

1. The central theme of our Sidra this morning ~~revolves~~ is the reconnaissance mission of MERAGLIM which Moses sent into Canaan to spy out the Land and see if it can be taken by the Israelites grouped in the desert, at its borders, as G-d had promised. These MERAGLIM were important people, people held in respect by their peers and leaders of their tribes. When they returned from their tour of duty they reported to Moses and to Israel: the Land is rich - it is indeed a Land flowing with milk and honey. They brought back tremendous clusters of grapes to prove its fertility and the richness of its natural resources. However, they said, the Land was inhabited by a race of giants who dwarfed the Israelites and made them look like locusts. They were a mighty people, heavily armed and their cities powerfully fortified. By no stretch of imagination, by no exercise of military optimism is it conceivable, they reported, that this band of newly freed Semite slaves could fight and beat the race of armed Canaanite giants. This is what they had seen, and so had they reported. As a consequence of their report, the anger of G-d was kindled against the entire people, and especially the MERAGLIM. It was then that G-d determined the punishment: 40 years of circuitous and tortuous travel in the great burning desert. Plague was to strike these people, and this entire generation would die out in the desert, not one of them would ever set foot on the Promised Land of Canaan, only their children, who had not been partner to this pessimistic report, only they would enter Canaan.
2. It is a story which is well-known but which is puzzling. They were punished in a most harsh manner - an entire generation killed off. And we sometimes wonder at the justice of the penalty: did the Meraglim not tell the truth? They reported just what they saw. They did not lie, they did not tell one untruth. All was truthful. Why should people be punished for telling the truth?
3. In the answer to that question, supplied by the eminent Rabbi of Kotzk, lies a whole weltanschauung, a whole view on life. It is true, he says, that the Meraglim did not lie; it is not true, however, that they told the truth. One can refrain from lying, and still not be telling the truth. EMESS, truth, is more than an accurate recital of facts. Rendering the facts precisely down to the last detail means that one has not lied and that he has achieved accuracy. But EMESS - truth - that is a religious and moral technique, a G-dly essence, and not a scientist's instrument. EMESS, he says, means not only finding and telling the facts as they appear, but finding and telling the facts as they bring out the Will of G-d; it means raising appearances until they become one with the view of G-d; it means finding the hidden G-dliness in any situation. That is EMESS, the Seal of G-d.

And that was the sin of the Meraglim. They reported accurately, but not truthfully. To give the EMESS, they should have reported the fertility of the Palestinian soil and the power of its inhabitants, as they did, but they should have added: these giants are only men. Where there is the Will of G-d no giant can resist it. It is indeed the Land which G-d has promised us, and so let us go up and take it. It is a Land worthy of the Divine Name, let therefore the will of G-d be achieved. Instead of seeing only clusters of grapes and walls of cities and tall men and many weapons, they should have ~~one~~ seen the figure of Abraham as G-d promised him this land; they should have heard the Divine Word foretelling its future as the Land of Israel; they should have felt the Divine presence already penetrating it. That would have been EMESS. But they failed EMESS, tho they did not lie, and hence the terrible punishment and the death of DOB HA'MIDBAR.

4. Take that criterion of EMESS and you see how it applies to every aspect of our contemporary life. The American Jew who visits Israel today - the modern counterpart of the MERAGLIM - who comes back from the Holy Land and does not fabricate any stories, can do one of two things: he can be just accurate, or he can give EMESS, Truth. The traveler who is merely accurately will come back armed with statistics and anecdotes - he will tell you the level of unemployment, the terrible drinking water, the new construction, the Yemenite habits, the many languages, the Haddassah's hospital, the high political tension, the extremely tense religious situation between extremists on both sides, the communal life of the kibbutzim etc. It is a report you could hear about any small country, newly formed, in a process of rapid and attimes uncontrolled development. That is mere accuracy.

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5. We are all in a sense MERAGLIM. Our lives seem to be spent in a desert, in a wilderness of purposelessness, but occasionally, tho rarely, it is given to us to make a spiritual expedition, a religious reconnaissance of another kind of world, of the Canaan of our souls, of the delights and heights of a different and higher kind of life and living. Some of us make this trip into greater spirituality during great religious moments - the time of Shofar blowing or Kol Nidre or Neilah might provide some people with a deepened sense of G-dliness, or with a heightened sensitivity to the call of Torah, with all the ecstasy and spiritual delight it signifies. Others might find it in the study of Torah, in the comprehension of one of its great and eternal truths. Others might experience this sudden reconnaissance in a greater and much different world at a time of personal significance - a Bar Mitzvah or wedding or, may Heaven forbid, a tragedy, such as the passing glimpse of Eternity some of us get as we stand beside the coffin of a beloved one. It is what happens when we get back to the mundane routine of daily living and when we then consider this special experience that determines whether we have achieved EMESS. If we pass it off as a psychological release or emotional experience, it might not be inaccurate. But we have then lost EMESS. EMESS means to understand that this glimpse can become a stare, and the stare can become a lifetime of higher and greater experiences. EMESS means to act so that this land we have reconnoitered becomes our own. It means that the inspiration becomes permanent so that greater and deeper awareness of G-d will result.
6. In a similar fashion, I can understand someone talking about Kodimoh and describing it in one of two ways: accurate - or EMESS. It is not inaccurate to say that the foremost Orthodox synagogue in Springfield is housed in an old building, that it has architectural features which are unpleasant: the lighting is poor, the seats uncomfortable, the quarters cramped, facilities insufficient, room sparse and crowded. It is accurate to say that not only on High Holidays is it terribly insufficient, but on every Sabbath, when our Junior Congregation must move to less convenient quarters and our Sr Cong dismissed when there is any kind of Simcha. That is all accurate. But from that sort of accuracy one might conclude that there is a lack of vitality in this institution. While EMESS means the reverse - it means adding that Kodimoh has the largest Sabbath attendance of any synagogue within 25 miles of it, that it has daily minyanim every day of the year, that it has its youth returning to it and its people practicing, by and large, more and more of their beliefs. It means that at those very facts - cramped quarters, insufficient facilities, overcrowded synagogue, need for newer, fresher looking externals - all this proves that Kodimoh has so grown that it has outgrown its past building and must do something constructive so that its facilities keep up with its vitality and its message to the community. EMESS means to lead to the only logical conclusion: the conclusion to which David was led some 2400 years ago when he saw the Ark unhoused properly: BUILD - and build graciously and spaciouly, for the success of KODIMOH will reflect and inspire the success of genuine and authentic Judaism every place else in the country. That is EMESS.
7. We say in our morning prayers: LE'OLAM YEHEI ADAM YEREI SHAMAYIM BESEISER UVAGALUY UMODEH AL HAEMESS - at all times let a man fear G-d, in private and in public, and testify the truth. In our private lives may we learn to be more than accurate - may we learn that to be MODEH AL HAEMESS means to be a YEREI SHAMAYIM, to fear G-d and find His will; and as for fearing G-d in public, in public worship, EMESS directs us to one goal: the expansion of our facilities so that more people will flock to this center of Torah in ever greater devotion.