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ח' טבת תשס"ז

“והנה עיניכם ראות ועיני אחי בנימין כי פי המדבר אליכם...” (בראשית מ"ה י"ב)

**“Behold your eyes and the eyes of my brother Binyamin can see,
that it is my mouth that speaks to you...”**

The Gemara in Megilla¹ relates the story of Talmi's (Ptolemy II Philadelphus, King of Alexandria cir. 3484²) coercion of seventy-two Chachamim to translate the Torah into Greek. (Alexandria was the capital of the Macedonian – Greek empire during that period following Alexander of Macedonia's conquest of the region. Ptolemy I was one of Alexander's generals and was succeeded by his son Ptolemy II.) The Gemara relates that in order to assure that he was receiving an accurate and unaltered version of the Torah, he locked each of the seventy two sages in an individual room without allowing them to discuss anything with each other. The sages were faced with a great dilemma, since many of the verses in the Torah, when translated literally, can easily be misconstrued to establish false conclusions. Hashem performed a miracle and provided the sages with a divine inspiration to alter all of these possible mistranslations in the same manner, so that none of these verses would be presented inaccurately and yet Ptolemy would be none the wiser. (This translation of the Torah is commonly known as the Septuagint, which in Greek means “Seventy”, a reference to the round number of sages who created it. The Septuagint known to us today does not contain all of the changes made by the sages and has clearly been altered since that time.)

The rendering of the sacred Torah into Greek was a catastrophic event which resulted in three full days of darkness descending on the world following its completion³. The Tur states that these three days of darkness were on the 8th, 9th, and 10th of Teves⁴. The Bahag elaborates further by explaining that each of these dark days has its own individual distressing event which is cause for a fast day. The Minhag is only to fast on the 10th of Teves, which falls out this year on Sunday, although some fast all three days (when they do not fall out on Shabbos). He explains that the 8th of Teves is a fast day since it commemorates the completion of the Septuagint, the 9th of Teves “is not known what lamentable event occurred on it”, and the 10th of Teves commemorates the siege of Yerushalayim – the harbinger of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash⁵.

The Magen Avraham and the Taz comment that it is alarming that the Bahag would write that the 9th of Teves “is not known what lamentable event occurred”, since in Selichos we clearly mention the even of the 9th of Teves. In the Selichos of Asarah B'Teves (written by R' Yosef Tov Ellem, one of the Baalei Tosfos) it states, טרף טרף בו הנותן, “ועמתי בתשעה בו בכלימה וחפר, טרף טרף בו הנותן, הוא עזרא הסופר” – “I was agitated on the ninth of [Teves] with shame and disgrace, as the giver of graceful words was torn apart – (he is) Ezra Hasofer”. In this Selicha it clearly states that the cause of grief on the 9th of Teves is due to the anniversary of Ezra Hasofer's death⁶?

In truth the entire tragedy and subsequent fast of the 8th of Teves begs for clarity. Why should the translation of the Torah be considered such a catastrophic event causing three days of darkness and a fast day for generations to come? The Chasam Sofer writes that the explanation to this mystery lies in the deeper understanding of Yavan and the Greek culture. The culture of Yavan is one emphasizing the exterior beauty of the physical without regard for inner spiritual worth. The Greeks are the descendants of Yefes the son of Noach. Interestingly, both Yefes and Sheim were partners in the worthy deed of covering their exposed father Noach. Yet, Sheim received as reward for this deed that his descendants would merit the Mitzva of Tzitzis, while Yefes received the reward that his descendants will merit burial after the war of Gog and Magog. The key to the discrepancy in the type of reward received by Noach's sons for a seemingly identical and equal involvement in this meritorious action, lies in the difference in intention behind their deeds. Sheim's intention was to perform the Mitzva of preventing the shame of his father, whereas Yefes simply felt that it was unbecoming of Noach's dignity to remain in such a

¹ מגילה ט ע"א, כשהתירו רבותינו יונית - לא התירו אלא בספר תורה, ומשום מעשה דתלמי המלך. דתניא: מעשה בתלמי המלך שכניס שבעים ושנים זקנים, והכניסן בשבעים ושנים בתים, ולא גילה להם על מה כינסן. ונכנס אצל כל אחד ואחד ואמר להם: כתבו לי תורת משה רבכם. נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא בלב כל אחד ואחד עצה, והסכימו כולן לדעת אחת. וכתבו לו "אלהים ברא בראשית", "אעשה אדם בצלם ובדמות", "ויכל ביום הששי, וישבות ביום השביעי", "זכר ונקבה בראו", ולא כתבו בראם, וכו'.

² סדר הדורות עמ' ע"א.

³ מגילה ט', ואע"ג שכבר תרגמו בימי משה, ע' מה שתירצו בשו"ת מהר"ץ חיות הנ"ל, ובשו"ת דברי יששכר יו"ד ס' צ"ז, ובפרד"י עה"ת שם.

⁴ טור או"ח ס' תק"פ.

⁵ הובא שם.

⁶ שו"ע או"ח תק"פ ס"ב, בשמונה בטבת נכתבה התורה יונית בימי תלמי המלך והיה חשך בעולם שלשה ימים; ובט' בו לא נודע איזו היא הצרה שאירע בו. וכל המגן אברהם סק"ו, לא נודע - ובסליחו' שלנו איתא שמת עזרא הסופר, וע' בט"ז סק"א, תימה גדולה הא איתא בסליחות של י' בטבת דבט' בו מת עזרא הסופר וצ"ע רב:

state. Sheim, whose intentions were based on the spiritual received a spiritual reward of Mitzvas Tzitzis. Yefes who was merely concerned with the external unbecomingness of the situation, merited that his descendant's physical bodies will not be left exposed in disgrace.

The main intention of the Greeks in the time of the Chashmonaim was to uproot the Oral Torah. (Hence the emphasis upon the lighting of the Menora which represents the Torah SheBaal Peh, ואמ"ל⁷) The Greek king Ptolemy also intended to uproot the Torah SheBaal Peh. All of the Oral Torah is contained within the words of the written Torah. The Tanna R' Akiva was able to derive reams of Halachos from each of the small crowns on each of the letters in the Torah. Each word of the Written Torah is measured and every extra letter can be used to derive yet another Halacha of the Oral Torah. Every part of the Torah has myriads of explanations, in the literal, esoteric, and mystical realms. By translating the Torah into Greek, the value of the Torah was diminished and confined to the basic literal translation, stripped of all its deeper meaning and intention. A literal translation of the Torah is merely its exterior shell, devoid of all the inner wisdom it contains. This was the purpose of the Greeks, to show the world the Torah's exterior beauty and wisdom while depriving it of any inner value.

This was the cause for three days of darkness following the Torah's translation. Chazal in numerous places refer to the Kingdom of Yavan as representing darkness in the world. Yavan's attempt to darken the light of the Torah was symbolized by this three day worldwide darkness.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin tells us that Ezra was worthy to have the Torah given by him if Moshe had not preceded him. Although the entire Torah was not given through him, he merited to change the "K'sav" – the letters the Torah is written in from "Libonaah" to "Ashuris". The advantage of Ksav Ashuris (the letters we use today in Sifrei Torah) is that they are written with crowns that symbolize many of the hidden secrets contained in the Torah's letters. The Haflaah writes that this essential quality of the Torah is referenced in Yosef's words quoted above. Yosef tells his brothers, "Behold your eyes and the eyes of my brother Binyamin can see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you". Rashi explains that Yosef was proving his identity to his brothers by demonstrating his ability to speak Lashon Hakodesh. The Rishonim question this explanation, since many Egyptians were also familiar with Lashon Hakodesh. The Haflaah points out that this is the reason why Yosef does not say "Behold you can hear that my mouth is speaking to you", rather he refers to the sense of sight – "You can see that my mouth speaks to you". Had Yosef merely been referring to his ability to speak their language it would suffice to refer to the sense of hearing, normally associated with speech. Explains the Haflaah, that Yosef was showing his brothers his ability to speak words of Torah learning. The words of the Torah are not mere words that are heard; in each word of Torah one can see the deeper meaning behind each of its words and letters⁸.

Concludes the Chasam Sofer, this is the meaning behind the words of the Bahag that on the 9th day of Teves "it is not known what lamentable event occurred". The Bahag was well aware that the 9th of Teves is the anniversary of Ezra's death. By stating that it is unknown what tragedy occurred he wishes to explain why Ezra more than any other luminaries' death is so significant. Following the tragedy of the 8th of Teves (where the Torah was translated and thereby limited to its literal exterior shell, as we explained), the entire gift that Ezra bestowed upon us of Ksav Ashuris (which represented the inner meaning of the Torah) was lost. Hence, following the 8th day of Teves, we no longer can fathom the great loss of Ezra Hasofer⁹. This in itself is reason to mourn. May we soon merit to once again see the greatness of the Torah in all its splendor, בב"א.

גוט שבת,
מאיר הלוי הלמן
פעיה"ק תובב"א

⁷ ע' מג"א עה"ת פ' מקץ, שחנכה היא זמן תושבע"פ, וראה יומא כ"ט ע"א "חנכה לא ניתנה ליכתב", ומש"כ ע"ז ר' צדוק בס' רסיסי לילה עמ' ע"ז, ופרי צדיק עיני חנכה, שפ"א חנכה תרמ"ד, ומקום המנורה בדרום וכמ"ש ב"ב כ"ה ע"ב הוצה שיחכים ידרים, וע' ברכות נ"ז ע"א בענין חלום של שמן זית, וע"ע מ"ר ריש פ' בהעלותך, העמק דבר שם, רבינו בחיי שם, ר"ן שבת כ"א ע"א, וכת"ס פ' תרומה, וקונ' בעיני חנכה, בענין כח המנורה, וקיצרתי כי אין כאן מקומו.

⁸ פנים יפות עה"ת שם.
⁹ מיוסד על דברי החת"ס בדרשותיו לח' טבת, וס' אור גדליהו ליקוטים.