

## **EXPLOSIVE POTENTIAL**

The golden calf, the translation of the Torah, and Shammai's "power grab."
A historical journey through dramatic moments in our past, with a bold message for the present.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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In this week's Torah reading, we read about Moses' translation of the Torah (Source 1). 989 years later, the Torah was translated a second time, at the behest of King Ptolemy. Ptolemy isolated 72 sages and asked each of them to produce a translation of the Torah. "That day was as difficult for the Jews as the day the golden calf was made," the Talmud says (Source 2). The Rebbe asks, how can the translation of the Torah be compared to the sin of the golden calf? What could be so terrible with translating the Torah into Greek?

There's another place where this comparison is made: When there's a difference of opinion between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, we usually follow the school of Hillel (Source 3). One day, however, most of the students present in the academy were from the school of Shammai, and the rulings followed Shammai. On that day it was said "That day was as difficult for the Jews as the day the golden calf was made" (Source 4). Here too the Rebbe asks, how could this incident be compared to the golden calf?

### B. Dangerous Potential......10

The Jews didn't just wake up forty days after receiving the Torah, and decide to worship idols. They weren't asking for a new G-d. They only wanted a replacement for Moses. Moses connected them to G-d, and after his disappearance, they needed a new intermediary. On that day, there was no concern of idol worship, the issue was the dangerous potential it carried.

Therefore, after fashioning the golden calf, Aaron declared a "celebration for G-d tomorrow." He hoped that Moses would come down from the mountain in the interim and explain to the Jews that only G-d can choose his intermediary; the people cannot choose their own. In such a best-case scenario, they wouldn't worship idols and they'd receive a lesson on faith. In reality, the next day, they committed idol worship.

In summary: Saying that something is "as difficult for the Jews as the day the golden calf was made," refers to the potential for idol worship, not actual idol worship.

The translation of the Torah faced the same problems. It had explosive potential. Had the sages rendered a literal translation, it could have led Ptolemy to reason that there are two gods (Source 5). This is why the translation is compared to the day the golden calf was made; both had the potential to lead to idol worship.

The day that the school of Shammai triumphed over the school of Hillel wasn't so terrible because of the 18 rulings that were issued in favor of the school of Shammai, it was the potential for the school of Shammai to seize the decision-rendering process forever.

What was wrong with that? Shammai expressed a strict style of ruling, one that was less concerned with the person standing before him and more concerned with the truth, no matter the price. The issue is that the world cannot function in such a way; before G-d created the world, the attribute of truth advised G-d not to even create it. This was compared to the golden calf because the problem was more the potential than what was happening in the moment.

### C. Disseminating Chassidic Teachings......18

In a letter to his brother-in-law, Rabbi Gershon of Kitov, the Baal Shem Tov describes a time when his soul ascended to heaven on Rosh Hashanah, 1746, and he asked the Mashiach when he would come. "He answered me: This will be a sign; when your teachings will spread forth and be revealed, and your wellsprings spread outwards." (Source 6). When the Chassidim heard this, they cried, the Rebbe said. Similarly, when the Previous Rebbe began to translate Chassidut to other languages, some weren't pleased. They feared the potential damage of revealing the deep secrets of Chassidut.

However, just as the seventy elders and the schools of Hillel and Shammai merited that the disastrous potentials were not realized, and on the contrary, their actions yielded positive results, the same was for disseminating Chassidut. The Baal Shem Tov and Chassidic leaders in successive generations were successful in spreading the teachings of Chassidut in a positive way, and, as the Mashiach said, in bringing the redemption closer.

## Introduction

In this week's Torah reading, we learn how Moses translated the Torah. This leads us to the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Torah produced by seventy elders of the Jewish people for King Ptolemy in Egypt, and the issues translations raise. Are translations a good thing, or can they lead to negative outcomes?

A gripping historic journey following the Jews of the desert, Ptolemy, Hillel and Shammai, the Baal Shem Tov and the Rebbe Rayatz, and the surprising thing they all had in common.

#### השיעור לפרשת דברים

משיחת שבת פרשת וארא, ה'תש"מ לקוטי שיחות חלק כ"ד, עמ' 2 והלאה תורגם על ידי 'אוצר ליקוטי שיחות', ונוספו בו השלמות מ"שיחות קודש", הנחה בלתי מוגה, בתרגום חברי המערכת.

## A. A Wild Comparison

#### Moses' translation of the Torah

We read about something fascinating in this week's Torah reading: a historic translation of the Torah by Moses.

## **Source 1** Deuteronomy 1:3-5

Student's pq. 3

It came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel following all that G-d had commanded him regarding them; after he had smitten Sichon, king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Cheshbon, and Og, king of the Bashan, who dwelt in Ashtarot in Edrei. On that side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses commenced explaining the Torah.

וְיָהִי בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּעַשְׁתֵּי עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל בְּנִי יִשְׁרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צְּנָּה ה' אֹתוֹ אֲלֵהֶם. אַחֲבִי הַכֹּתוֹ אַת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הְאֶמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן וְאֵת עוֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבְּשֶׁן אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב בְּעַשְׁתָּרֹת בְּאֶדֶרְעִי. בְּעֵבֶר הַיִּרְדֵן בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב הוֹאִיל מֹשֶׁה בַּאֵר אֶת הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לֵאמֹר.

Rashi

רען"י

**Explaining the Torah:** He explained it in seventy languages.

בַּאֵר אֶת הַתּוֹרָה. בְּשִׁבְעִים לְשׁוֹן פֵּרְשָׁה לָהֶם.

989 years later, the Torah was translated a second time:

## Ptolemy's translation

In the year 3477, Ptolemy became the king of Egypt. He appreciated culture, science, and the arts and maintained close ties with the learned Jews of his land. As someone who appreciated knowledge, and wanting to appease the Jews, he decided to do something special and commission a translation of the Torah into Greek.

Ptolemy had the largest library of his day, containing the works of the philosophers and wise men of the ages. Shouldn't his library also have a copy of the famous Jewish Torah?

Ptolemy turned to Elazar the high priest and requested that he send him the greatest Jewish scholars. The high priest selected 72 sages and sent them to Egypt.

Ptolemy put them each in separate rooms, so they wouldn't be able to collaborate, and asked them to translate the Torah to Greek. It took a long time, but at the end, when Ptolemy compared each

translation, they were identical, word-for-word!

On the eighth of Tevet the translation was completed. It is known as the Septuagint, after the seventy sages who worked on it.

## **Source 2** Tractate Sofrim, chapter 1

Student's pq. 3

Ptolemy gathered 72 elders and sat them in 72 different rooms, without telling them why he gathered them. He went to each one, and told them: "Write for me the Torah of Moses your teacher."

G-d granted insight to each of them and they all produced an identical translation of the Torah. They changed thirteen things,:including "G-d created in the beginning" (Genesis 1:1), and "G-d said: I will make man with a form and image" (Genesis 1:26).

That day was as difficult for the Jews as the day the golden calf was made, because the Torah can't be translated adequately.

שׁוּב מַשְּשֶׁה בְּתַלְמֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, שֶׁבְּגֵּס ע"ב זְמֵנִים, וְהוֹשִׁיכָם בְּשִׁבְעִים וּשְׁנִים בָּמִים, וְלֹא גִּלָּה לָהֶם עַל מָה כִּנְסָם. נִכְנָס לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מֵהֶם, אָמֵר לְהֶם: בִּתְבוּ לִי תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה רַבְּכֶם.

נְתַן הַפְּקוֹם עֵצָה בְּלֵב כְּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד,
וְהְסְכִּימָה דַּעְתֶן לְדַעַת אַחַת, וְכָתְבוּ
לוֹ תּוֹרָה בִּפְנֵי עַצְמָה: וי"ג דָּכָר שִׁנּוּ
בָּה. וְאֵלוּ הַן: אֱלֹהִים בְּרָא בְּרֵאשִׁית
(בראשית א, כו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים (שָׁם).
אֶעֶשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצֶלֶם וּכִּדְמוֹת (שָׁם).

וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם קְשֶׁה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּיוֹם שֶׁנְּצְשָׁה הַעְּגָל, שֶׁלֹא הְיִתְה הַתּוֹרָה יְכוֹלָה לְהִתַּרְגַם כָּל צַּרְכָּה.

## >> The Rebbe

Student's

How can it be that just because the Torah can't be translated perfectly, the translation is considered such a terrible event, to the extent that it is compared to the creation of the golden calf?

This translation was made by the elders and sages of the Jewish people, and they had Divine assistance in the process. The reason the Talmud gives, that "the Torah can't be translated adequately" is insufficient to justify comparing it to the day of the creation of the golden calf. I haven't yet seen that any of the commentators address this question.

איך יתכן לומר שרק מפני שתרגום התורה לא היה יכול להיות "כל צרכה", היה זה דבר כה קשה ושלילי, עד שהוא בדומה ליום וזמן עשיית העגל?<sup>1</sup>

הרי התרגום נעשה על ידי זקני וגדולי ישראל, והיתה להם סייעתא דשמיא על כך! והטעם שהגמרא נותנת על כך, "שלא היתה התורה יכולה להיתרגם כל צרכה", כלל אינו ביאור מספק להשוואה הקשה של "יום שנעשה בו העגל"! ועד עתה, לא מצאתי מפרשים שיתייחסו ויבארו את הקושיה הזאת! (הנחה בלתי מוגה).

The Rebbe poses an obvious question: What is so terrible about translating the Torah to Greek? Yes, the Talmud identifies an issue: the Torah cannot be adequately translated. A translation cannot ever be perfect. But can it really be compared to the golden calf?

## The Victory Of Beit Hillel Over Beit Shammai

## Student's

The same expression, "like the day of the creation of the golden calf" is found in Tractate Shabbat.

הלשון "כיום שנעשה העגל" - מצינו גם במסכת שבת<sup>2</sup>:

### **Source 3** Talmud, Eruvin 13b

Hillel and Shammai lived in the first century and led the Jewish people living in Israel. Hillel was the head of the Sanhedrin and Shammai was his deputy. With time, each established a "school" of their own, groups of students who studied with them and learned to follow their way of understanding the spirit of their rulings.

In the many disagreements between them, the school of Hillel (Beit Hillel) is usually more lenient, and the school of Shammai (Beit Shammai) tends to be more strict, with a few notable exceptions. Almost always, the final consensus follows Beit Hillel.

#### Student's

na. 4

Rabbi Abba said in the name of Shmuel: For three years, Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel argued. Beit Hillel said that the law should follow them, and Beit Shammai said it should follow them. Ultimately, a heavenly voice rang out: "Both opinions are the word of the living G-d, and the Halacha follows Beit Hillel."

If both schools are "the word of the living G-d," why was does the Halacha follow Beit Hillel? Because the students of Hillel were pleasant to others and humble - when Beit Hillel would teach, they would also cite Beit Shammai's ruling, and even cite it before their own.

אָמַר ר' אַבָּא אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל: שָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים נֶחְלְקוּ בֵּית שַׁמַּאי וּבִית הַלֵּלוּ הַלָּלוּ אוֹמְרִים: הַלָּכָה כְּמוֹתֵנוּ, וְהַלָּלוּ אוֹמְרִים: הַלָּכָה כְּמוֹתֵנוּ. לְכַסוֹף יָצְאָה בַּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה: אֵלּוּ וָאֵלּוּ דִּבְרֵי אֶלֹהִים חַיִּים הֵן, וַהְלָכָה כְּבִית הִלֵּל.

יְשׁוֹאֲלִים: וְכִי מֵאַחַר שֶׁאֵלּוּ וָאֵלּוּ דִּכְרֵי אֶלֹהִים חַיִּים הֵם, מִפְּנֵי מָה זָכוּ בֵּית הַלֵּל לִקְבֹּצִ הַלָּכָה כְּמוֹתָן? — מִפְּנֵי שֻׁנּוֹחִין לַבְּרִיּוֹת, וַעֲלוּבִין (מְנִיחִים עַצְמָם לְהִפָּגַע, וְסוֹבְלִים עֶלְבּוֹנָם) הָיוּ, וּכְשֶׁהִייּ שׁוֹנִין בַּמִשְׁנָה הְיוּ שׁוֹנִין דְּבְרֵיהֶן וְדְבְרֵי בֵּית שַׁמֵאי, וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא שֶׁמַקְדִּימִין בְּנְסוּחַ הַדְּכָרִים בְּדֶרֶךְ כְּבוֹד אֶת דְּבְרֵי בֵּית שַׁמֵאי לְדְבָרִיהֵוּ.

The final ruling doesn't follow Beit Hillel in deference to the heavenly voice. The law follows the majority opinion in the academy; when there was a debate, the ruling followed the majority. It would seem, however, that the heavenly voice had some influence in persuading the majority of sages to follow Beit Hillel.

One day, however, something extraordinary happened: the majority of sages present at the academy were from Beit Shammai and that day the final ruling followed Beit Shammai.

It was at a contentious meeting in the attic of the home of Rabbi Chananiah ben Chezkiyah, and the students of Hillel and Shammai engaged in a debate. When the vote was counted, it was Beit Shammai was found to be in the majority. Eighteen rabbinic rulings were issued that day, mostly on ritual purity matters concerning the gifts given to the priests, but also regarding wine, bread, and oil of gentiles.

That day's events are recounted in the Talmud:

## **Source 4** Talmud, Shabbat 13b: 17a

Student's pq. 5

Mishnah: These are the laws which were said in the attic of Rabbi Chananiah ben Chezkiyah ben Garon, when the sages went to visit him. They counted, and the students of Shammai were more than the students of Hillel. They adjudicated eighteen laws that day.

**Gemara:** They placed a sword at the entrance of the academy and said: One who wishes to enter, let him enter. One who wishes to exit may not exit. That day, Hillel bowed before Shammai like the other students; it was as difficult for the Jews as the day the golden calf was made.

משנה: וְאֵלוּ מִן הַהַלָּכוֹת שֶׁאָמְרוּ בַּצְלִיֵּית חֲנַנְיָה כֶּן חִזְקיָה כֶּן גְּרוֹן. שַׁעַלוּ לְבַקּרוֹ, נִמְנוּ, וְרַבּוּ בֵּית שַׁמַאי עַל בֵּית הָלֵל. וּשָׁמוֹנָה עַשַּׂר דְּבַרִים גזרו בו ביום.

גמרא: נָעֲצוּ חֵרֵב בָּבֵית הַמִּדְרַשׁ, אַמרוּ: הַנְּכָנַס - יְכַנַס, וְהֵיוֹצֵא -אַל יָצֵא. וָאוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם הַיַה הְלֵּל כַפוּף וִיוֹשֶׁב לִפְנֵי שַׁמַאי כָאָחַד מִן הַתַּלְמִידִים. וְהַיַה קַשָּׁה לִיִשְׂרָאֵל בַּיּוֹם שַׁנַּעֲשָׂה בּוֹ הָעָגַל.

### >> The Rebbe

#### **Student's** pg. 5

## **How Can This Event Be Compared To The Golden Calf?**

Here too we need an explanation for how this day can be termed so difficult for the Jewish people that it is compared to the day of the creation of the golden calf.

Shammai was a great person. Both Hillel and Shammai were students of Shmaya and Avtalyon. Beit Hillel were even particular to mention Beit Shammai's opinions before their own. So what is so terrible about Hillel sitting submissively before Shammai like one of the students, and to the extent that this is compared to the day of the creation of the golden calf?!

ואף שם דורש הדבר ביאור, מדוע "אותו היום" היה "קשה לישראל" כל כך, עד שיש להשוותו ל"יום שנעשה בו העגל"?

הרי ידועה גדלותו של שמאי, שהרי שמאי והלל קבלו משמעיה ואבטליון, ויתירה מזו, אפילו בית הלל "מקדימין דברי בית שמאי לדבריהן". אז מה כל כך חמור בכך שבאותו יום היה הלל כפוף ויושב לפני שמאי כאחד מן התלמידים, עד שמשווים זאת ליום שנעשה בו העגל?! (הנחה בלתי

מוגה)

This wasn't a hostile takeover of the academy by an outside entity. It was just a group of sages who on that day constituted the majority, and the ruling followed them. Why is it being compared to the golden calf?

Shammai was Hillel's peer and they studied together with the same teachers! Moreover, we learned that Hillel's students studied the opinions of Shammai and respected them. How could it be, after all this tolerance, one day Hillel loses the majority and it's declared that this day was as tragic as the golden calf?!

## **B. Dangerous Potential**

## >> The Rebbe

## Slippery Slope To Idolatry

Student's pq. 6

To explain this, we first need to highlight a detail of the wording used. In both passages the Talmud terms the events discussed as "like the day of the creation of the golden calf," rather than comparing it to the sin creation of the golden calf itself.

Following a simple reading of the Torah's account, the day on which the golden calf was worshipped was the day following the day of its creation. The verse states that on the day of the creation of the calf Aaron said "tomorrow will be a celebration for G-d." By this he was trying to stall for time, as he was convinced that Moses would return the next day and everyone would serve G-d alone. The main part of the sin of the golden calf occurred on the following day, "they rose early the next day and raised sacrifices."

On this note, Nachmanides explains that Moses was not told "go down, for your people have become corrupted" on the day Aaron created the calf, but only on the following day, when the people brought sacrifices to it and prostrated themselves before it.

ויש לומר הביאור בזה, ובהקדים דיוק הלשון בשני המאמרים הנ"ל "כיום שנעשה בו העגל", ולא "כעשיית העגל", "כחטא העגל", וכיוצא בזה.

בפשטות, יום עבודת העגל היה למחרת יום עשיית העגל, כמו שנאמר בכתוב, שביום עשיית העגל אמר אהרן<sup>3</sup> "חג לה' מחר", ונתכוון בכך לדחותם ולעכבם עוד<sup>4</sup>, לפי ש"בטוח היה שיבא משה ויעבדו את המקום"<sup>5</sup>; ועיקר<sup>3</sup> חטא העגל היה למחרת - "וישכימו ממחרת ויעלו עולות וגו"<sup>7</sup>.

וראה רמב"ן (שם, ה): שלא נאמר למשה לך רד כי שחת עמך ביום שעשה אהרן העגל כו' אבל כשזבחו והשתחוו לו העם אז אמר למשה שירד כי שחת עמך כו'.

The day the golden calf was made, Moses was on Mt. Sinai, studying Torah from G-d, and nothing changed. Only the next day, when the Jews began worshipping the calf, G-d said: "Go down, for your people have been corrupted." So it turns out, that on the day it was fashioned, it had not yet been used for idol worship.

## The Jews Sought A Connection With G-d

Student's pq. 7

The commentators discuss at length the reasoning behind the sin of the golden calf. The Jewish people weren't looking for idolatry, G-d forbid. They were looking for a leader to replace Moses, not a substitute for G-d. This is expressed in their statement "we don't know what has happened to Moses, the person who took us out of Egypt."

In other words, they were seeking an intermediary to stand between them and G-d. This was seemingly in accordance with the system G-d Himself had instituted, in which Moses is described as "the person who took us out of Egypt"—the exodus isn't attributed to G-d directly, but to Moses who served as the conduit between G-d and the Jewish people.

וההסבר לכך: ידוע<sup>8</sup> מה שהאריכו מפרשי התורה לבאר בנוגע לענין עשיית העגל, שבני ישראל לא דרשו ענין של עבודה זרה חס ושלום, אלא רק מנהיג שינהיגם במקום משה ולא במקום ה', וכטענתם "כי זה משה האיש אשר העלנו מארץ מצרים לא ידענו מה היה לו"<sup>9</sup>.

כלומר, רצונם היה ב"ממוצע" שיעמוד בין הקב"ה לבינם, והדבר היה מיוסד על הסדר שנקבע לכאורה על ידי הקב"ה עצמו: "כי זה משה האיש אשר העלנו מארץ מצרים" - היינו שלא הקב"ה עצמו "העלנו", אלא על ידי משה ששימש ממוצע בין הקב"ה לישראל.

The Jews didn't suddenly decide, on the fortieth day after receiving the Torah, to worship idols. They weren't demanding a new G-d. They only wanted a replacement for Moses. Moses was the intermediary who connected them to G-d. After he disappeared, they wanted a new intermediary.

For some reason, they figured that an animal intermediary would be better than a person. (There is a kabbalistic explanation as to why, but we will not get into it in this class.)

Even after the calf had been created—but before it had been worshiped—Aaron was still hoping for "a celebration for G-d tomorrow." He was hoping that this episode would result in spiritual improvement, when Moses would come and the Jewish people would realize that the idea of a calf is worthless.

ואפילו לאחר עשיית העגל ובטרם עבדו לו, אמר אהרן "חג לה" מחר", היינו שכתוצאה מכך יכול לבוא עילוי שכאשר יבא משה יתגלה לישראל שענין העגל אינו מציאות.

## Student's pq. 7

This would further express Divine oneness, that there is none other than G-d, and the only one capable of serving as an intermediary is Moses, who was appointed by G-d and sent as His messenger to the Jewish people. Moses was a conduit for connection, not an intermediary who separates.

ואזי אחדות ה' תבוא לידי ביטוי עוד יותר, ויתגלה אשר "אין עוד מלבדו"<sup>10</sup>, ומי שיכול לשמש ממוצע הוא רק משה (ממוצע המחבר)<sup>11</sup>, שנשלח על ידי הקב"ה ונתמנה על ידו להיות שליחו לישראל.

Even after they fashioned the calf, Aaron still hoped that the next day would be a "celebration for G-d." How? He hoped that Moses would descend early and then be able to explain to the Jews that only G-d can choose an intermediary between Himself and the people; it wasn't something they could do on their own. Then everything would work out; not only would the Jews not commit idol worship, they'd learn a lesson in faith: an intermediary is chosen only by G-d.

## Student's pq. 8

However, the actual outcome the next day was the sin of the golden calf, which some Jews worshiped as a form of idolatry, contrary to the principle of Divine oneness.

The "difficult" matter on "the day the golden calf was created" (not the day on which it was actually worshiped) was that it contained the potential to lead to the sin of idolatry.

אלא שבפועל נסתעף מכך למחרת (בקרב כמה מישראל) חטא העגל, חטא עבודה זרה - ההיפך מאחדות ה'.

וזהו הדבר ה"קשה" ב"יום שנעשה בו העגל", ולא ביום שבו עבדו את העגל: שמזה היה עלול להסתעף חטא עבודה זרה.

In summary: the problem of "the day the golden calf was made" was the potential for it to become an idol, not idol worship itself.

## **Potentially Dangerous Translation**

#### Student's pg. 8

The same is true regarding the Greek translation of the Torah that the Sages made for Ptolemy. The teaching that states that the Torah can't be translated adequately means

ועל דרך זה הוא בנוגע לתרגום התורה, "שכתבו לתלמי המלך את התורה יונית". הכוונה במה שאמרו במסכת סופרים<sup>12</sup>

11. ד"ה עוטה אור הש"ת פ"ד. ועוד. וראה גם סד"ה פנים בפנים

Student's pq. 9

that there can't be any precise literal translation, preserving the original Hebrew structure. The problem is that this creates the possibility for erroneous conclusions [by its readers].

"לא היתה התורה יכולה להתרגם כל צרכה" היא לתרגום מילולי מדויק, ובסדר המוקדם והמאוחר כפי שהוא בכתוב בלשון הקודש, אשר באופן זה -"אין התורה יכולה להתרגם". והחסרון הוא בנתינת המקום לטעות וכו' העלולה להסתעף מזה לאחר מכן.

## Source 5 Tractate Sofrim

In order to understand this potential issue, let's examine two Divinely-inspired changes the sages made to the translation:

Student's

"G-d created in the beginning," in order not to give the impression that "beginning" is a divine name, and there are two divine powers

אֶלהִים כָּרָא בְּרֵאשִׁית, שֶׁלֹא יֹאמְרוּ בְּרֵאשִׁית שֵׁם הוּא, וְהֵם שָׁנֵי רָשׁוּיוֹת.

Had they translated the Torah literally, it would read: "Beginning created G-d," and Ptolemy could have thought that "beginning" was the name of the first god and he created what we call G-d, the second god, G-d forbid. In order to prevent this mistake, they edited it to read: G-d created in the beginning.

"I will make man," they wrote, not as written ("Let us make man"), in order to prevent Ptolemy from thinking that there are two divine powers.

אֶצֶשֶׂה אָדָם, וְלֹא כָּתְבוּ נַצְשֶׂה כְּדָכְתִיב, שֶׁלֹּא יֹאמְרוּ שְׁנֵי רשׁוּיוֹת.

If they would literally translate "let us make man" Ptolemy could have erred in thinking that there are multiple divine beings who are "making" man together. He may not have accepted Rashi's explanation that G-d was speaking to the angels and in His humility he considered them partners in creation. Thus, they wrote "I will make man" in the singular form.

### >> The Rebbe

#### **Idolatrous Potential**

Student's pq. 9

When a non-Jew like Ptolemy would later study a perfectly precise translation of the Torah in Greek, he wouldn't be able to understand various passages, and could even reach an understanding completely opposite of the intended one. This is why G-d assisted the seventy-two sages and planted in their minds the same idea of making changes. That's what it means when it says the Torah was not translated adequately.

כאשר גוי (תלמי המלך) ילמד לאחר מכן את התורה (בלשון יון) כפי שהיא מתורגמת בדיוק, "כל צרכה", עלול הוא לא להבין את הפירוש הנכון בכמה וכמה מקומות בתורה, ויתירה מזו - להבין להיפך מהכוונה האמיתית. ולכן מצינו שכאשר תרגמו ע"ב הזקנים את התורה עבור תלמי המלך "נתן הקב"ה בלב כל אחד ואחד עצה והסכימו כולן לדעה אחת" ו"י"ג דברים שינו בה"14 היינו שלא תרגמו את התורה "כל צרכה"15.

To "adequately" translate the Torah means perfectly, literally. The challenge is that Torah cannot be translated that way, because it will cause misunderstandings which could lead to heresy, like believing there are two divine powers.

This is why the translation of the Torah is compared to the day of the creation of the golden calf. The day of the creation of the calf was "difficult" because it laid the groundwork for the sin of idolatry that took place the next day. Similarly, the day the Sages translated the Torah into Greek was a difficult day for the Jewish people because it bore the potential of causing the Torah to be misunderstood and distorted.

וזהו תוכן ההשוואה הנ"ל במסכת סופרים "והיה היום קשה לישראל כיום שנעשה בו העגל"6. כשם ש"יום שנעשה בו העגל" היה "קשה" מחמת היותו ההכנה לזה שלמחרתו התקיימה כתוצאה מכך<sup>17</sup> העבודה לעגל - על דרך זה היום שבו תרגמו הזקנים את התורה ליונית היה "יום <sup>18</sup>קשה לישראל", לפי שהיה עלול לגרום לפירוש התורה שלא כדבעי והיפך הכוונה,

ההשוואה דמיתת אהרן שהיא לשבירת הלוחות להשוואה בין "נתנה ראש" שהיא לעשיית העגל). ובפרט שלכאורה השוואה זו שייכת יותר מצד תוכן הענינים, השפלה ושינוי בענין התורה (תרגום ליונית, וכפיית ההלכה – כשמאי כו') – דוגמת שבירת הלוחות.

17. ועפ"ז יומתק הלשון במס' סופרים "כיום שנעשה" העגל" ועד"ז בשבת שם ובתוספתא שם"\*, שאינו מדגיש את מעשה החטא, "כיום "עקב שם), אלא את ה״נפעל (כלשון רש״י עקב שם), אלא את ה״נפעל. ") ולהעיר מלשון הכתוב תשא לב, כד ובפרש"י שם. תנחומא שם, יט. פרש"י שם, ד סד"ה עגל מסכה.

\*\*) כן הוא בגמ' (וע"י) שבת שם, ובתוספתא שלפנינו. אבל בתוספתא צוקר מנדל: "כיום שעשו בו". ועד"ז במס' ס"ת שם.

18. ועד"ז יש לפרש במס' ס"ת שם, ד"היה אותו היום קשה לישראל כו"י, היינו היום שבו התחילו לתרגם את התורה לפני גמר התירגום בפועל כשי"ג דברים שינו בה (כמו שממשיך שם).

13. נסמן לעיל הערה 6 [בשיחה]. וראה כסא רחמים למס' סופרים שם. ובמס׳ ס״ת הובא רק תרגום זה ״והיה אותו היום קשה כו״, כנ״ל בהערה שם. וראה הערה 73, 73 [בשיחה].

.14 מס׳ סופרים שם. וכן הוא בירושלמי מגילה שם. מס׳ ס״ת שם ה״ח. בכבלי מגילה שם מונה ע"ו שינויים. ובשמו"ר פ"ה, ה: זה אחד מי"ח בבני? מגיילה שם מונה ש? שינויים. ובשמחי פידו, היה זה אחד מידו דברים (וכן הביא בשיק עה"ת (מילך לא, כח)). ובתנחומא שמות כב: זה אחד מעשרה דברים. וראה יפ"ת לשמו"ר שם. ואמ"מ. 15. משא"כ בירושלמי הנ"ל "אין התורה יכולה להתרגם כל צורכה

אלא יוונית" – היינו שביונית אפשר לתרגמה "כל צורכה" – על כרחך צריך לומר שהפירוש ב"כל צורכה" שם הוא כפשוטו, שרק בלשון יון אפשר להיות תרגום נכון ומדויק כו'. וראה לקמן הערה 75 [בשיחה]. 16. וכדמוכח גם (שהכוונה היא לא ליום שעבדו את העגל אלא ליום שלפניו (שנעשה בו העגל)) מזה דלא אמר "כיום שנשתברו בו הלוחות" (כלשון רש"י עקב שם. ולהעיר מהשינויים ברש"י שם בין This is why the Septuagint is compared to the day of the creation resting of the golden calf. They both had explosive potential. The golden calf maybe didn't come from such a bad place, but it led to idolatry, and the Septuagint could have led to heretical interpretations of the Torah.

## **A Dangerous Majority**

Student's pg. 10 Similarly regarding the day when Hillel sat submissively before Shammai.

The actual fact that rulings were issued on that day in accordance with the opinion of Shammai was not the problem. Hillel conceded to Shammai and didn't maintain his disagreement, so the ruling was proper.

The "difficulty" was that this had the potential of setting a precedent for ruling in favor of Beit Shammai in the future as well, contrary to the general rule that "the opinion of Beit Shammai doesn't count against the opinion of Beit Hillel."

ומעין זה יש לומר אודות היום שבו "היה הלל כפוף ויושב לפני שמאי":

עצם זה שבאותה שעה גזרו כדעת שמאי, אינו דבר "קשה" כל כך, שהרי סוף סוף "שתיק ליה הלל לשמאי"<sup>19</sup> ו"לא עמד במחלוקתו"<sup>20</sup>, היינו שענין זה היה בהתאם להלכה<sup>21</sup>.

ועיקר ה"קושי" שבזה הוא בכך שהדבר היה עלול לגרום שגם לאחר מכן יפסקו ההלכות כבית שמאי, היפך כללי ההלכה שנקבעו לדורות, ש"בית שמאי במקום בית הלל אינה משנה"<sup>22</sup>.

The issue was not that 18 rulings followed Beit Shammai, even Hillel wouldn't really disagree with that outcome. The problem was the potential that it had: that Beit Shammai would achieve permanent dominance in halachic decision making.

What's wrong with that?

It is known that Shammai reflected the Divine attribute of severity, while Hillel reflected the attribute of kindness. This is why Beit Shammai usually rules stringently, and Beit Hillel usually rules leniently.

ידוע<sup>23</sup> ששמאי שרשו ממדת הגבורה - דין, והלל שרשו ממדת החסד - רחמים, ולכן בדרך כלל בית שמאי לחומרא ובית הלל לקולא.

<sup>23.</sup> ראה זהר ח"ג (רעיא מהימנא) רמה, א. אגרת הקודש סי"ג. לקוטי תורה קרח נד, סע"א ואילך. שיר השירים מח, ב ואילך. ובכ"מ.

 <sup>12.</sup> ועד"ז לפי התוספתא והירושלמי שם דאותו היום קאי על היום שגזרו את הי"ח דבר (וראה הנסמן בהערה זו[בשיהוה] "זמנו ורבו ב"ש על ב"ה" (משנה שם יג, ב. תוספתא שם. וראה פיה"מ להרמב"ם שבת שם "ולא נשאר באותו הדור מי שראוי

Student's pg. 10

Hillel would descend to the level of each individual, and, irrespective of their level, he would look at them with kindness. Hillel believed that he needed to descend to any level and express kindness there, "educate the child according to their path," and then "even when they grow old they will not stray from it." It is Hillel's conduct that sustains the world because he acts kindly.

Student's

Shammai, by contrast, acted in accordance with the attribute of truth, leading him to be more stringent. Such conduct cannot sustain the world.

עניינו של הלל היה, שהוא היה יורד לדרגת כל אחד ואחד באופן של חסד. באיזה מצב שיהודי לא ימצא בו, הסתכל עליו הלל באופן של חסד. כי הלל חשב שצריך לרדת לדרגה של כל יהודי, וגם לשם להמשיך חסד, עד לאופן של "חנוך לנער על פי דרכו" ואז "גם כי יזקין לא יסור ממנה". ומזה מובן שדווקא על ידי ההנהגה של הלל יש קיום לעולם, כי הוא נוהג באופן של חסד.

מה שאין כן לפי הנהגתו של שמאי, שהיא מידת האמת, שלכן הוא מחמיר, מצד זה אין קיום לעולם. (הנחה בלתי מוגה).

Shammai expressed a strict style of ruling, one that was less concerned with the person standing before him and more concerned with the truth, no matter the price. The issue is that the world cannot function in such a fashion. Before G-d created the world, the attribute of truth advised G-d not to even create it. When we follow only the truth, without considering one's circumstances and complicated reality - we leave no room for human existence.

This was the major tragedy that day; not the eighteen rulings which were issued, but the potential for Shammai to become dominant and dictate the law, something that would challenge the world's existence. That's why they compared it to the day the golden calf was made; it too had a problem in terms of the potential results, not necessarily the actual events.

Student's pq. 11 In practice, however, there was no negative result from the translation of the Torah into Greek nor from the day when Hillel sat submissively before Shammai. In this respect these events differ from the day of the creation of the golden calf.

אבל בפועל לא נגרם כל ענין הפכי כתוצאה מתרגום התורה ליונית ומן ה"יום שהיה הלל כפוף ויושב לפני שמאי" (ובכך שונים הדברים מיום עשיית העגל). Student's

Moreover, we can argue that this Greek translation of the Torah by the seventy-two sages for Ptolemy, and its editorial changes—starting with translating "G-d created the world in the beginning," rather than the strictly literal "in the beginning created G-d"—brought the message of G-d's oneness to the nations of the world as well.

Similarly when Hillel sat submissively before Shammai like one of his students. Not only did it not result in the law being determined in favor of Shammai in general, it even had a subjugative effect on Shammai. This may be the reason why we find a number of instances in which Beit Shammai are lenient. ויש לומר יתירה מזו.... כאשר תרגמו ע"ב הזקנים את התורה לתלמי המלך, ושינו בה כמה וכמה דברים, החל מהשינוי "אלקים ברא בראשית" במקום "בראשית ברא אלקים" - אזי... אחדות ה' כפי שנאמרה בתורה ירדה ונמשכה גם לאומות העולם.

ועל דרך זה יש לומר בנוגע ל"אותו היום שהיה הלל כפוף ויושב לפני שמאי כאחד מן התלמידים" - שלא זו בלבד שהדבר לא גרם שתיקבע הלכה כבית שמאי לדורות, הנה עוד זאת, הדבר פעל<sup>24</sup> גם בבית שמאי ענין של כפיה וביטול. ויש לומר שמטעם זה מצינו כמה מקומות<sup>25</sup> שבהם בית שמאי הולכים לקולא<sup>26</sup>.

## C. Disseminating Chassidic Teachings

## Mashiach's Message To The Baal Shem Tov

In a letter to his brother-in-law, Rabbi Gershon of Kitov, the Baal Shem Tov describes a time when his soul ascended to heaven on Rosh Hashanah 1746

## **Source 6** Ben Porat Yosef, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye

Student's pq. 12 I ascended from level to level, until I reached Mashiach's chamber, where he studied Torah from the great sages and with the seven "shepherds." I saw great joy there, and I didn't know the cause of it. I thought perhaps they were rejoicing over my passing from this world, but later they informed me that I had not passed; they took great pleasure in the fact that I was teaching their Torah down below. I still do not understand the reason for this joy.

I asked Mashiach: "When is the master coming?" and he answered me: "This will be a sign; when your teachings will spread forth and be revealed, and your wellsprings spread outwards, that which I have taught you and you have grasped, and then they will also be able to have the effect you have, the negative forces will be nullified, and it will be a time ripe for redemption."

עָלִיתִי מַדְרֵגָה אַחַר מַדְרֵגָה, עַד שָׁנָּרְנַסְתִּי לְהִיכֵל מְשִׁיחַ, שֶׁשְׁם לוֹמֵד מְשִׁיחַ תּוֹרָה עִם כָּל הַתַּנָּאִים וְהַצַּדִּיקִים וְגַם עִם שִׁכְעָה רוֹעִים. וְשָׁם רָאִיתִי שִׁמְחָה גְּדוֹלָה עַד מְאוֹד, וְאֵינִי יוֹדֵע לְשִׁמְחָה זוֹ מָה הוא עוֹשָׂה, וְהָיִיתִי סוֹבֵר שֶׁהַשִּׁמְחָה זוֹ חַס וְשָׁלוֹם עַל פְּטִירָתִי מֵהָעוֹלָם הַגָּה, וְהוֹדִיעוּ לִי אַחַר כָּךְ שֶׁאֵינִי נִפְּטַר עַדִין, כִּי הַנָּאָה לָהֶם לְמַעְלָה בְּשַׂאָנִי מְיָחֵד יְחוּדִים לְמַשָּׁה עַל יְדֵי תְּוֹרוֹתֵיהֶם הַקְּדוֹשְׁה, אֲבָל מַהוּת הַשִּׁמְחָה אֵינוֹ יוֹדַע עַד הַיּוֹם הַגָּה.

וְשְׁאַלְתִּי אֶת פִּי מְשִׁיחַ: אֵימַת אָתִי מַר? וְהַשִּׁיב לִי: בָּזֹאת תַדע, בְּעֵת שֻׁיּתְפַּרְסֵם לִמּוּדְךְ וְיִתְגַּלֶּה בְּעוֹלְם, וְיָפָצוּ מַעְיְנֹתֶיךְ חוּצָה מָה שֶׁלְּמַדְתִּי אוֹתְךְ וְהִשַּׂנְתָּ, וְיוּכְלוּ גַּם הַמָּה לַצְשׁוֹת יְחוּדִים וַעֲלִיּוֹת כְּמוֹךְ, וְאָז יִכְלוּ כְּל הַקְלְפּוֹת וִיְהִיָּה עֵת רַצוֹן וִישׁוּעָה.

וְתָמַהְתִּי עַל זֶה וְהָיֶה לִי צַעַר גָּדוֹל בַּאֲרִיכוּת הַוְּמַן כָּל כָּךְ מָתַי זֶה אֶפְשָׁר להיוֹת.

### >> The Rebbe

#### The Chassidim Cried

Student's pg. 13

The story is told that when the instruction was given that the teachings of Chassidut need to be spread everywhere, to all people, Chassidim cried. On the one hand, this spreading of Chassidut is what will bring Mashiach, but on the other hand it requires that the great secrets of Chassidut be revealed in the public thoroughfare.

When my predecessor, the Rebbe Rayatz, began publishing translations of Chassidic teachings in various languages, there were also people that raised complaints. They asked: How can you take the deepest secrets of the Torah and translate them into foreign languages, thereby enabling everyone to understand them? These teachings were even published in newspapers, bringing them into the public thoroughfare!

ישנו סיפור, שכאשר התחדש הרעיון של "יפוצו מעיינותיך חוצה" - הפצת מעיינות החסידות לכולם - בכו החסידים, משום שמצד אחד ההפצה היא שתביא את המשיח, אך מצד שני, סודות החסידות צריכים להתגלות בראש כל חוצות...

ועל דרך זה, כאשר חותני, כבוד קדושת אדמו"ר הריי"ץ החל לתרגם את תורת חב"ד לשפות שונות, היו כאלו שבאו בטענות, הייתכן שלוקחים את סודות התורה, ועד לסודות הכמוסים ביותר, ומתרגמים אותם לשפות שונות כדי שכל אחד יוכל להבין זאת, ומפיצים זאת, מדפיסים בעיתונים עד שזה מופץ בראש כל חוצות?!

What's the issue? Similar to the fears of the seventy elders, that if the Torah would be translated literally Ptolemy would err and think there are two divine powers, the same could happen here when translating and spreading the Torah's secrets. People might misunderstand things, and by that time it would be too late to correct them. That's why the Chassidim cried, and why there was some initial opposition to translating Chassidic teachings.

## **Dangerous Potential Indeed**

Student's pg. 13 The explanation given above is relevant to our case as well.

Spreading the teachings of Chassidut is indeed a difficult and risky task, and this is why Chassidim cried. But the result was extraordinarily successful, leading to a great spiritual elevation.

על פי המבואר, ניתן להבין זאת גם בעניינינו:

אכן הענין של יפוצו מעיינותיך חוצה הוא ניסיון קשה ולכן החסידים בכו. אך לפועל ראו שזה הצליח, בממדים הגדולים ביותר, ומזה הגיע עילוי בקדושה. Student's pq. 13 The same applies to the translation of Chassidut spearheaded by the Rebbe Rayatz. This was a risky step at the time, because it provided even distant people access to these teachings. But we see that it was successful.

ועל דרך זה, בנוגע לתרגום תורת החסידות על ידי חותני, הרבי הריי"ץ, שאכן לכתחילה היה בזה ניסיון קשה, משום שזה יכול היה לגרום שאפילו אנשים שהם ב"חוצה" יוכלו לקבל גישה לזה, אך לפועל ראו שזה הצליח.

The seventy elders as well as Hillel and Shammai were fortunate that the dangerous potentials didn't materialize, and the actual outcomes were positive. The same happened with the spreading of Chassidut. The Baal Shem Tov, and successive Chassidic leaders, were successful in teaching the masses with positive results and—as Mashiach promised—bringing the redemption closer.

Student's pq. 14

The lesson we can learn from this is to engage in the spreading of the teachings of Chassidut, even to a person who seems far removed from them. We need to look at such people like Aaron did in his time, seeing the positive potential they have. We need to spread Chassidut to everyone, in their own language, and this will lead to the redemption, speedily in our time.

ההוראה מכך היא: יש להתעסק בהפצת המעיינות עד ל'חוצה' ממש, אפילו ליהודי שבחיצוניות נראה נפרד, צריך להסתכל עליו כמו שאהרן הסתכל על היהודים בזמנו ולראות בהם את הפוטנציאל הטוב שבהם, ולכן צריך להפיץ את המעיינות לכל אחד בשפתו, ועל ידי זה יבוא משיח צדקנו, בקרוב ממש.

(כל השיחה המובאת בחלק ג' היא מהנחה בלתי מוגה)

משיחת שבת פרשת וארא, ה'תש"מ לקוטי שיחות חלק כ"ד, עמ' 2 והלאה תורגם על ידי 'אוצר ליקוטי שיחות', ונוספו בו השלמות מ"שיחות קודש", הנחה בלתי מוגה, בתרגום המערכת.