



לע"נ הרה"ת הרה"ח יוסף יצחק
בן הרה"ת הרה"ח אשר ז"ל
סאסאנקא
ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'
נדבת משפחתו שיחיו

ה שבת Crisis Becomes Clarity

The Torah is translated into Greek

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In a second attempt to translate the Torah into Greek (after an unsuccessful attempt 61 years earlier), the Egyptian-Greek Emperor Ptolemy (Talmi) gathered 72 chachomim, isolating them in 72 separate rooms, and ordered them to each produce a translation. On the 8th of Teves of the year 3515 (ג'תקט"ו) they produced 72 identical translations, including identical changes in thirteen places (where they each felt that a literal translation could distort the Torah's true meaning). As a result of this translation, Greek became a significant second language among Yidden. In Talmudic times, 8 Teves was observed by some as a fast day, expressing the fear of the translation's detrimental effect.

Regarding the day on which the Torah was translated into Greek, it states in *Maseches Sefer Torah* (1:8): "...that day was as difficult for the Yidden as the day on which the *eigel ha'zahav* was made, since the Torah could not be translated adequately."

This statement requires explanation: Firstly, we know that Moshe translated the Torah into all 70 languages (*Devarim* 1:5; *Rashi*)—including Greek. Clearly, then, translating the Torah into other languages is a *positive* thing; otherwise, Moshe would not have done so. Why, then, was 8 Teves labeled a "difficult" day for the Yidden? Furthermore, how can we say that "the Torah could not be adequately translated" if Moshe Rabbeinu had already done so many years earlier?

The biggest question, however, is this: Even if we could understand why "the Torah could not be adequately translated" and therefore 8 Teves was a "difficult" day, how can it be compared to the day the *eigel ha'zahav* was made, a catastrophe of cosmic proportions? Were the events of 8 Teves really that disastrous?!

This phraseology is also found in *Maseches Shabbos* (17a)

regarding an incident in which, following a halachic dispute between Hillel and Shammai, the *halacha* was decided according to the opinion of Shammai: "That day Hillel was bowed and was sitting before Shammai like one of the students. And [that day] was as difficult for the Yidden as the day the *eigel [ha'zahav]* was made."

Here, too, we need to understand why this situation was considered as grave as the incident of the *eigel ha'zahav*?

The explanation lies in the precise wording of *Chazal*: "That day was as difficult for the Yidden as the *day* on which the *eigel ha'zahav* was made" (rather than "...as difficult...as the **sin** of the *eigel ha'zahav*").

To clarify: The act of making the *eigel ha'zahav* in and of itself was not a catastrophe; there still could have been a happy ending, as Aharon (in an effort to delay the *worship* of the *eigel* until Moshe returned) subsequently announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to Hashem!" (*Ki Sisa* 32:5). It was only on the *next* day that the Yidden performed the *cheit ha'eigel* by worshipping the calf.

Accordingly, the expression "as the *day* on which the *eigel*



ha'zahav was made” takes on new meaning: It is not referring to the disaster *itself*, but rather to an event with a *potentially* disastrous outcome.

Based on this new understanding, we can answer our previous questions: When we say that “the Torah could not be adequately translated,” we mean that a literal and precise word-for-word translation of the Torah into Greek could have enabled someone like Talmi to misinterpret and distort the Torah.

Similarly, when the *halacha* was decided following the opinion of Beis Shammai, there was a concern that the *halacha* might follow Beis Shammai forever—contrary to a foundational principle in *halacha* that wherever Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel disagree, the opinion of Beis Shammai is completely disregarded.



Meforshim on Chumash explain that the Yidden made the *eigel ha'zahav* because they desired to have a tangible representation of Hashem's presence in their midst. In fact, they thought that if they could fashion a tangible representation of Hashem's presence out of a physical material like gold, that would be even better than what they had until then—Moshe Rabbeinu. *Elokus* would permeate even deeper into physical reality and demonstrate how *everything* is one with Hashem (similar to what we find later on in Torah, when Hashem commanded the Yidden to fashion a dwelling place—the Mishkan and specifically the *aron* and *keruvim*—out of gold).

However, since their actions were not based on Hashem's command but rather on their own reasoning, the results were the complete opposite—the Yidden fell through with the *cheit ha'egel*, thereby erecting a *barrier* between them and Hashem.

This is why “the day on which the *eigel ha'zahav* was made” (even before they worshipped it) is referred to as “difficult,” because the *eigel* represented the idea of creating “separateness,” so to speak, from Hashem.

When Moshe was instructed by Hashem to translate the Torah into all 70 languages, there was no room for a negative outcome (i.e. misinterpretations), since it was based on Hashem's command.

But when the translation was carried out at the behest of Talmi, a human being, there was a potential for grave error (such as misinterpreting the first *possuk* in Torah, “בראשית

ברא אלוקים”, which, if translated literally, could be understood to mean that there is another authority besides for Hashem (“שתי רשויות”), *chas v'shalom*).

Likewise, if the *halacha* had been decided according to Shammai in every dispute from then on, it would have been a tragic error: Beis Shammai is more stringent in their rulings due to their *neshamos* being rooted in the realm of severity and judgement (מדת הדין). Since they have a more prohibitive worldview and do not see the potential for holiness in the physical world, therefore, when there is a choice to reject or embrace, they reject. In a very, very subtle way, saying that there is an entity which cannot be imbued with *kedusha* is ascribing to the concept of “שתי רשויות”; saying that there is an entity outside of Hashem.

But unlike the day on which the *eigel* was made, in these two instances, the potential calamity did not materialize. On the contrary, both of these instances led to positive results: The Greek language was refined to such an extent that, according to *halacha*, it is the only language other than *lashon hakodesh* in which one may write a *Sefer Torah*. And due to Hillel's humility by deferring to Shammai, he influenced him to be more embracing, resulting in some leniencies in the rulings of Beis Shammai.

Takeaway:

In our generation, Torah, and specifically Chasidus, has been made available in numerous languages, allowing people from diverse backgrounds to tap into these profound teachings. By translating the deep and lofty ideas discussed in Chasidus about *achdus Hashem*, we refine the “70 languages” spoken by humanity, which in turn elevates the “70 nations” that they represent. This process draws us nearer to the era of Moshiach, about which it says: “For then [in the era of Moshiach], I will convert all the peoples to a pure [and accurate] language, for all of them to call in the name of Hashem, to serve Him with a common effort” (Tzefania 3:9).

(Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 24, p. 1)