



לקוטי שיחות  
PROJECT  
LIKKUTEI  
SICHOS

## The Long, Loving Way

### Sicha Summary

Chelek 19 | Devarim | Sichah 1

#### The Context:

The book of *Devarim* opens with Moses delivering a veiled rebuke to the Jewish people concerning their behavior in the desert.

On the verse, “Eleven days from Chorev, by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea,” (*Devarim* 1:2) Rashi explains that G-d miraculously transported the Jewish people from Chorev to Kadesh Barnea in three days, a journey that would take eleven days minimally; however, “because you sinned, He made you travel around Mount Seir for forty years.”

Why did Rashi turn the explicit time-frame of the verse, eleven days, into a mere building block for the actual rebuke — that G-d transported them in three days? Evidently, Rashi understood that there were two options: Either they would make the journey miraculously, or they would spend an unnecessarily long time in the desert. Thus, the rebuke was that instead of being transported by G-d miraculously, they spent forty years in the desert as a result of their sins.

This insight unlocks a puzzling Talmudic discussion.

#### The Talmud:

The *Talmud* records a debate between a Boethusian and Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai concerning the timing of the Shavuot holiday. The Boethusians

believed that Shavuot must be on a Sunday, taking the verse “on the morrow of Shabbos” (*Vayikra* 23:15) literally, while the Sages established through numerous textual proofs that it did not need to be on a Sunday.

To marshal proof for his position, the Boethusian argued: “Moses, our teacher, loved the Jewish people, and he knew that Shavuot is only a one day holiday. Therefore, he arose and established it to always fall {on Sunday,} after Shabbat, so that the Jewish people would enjoy themselves for two days.”

“Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai recited this verse in response: “It is an eleven day journey from Chorev to Kadesh Barnea by the way of Mount Seir.” If Moses, our teacher, was a lover of the Jewish people, why did he detain them in the wilderness forty years?” (*Menachos* 65a)

### **The Tosafot:**

*Tosafot* cites Rashi to explain Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai’s reply: “If Moses loved the Jewish people, why didn’t he travel quickly through the desert as he did in those three days from Chorev to Kadesh Barnea?” (*Ibid*, s.v. “*Achad Asar Yom*”)

Seemingly, this issue is irrelevant. Whether it took three days or eleven is not the point — the point is that it should never have taken forty years! Yet, as we have established, the journey could only have taken place in one of two ways — miraculously short or unnecessarily long.

### **The Question:**

Why is the idea embedded in this verse — that Moses led the people on a long journey as opposed to a miraculously short one — a credible response to the Boethusian claim that Shavuot should always be held on Sunday?

### **The Argument:**

The Boethusian’s argument was as follows: Shavuot is the fiftieth day, the culmination of the forty-nine day period of the Omer count. It is also the

day on which the Torah was given. Chassidut explains that the forty-nine days represent the spiritual advancement that human beings are capable of by their own effort. The fiftieth day represents a Divine gift that is unattainable through human effort. (*Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar 10b*)

This dichotomy between human effort and a Divine gift is represented in the two parts of Torah: The Written Torah was given by G-d, word for word, to Moses. It is unalterable — a Divine gift that is not earned through human toil. The Oral Torah is the human dimension of Torah where we develop the Torah and make it our own through our creativity, intelligence, and effort.

The Boethusians only believed in the Divine element of Torah and rejected the human element. (*Sanhedrin 33b*) Therefore, they believed that Moses would have manipulated the calendar to ensure that Shavuos — the day of the Giving of the Torah and the fiftieth day of the Omer — should follow immediately after Shabbos because the primordial, Divine holiness of Shabbos best reflects the theme of Shavuos — a Divine gift. Out of his love for the people, he wanted them to experience the highest form of Divine gift — Shavuos following on the heels of Shabbos.

### **The Retort:**

The ultimate purpose of Torah is for it to be understood by the human mind and developed through human ingenuity. Moses' love for the Jewish people, Rabbi Yochanan insisted, would lead him **not** to establish Shavuos on Sunday; rather, after a forty-nine day period of human effort and self-advancement, the Jews would be better prepared for the task of drawing Torah into the human realm.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai supported this position by replying to the Boethusian that Moses did not lead the people miraculously through the desert, but rather, slowly, over a period of forty years.

Miraculous travel represents Divinely inspired enlightenment. The long route represents the toil of human effort. In their journey of repentance following the sin of the Spies and as preparation for entering the Land of

Israel, they could be guided “miraculously,” receiving unearned Divine inspiration, or they could make the arduous journey themselves, by their own effort.

Moses, who loved the Jewish people, understood that the people would have a richer, deeper, and more authentic relationship with G-d by making their own halting, laborious journey through the desert.