

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Devorim

9 Menachem Av, 5779 – August 10, 2019

Compiled from the works of
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Devorim**

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Rashi in His Own Words

דברים א', ה': בעבר הנהגו בארץ מואב הזאיל משה באר את התורה הזאת לאמר:
רש"י ד"ה באר את התורה: בשבעים לשון פירשה להם:

Devorim 1:5: On the other side of the Jordan River in the land of Moav, Moshe began explaining the Torah, saying ...

Rashi Heading: explaining this Law: He explained it to them in seventy languages.

Synopsis

This week we read the Torah portion of Devorim. It marks the beginning of the fifth book of the Torah. Moshe tells the Jews that on the other side of the “Yarden – Jordan River,” Hashem began explaining the Torah to them. Rashi explains, that Hashem taught the Torah in all of the seventy base languages from which all other languages were derived. The Sages tell us that this is a reference to engraving all of the words of the Torah on stone “explained well” prior to our crossing the Jordan and entering into Israel. What is the meaning of “explained well?” The Sages explain that the meaning of these words is that they were written in all of the seventy primary languages¹. Hence, we see that these were all positive actions.

However, based on several statements of the Sages, it would seem that translating the Torah was less than ideal. In Maseches Sofrim², a translation of the Torah is discussed³. Five Sages translated the Torah into Greek at the command of King Ptolemy. The Sages exclaim there, that the day on which the Torah was translated into Greek was as bad for the Jews as the day on which the Golden Calf was made. The reason for this is explained there, that Hebrew cannot be properly translated into Greek. Why should Greek be any better or worse than any of the other languages? Additionally, why should the Torah's translation into Greek (as opposed to any of the other sixty-nine languages) be as bad as the day on which the Golden Calf was made? Furthermore, why should the Sages say that the day on which the Torah was

1. Parshas Ki Savo, Devorim 27:4,8.

2. Maseches Sofrim literally means the “Tractate of Scribes.” It is included in the so-called Minor Tractates. These were written by the Sages of the era of the Mishnah (Tanna'im) in the style of the Mishnah. However, these works were not included in the Mishnah.

3. Chapter 1, Paragraphs 6 and 7.

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written in Greek was “as bad as the day on which the Golden Calf was made.” One would think that it should say “as bad as it was *on the day* that the sin of the Golden Calf took place?”

The operative words which explain this, are, “as bad as it was *on the day* that the sin of the Golden Calf took place.” Just what happened on that day? According to the Jews’ calculation, the time that Moshe was scheduled to descend from Mount Sinai had passed. They were afraid that they would not have a “Moshe,” someone that could transmit Hashem’s words to them, and lead them. They had no interest in worshipping idols. They wanted the Golden Calf to stand in Moshe’s place. Aharon, in an effort to push the people off, began collecting their gold. However, things progressed incredibly quickly. Ultimately⁴, “When Aharon saw this, he built an altar in front of it, and Aharon proclaimed and said ‘Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord.’” The day that the sin of the Golden Calf took place was not evil, it was actually the prelude to the evil which would occur the next day. So too, regarding translating the Torah into Greek. The translation itself was not wrong. The problem was, that later on, it would give the Greek philosophers access to the Torah. They would be able to distort all of its words.

Rashi’s Explanation

This week’s Torah portion, Devorim, begins the fifth book of the Torah. The Torah tells us that⁵ “On that side of the Jordan, in the land of Moav, Moshe commenced explaining this Law saying.” Rashi cites the words “explaining the Law (the Torah).” He explains that “He (Moshe) explained it (the Torah) to the Jewish people in seventy languages.” Prior to the Jew’s entry into Israel, we needed to be able to teach Torah to everyone everywhere. We were totally isolated for forty years. We had all been in the “Yeshivah” of the wilderness. We had all studied Torah day and night from the world’s greatest teacher, Moshe Rabbeinu. Now it was time for us to begin teaching all of those around us.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Moshe told the Jews on the other side of the “Yarden – Jordan River,” that Hashem began explaining the Torah. Rashi explains that the meaning of this is that Hashem taught the Torah in all of the seventy base languages from which all languages were derived. The Sages tell us that this refers to Moshe’s engraving the Torah in each language on stones prior to crossing the Jordan. This was obviously something which was very great.

4. Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 32:5.

5 Our Parshah, Devorim 1:3.

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However, we also find that translating the Torah may be less than ideal. In *Maseches Sofrim*¹ it is written that a translation of the Torah was written by five Sages. They translated the Torah into Greek at the command of King Ptolemy. The text continues, that the day on which the Torah was translated into Greek was as bad for the Jews as the day on which the Golden Calf was made².

Maseches Sofrim continues that there was yet another incident involving King Ptolemy. He gathered seventy Sages (some say that it was seventy-two) in separate rooms and asked each of them to translate the Torah into Greek. Miraculously, all of the translations were identical. Therefore, this translation was called the Septuagint (meaning seventy in Greek), the “Targum Shivi’im – תרגום שבעים – Translation of the Seventy.” Another reason for this name is that the Sanhedrin consisted of seventy Sages.

The text explains the reason that this translation was unacceptable. It is because Hebrew cannot be properly translated into Greek. We need to understand this. Why should Greek be any better or worse than any of the other seventy languages? Additionally, why should the Torah’s translation into Greek (as opposed to any of the other sixty-nine languages) be considered so negative as to actually be as bad as the day on which the Golden Calf was made? Furthermore, the expression that it was “as bad as the day on which the Golden Calf was made” requires explanation. One would think that it should be compared to the *sin* of the Golden Calf. Why compare it to the *day* on which it was made?

Actually, we find a positive side to translating the Torah into Ancient Greek. We see that in terms of translating the Torah, the Greek language was actually preferred above any of the others. Noach had three sons; Shem, Cham, and Yefes. All Jews are descendants of Shem. Cham was the father of the Canaanites and the Africans. Yofes was the patriarch of the Greeks. After the flood, the Torah writes that⁶ “May G-d expand Yefes, and may He dwell in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be a slave to them.” The meaning of this is that Yefes, Greece received a special blessing. The only language in which a Torah may be written (besides for Hebrew) is ancient Greek. The incident with Ptolemy may be seen as a precedent for this. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel rules that a Torah may indeed be written in Greek⁷. In fact, the Halachic ruling follows his opinion⁸.

6. Parshas Noach, Bereishis 9:27.

7. The Greek language and alphabet to which we are referring is ancient Greek. This language is no longer known. Therefore, today one may not write a Torah in Greek.

8. See Talmud Megillah 8, b. See also the Mishnah, *ibid.* 9, b. Also, the Rambam Laws of Tefillin Chapter 1, Paragraph 19.

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The Explanation

We can answer all of the above questions, by first understanding the meaning of “it was as bad for the Jews *as the day on which the Golden Calf was made.*” What exactly happened on that day? The first thing that happened was that the Jews made a mistake calculating the time that Moshe would descend from the mountain. The Jews had no interest in worshipping an idol! The time that they had calculated that Moshe would return to them came and went. They thought that Moshe would never return. After all, how can a human of flesh and blood, even one as great as Moshe, exist in heaven? Therefore, they wanted the calf to replace Moshe. Because of their certainty that Moshe could not survive in Heaven together with Hashem, it is written that⁹ “When the people saw that Moshe was late in coming down from the mountain, they gathered against Aharon and said to him, ‘Come on! Make us gods that will go before us, because this man Moshe who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we don't know what has become of him.’”

Aharon realized that the people believed in Hashem and in Moshe. They wanted a replacement for Moshe. However, he also saw the danger that could arise from this. Therefore, he tried to stall for time in order to keep the people from doing something they may regret. He said to them¹⁰ “... Remove the golden earrings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me. And all the people stripped themselves of the golden earrings that were on their ears and brought them to Aharon. He took them from their hands, fashioned them with an engraving tool, and made them into a molten calf, upon which they said: “These are your gods, O Israel, who have brought you up from the land of Egypt!” He hoped that the people would not give in and follow this calf. However, ultimately it says¹¹ “When Aharon saw this, he built an altar in front of it, and Aharon proclaimed and said ‘Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord.’”

In other words, the day that the Golden Calf was built was actually a preparation for the evil which would take place the following day. The meaning of the comparison to the day that the Calf was built, was that it too was a preparation for the evil which would follow. Translating the Torah to Greek was not evil in and of itself. However, it was a preparation for evil. It gave Greek philosophers access to the holy Torah. This indeed bore the potential for the greatest evil, i.e. misrepresenting and misunderstanding the Torah.

9. Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 32:1.

10. Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 32:2-4.

11. Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 32:5.

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A Deeper Explanation of Rashi

As bad as the Translation of the Seventy was at that time, now the situation is very different. The fact that we are so close to the arrival of Moshiach has changed everything. At one point, making Torah available for one and all was a great danger, and was certainly unacceptable. Now, however, it is welcome.

We are all aware of the famous letter written by the Baal Shem Tov¹². In this letter he describes a spiritual “trip” which he took. His soul ascended to the greatest heights of heaven. Reaching the chamber of Moshiach, he asked him “when is the Master coming?” Moshiach’s response was “when your fountains reach the furthest most places; then I shall arrive.”

Now it is necessary for the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, together with all parts of the Torah, to be translated into every language. That will enable us to reach the final redemption!

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Vo'eiro (Rosh Chodesh Shevat¹³) 5740)

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12. See the beginning of Kesser Shem Tov, as well as a number of sources.

13. This was the date on which Moshe translated the Torah into the seventy basic languages.

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Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

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