

CHABAD

 RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday night*..... קדש

Friday 5 August 2011 - 5 Menachem Av 5771
 Sedra Devarim

גמ

THE TRUE TRANSLATION

IN OUR MULTINATIONAL SOCIETY, TRANSLATIONS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART of life. Ideally, they enable different peoples, with different ways of thinking, to connect together. But are translations always accurate? Not always.

Our Sedra¹, beginning the fifth and final Book of the Torah, presents Moses giving talks to the Jewish people, explaining what the Torah is going to mean in their lives when they enter the Land of Israel. The Sages tell us he did not only speak to them in Hebrew: he also translated the Torah into the seventy languages of the original seventy nations of the world².

This was opening the possibility for future translations of the Torah, as in our time, communicating aspects of Torah thought to very disparate kinds of people: men and women with different life-styles, with different questions. The Torah has answers for them all, but these have to be translated in a way which they can understand.

Now, this is a sensitive and possibly dangerous process. A false phrase in the translation might lead a person in the wrong direction, with serious consequences. In fact, the Sages were very anxious about an actual event in Second Temple times, when the Torah was translated into Greek. King Ptolemy of Alexandria (3rd cent. BCE) was fascinated by the idea of the Torah, and ordered the Sages to produce a

Celebrating the Birthday of Yisroel Aryeh Leib Danow שי'
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Dedicated to his Grandparents שי'

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translation. He was worried they might falsify something, so he made seventy two Sages sit in separate cubicles, so that each one would write an independent version. Miraculously, their translations tallied with each other, even when it came to delicate passages which could easily be misconstrued³.

Nonetheless, the later Jewish Sages commented that the day the Torah was translated into Greek “was as difficult for the Jewish people as the day when the Golden Calf was made, because the Torah cannot really be translated”⁴. What is meant by the comparison with the day the Golden Calf was made?

Incidentally, the worship of the Golden Calf caused Moses to break the Tablets of the Law on the seventeenth of Tammuz, commemorated recently with a fast. This was the first calamity to occur on this day, which ultimately began the Three Weeks which culminate on the coming Tuesday (9 August) with the fast of the Ninth of Av, when both Temples were destroyed.

The Sages were worried about a false translation of the Torah. In a sense, that is exactly what the Golden Calf was: a false translation of spirituality. The people wanted something spiritual which would be here, in our lower world. A ‘true’ translation of holiness would be the Sanctuary, or the Temple. According to Nachmanides, the Golden Calf was actually intended to substitute for Moses⁵. Moses’ role was to connect the Jewish people with G-d. A false translation of this role was the Golden Calf: an idol, which would only separate people from G-d. Thus the Sages feared the Greek translation of the Torah might lead to misunderstandings, separating people from the truth of Torah teachings and from G-d.

However, ultimately, the translation of the Torah into Greek had a positive effect: it communicated the Oneness of G-d to all nations. Further, Moses’ translation of the Torah into the seventy languages was the key to the communication of Torah in our own time, to Jews all over the world. The effect of this spread of Torah will eventually be the transformation of the sad day of the Ninth of Av into a joyous festival, with the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. This, at last, will be the true translation, translating sorrow into joy...⁶

1. Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22. 2. Deut.1:5. See Rashi’s comment. 3. Megila 9a. Elsewhere the number of Sages is given as 70. 4. Masechet Sofrim 1:7. 5. See his comment to Exodus 32:1. 6. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol.24 p 1 ff.

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SEDRA DEVARIM - NINTH OF AV

THE TEMPLE

That year, like this one, the Ninth of Av was on a Tuesday, at the beginning of the Summer vacation. The adults and older children were fasting, including Rebecca. She was wandering around the house trying to find something to take her mind off food. She heard a noise coming from her little brother's room, so she poked her head inside.

'Daniel, what are you doing?' Rebecca asked in surprise.

Daniel was sitting on the floor surrounded by little Lego buildings that he had built. One of the buildings was much larger than the others, and for some strange reason he was smashing it to bits. This was the noise that she had heard.

Smash!!!

Daniel looked up at his big sister. 'Rebecca', he said solemnly, 'this is the Temple in Jerusalem'.

Rebecca looked amused. 'So why on earth are you breaking it?'

'You see today on the Ninth of Av the Temple was destroyed', Daniel explained to Rebecca. 'So I'm destroying it so that I can feel sad'.

As he spoke, he punctuated his words with the destruction of the last few bits of the Lego building.

'Interesting!' remarked Rebecca, 'but we also hope that the Third Temple will be rebuilt very soon, don't we?'

Her brother was now clearing up all the pieces and putting them together in a pile.

'Of course', he said, 'don't worry. I've thought about that as well'.

'What do you mean?' Rebecca asked.

'Well,' Daniel smiled, 'I'm about to build another model Temple!'. He pointed to a cardboard box of pieces he had carefully put together ready for use.

'This is going to be the Third Temple!'

Daniel was too young to fast, but he knew that his sister was fasting.

'Would you like to build it together with me? That will make it easier for you to fast,' he suggested. 'Yes, that's a good idea, Daniel...' said Rebecca. She hadn't realised that her brother was so understanding.

'Should I sit here?' she asked. 'Yes!' said Daniel. 'Before the fast is over, the Third Temple will be built, and you and I will be in Jerusalem...'

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