *Tosafos*} “**succeeding** to travel...,” **expediting** their entry into the land {in a miraculous manner that is consistent with an initiative} which **descends from On High** (“in order that the Jewish people would enjoy themselves,” etc.).

But their delay in the wilderness for forty years proved that Moshe’s true love of the Jewish people expressed itself, specifically, by bringing the Jewish people to **perform *avodah* based on their own abilities**.

[For this reason, the verse, “eleven days from Chorev,” sums up all the previous words of rebuke recorded in the previous verse: “Moshe rebuked them because he loved them.” The purpose of Moshe’s rebuke was to inspire the Jewish people to engage in *avodah* and return to Hashem on their own volition. This, in fact, was the reason why they journeyed through the wilderness for forty years.]

The same idea applies to this **lengthy** final exile. The intention of this exile is to cleanse the Jewish people {from sins and blemishes} and make them worthy so that they **themselves** will also be ready for redemption.

Through the Jewish people engaging in this *avodah* with alacrity, {which characterizes bringing Mashiach} by (means of) “merit,” the refinement itself is accomplished in a manner characterized by the statement “I will hasten it.” As a result, the redemption will come about with both advantages: It will occur “in its time” (whereby the refinement is complete in all its details), and “I will hasten it” (from Above)<sup>38</sup> — especially since, “All the deadlines {for the final redemption} that were calculated have passed”<sup>39</sup> — with the true and **complete** redemption through *Mashiach tzidkeinu*, **speedily**, in our days, in actuality.

-Based on talks delivered on the second day of Shavuos, 5737 (1977)

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<sup>38</sup> *Sanhedrin* 98a.

<sup>39</sup> *Sanhedrin* 97b.