



THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, EMERITUS

“To Each His Language”

There was a time when the literary treasures of the Jewish people were accessible only to those with a reading knowledge of Hebrew. This is no longer the case. I know of no major Jewish religious work which has not been translated into English in recent years and, in most instances, into many other languages as well. The past several decades have witnessed the publication of multiple editions of the Bible and the Talmud, commentaries ancient and modern, liturgical works, historical tomes, biographies, and even cookbooks with recipes of our ancestors.

I must confess that when this phenomenon of translation began, I was not all that

happy. I am a bit of a purist and have long clung to the belief that sacred Hebrew books should be read in the original. I was willing to make exceptions for those religious classics which were originally written in languages other than Hebrew, such as those works of Maimonides, Saadia Gaon, and Bahya ibn Paquda, which were originally written in Arabic and translated into Hebrew and eventually English as well. But for me, the Bible and classical commentaries were to be read only in the language in which they were written.

I was guided in my opposition to translation by the classic Italian motto, “*traduttore traditore*”, “the translator is a traitor.” No translation is exactly accurate, and ideas expressed in one language inevitably lose some of their meaning when rendered into another language. Every translation compromises beauty and forfeits subtlety and nuance.

Ironically, in recent years, I myself have become a translator. My first professional effort was with the elegies that are recited on the solemn day of Tisha b’Av, when Jews recall the seemingly endless chain of catastrophes that have marked Jewish history. Translating these poignantly tragic poems was a difficult challenge. But I undertook the task in the belief that an English translation was better than no translation, and that I was doing a public service by bringing these poems to the public, albeit in a far from perfect form.

Since then, and to this day, I have been involved in the process of translating classical

This weeks Torah learning
is dedicated לעילוי נשמת

ישראל בן רפאל זאב ז”ל

Rabbi Dr. Israel Rivkin z”l
on his first Yartzheit - כ’ אלול תשפ”ה

Sorely missed and fondly remembered
by family and friends

*His dear wife Rebecca,
children, grandchildren
and great-grandchildren
The Rivkin, Kestenbaum,
Kwestel and Markowitz families*

Jewish works, and have come to terms with the fact that translations, although far from perfect, bring Torah study to multitudes of individuals who would otherwise be deprived from so much of our tradition.

These reflections bring us to this week's Torah portion, *Parshat Ki Tavo* (*Deuteronomy* 26:1-29:8). The relevant verses read, "As soon as you have crossed the Jordan into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones. Coat them with plaster and inscribe upon them all the words of this Teaching...On those stones you shall inscribe every word of this Teaching most distinctly" (*Deuteronomy* 27:2-3, and 8).

What does this phrase, *ba'er heitev*, translated as "most distinctly," mean? The Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Sotah* 32b suggests that the inscription of the "Teaching," that is, the Torah, should be done in seventy languages, in every language known to mankind. How fascinating! Moses himself, speaking on behalf of the Almighty, instructs the people to engage in that "traitorous" task of translation. He seems unconcerned with the difficulties of rendering the word of God from sacred Hebrew into the languages of all mankind.

Why? Why was it necessary to translate the Torah into languages which were incomprehensible to the people of Israel? Our Sages offer two very different answers to this question.

The Jerusalem Talmud takes a universalistic approach and suggests that these translations were to bring the teachings of the Torah to the entire world.

The *Zohar*, the basic text of the *Kabbalah*, notes that the members of the Jewish High Court, the *Sanhedrin*, knew all seventy languages. But the *Zohar* does not take this

literally. Instead, the *Zohar* understands the seventy languages to be a metaphor for the seventy facets of Torah, the seventy different avenues of interpretation with which the sacred text is endowed. The members of the Sanhedrin were thus not linguists, according to the *Zohar*, but experts in probing the depths of the Torah's meaning. Perhaps, the seventy languages inscribed on the stones in the River Jordan were also not the languages for the peoples of the world, but were seventy codes enabling so many different approaches to the Torah's interpretation.

Permit me to offer a somewhat different approach. I prefer to understand the word "language" more broadly. The word need not be restricted to its literal meaning, referring to French, Spanish, Swahili, and Portuguese. Rather, "language" can refer to a cognitive modality, or to a learning style. Thus, some of us prefer the language of humor, while others prefer the language of logic and reason. We speak of angry language, soothing language, and the language of love. Music is a language, play is a language, and there is even the language of war.

Every teacher worth his salt knows that he must use different "languages" for different



In loving memory of my mother

Pearl Katz א"ה

פעסה בת אפרים זאב ע"ה

Memphis, Tennessee

On her 24th Yahrtzeit - 18 Elul

Ronnie Katz

students. This does not mean that he speaks to some students in English and to others in Yiddish. No. This means that some students will respond to clear and logical explanations. Others will require anecdotes and stories. Still others will require humor, or perhaps visual illustrations of the subject matter being taught. This is the lesson which every successful teacher learns sooner or later: no two individuals learn in the same way. Woe to the teacher who delivers his or her prepared lecture once, and expects all thirty pupils to learn the material. The successful teacher discerns the learning styles of each pupil and develops strategies and modalities that facilitate the learning of every member of the class.

Perhaps this is what the Talmud in Tractate Sotah is really teaching. Inscribed on those stones in the River Jordan were seventy different teaching strategies, seventy pedagogical tools, which would enable every recipient of the Torah to learn its messages in his or her own idiosyncratic way. Some would learn best by reciting the words by rote until they were memorized. Others would learn by breaking the text down into small phrases and reflecting

on them, and still others would learn by using visual imagery to "see" the meaning of the text.

Indeed, the phrase "seventy facets of Torah" could be the Zohar's way of referring to seventy different learning styles, encouraging teachers to identify a "stone in the River Jordan" to match every pupil, even those who on the surface appear unteachable.

If I am at all correct in this interpretation of "the seventy languages" I am asserting that our Sages were very aware of a basic lesson in education. That lesson is that there is a need for individualized curricula so that diverse populations can all learn well.

This lesson is reflected throughout Talmudic literature. Here is one example:

"Observe the excellent advice given to us by the *Tanna* Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya: 'Make for yourself a teacher, and acquire for yourself a friend...' If you do this you will find that your teacher will teach you *mikrah*, *mishnah*, *midrash*, *halachot*, *ve'aggadot*. Whatever is not conveyed in *mikrah* (Scripture) will be conveyed in *mishnah*; whatever is not conveyed in *midrash* will be conveyed in the *halachot*; whatever is not conveyed in the *halachot* will become clear in the study of the *aggadot*. Thus, the student will sit in place and fill himself with all that is good and blessed." (*Avot DeRabbi Nathan*, 8:1)

In this passage our Sages are advocating a richly variegated curriculum. They know that not every student will be fully informed by the study of one subject. The student who fails to gain from the study of *mikrah*, will gain instead from a very different type of text, *mishnah*, the early rabbinic codification of the Oral Law. And similarly for *midrash*, rabbinic lore; *halachot*, rules and regulations, and *aggadot*, legends and stories.

Happy 80th birthday

to our loving

Charles Gold 

Ad Meah V'esrim!!!

***From the Gold, Wisemon,
and Blank families***

There are many erudite quotations that I could cite to summarize the point of my brief essay. But I prefer to conclude with a remark I hear from my teenage grandchildren: *Different strokes for different folks*. Arguably, this is an apt motto for getting along with people in all situations. But it is especially apt for teachers. And as I have repeatedly stated in this column, we are all teachers! ■

HUNDREDS OF SATISFIED CUSTOMERS

*Was given great guidance
and the process was smooth
and easy!!!*

Talia and Ethan Eisen, RBS



Write Your Halachic Will Today
halachicwill.com

Rav Menachem Copperman

Certified Dayan & Expert
in Jewish Law

0544-731052
info@kadatvkadin.com



THE APPLIANCE DOCTOR

SHLOMO ROSHGADOL
058-558-2630

All brands, all models

In Jerusalem, Gush Etzion, Bet Shemesh
and everywhere in between.
Service within 24 hours.



SHLOMO SEALING & ROOF

Advanced sealing system
Repair of tiled roof

- > Licensed sealer
- > 23 years of experience
- > Warranty on every job

We specialize in sealing roof and building walls, constructing and repairing roof tiles, constructing and repairing drainpipes, sealing balconies, basements and pools.

Our company uses only SII - certified approved by Ministry of Health.

Among our clients: the Jerusalem municipality, Bezeq, Ben Gurion Airport, house committees and more.
visit and consultation - no strings attached
FAIREST PRICE GUARANTEED!

Email: gagotshlomo@gmail.com

Shlomo: 050-266-9766

Office: 052-774-3343

BECAUSE A DRAWER ISN'T A VAULT.

A WILL. AN ENVELOPE
OF CASH. YOUR
GRANDMOTHER'S RING.
IF IT'S IMPORTANT -
IT SHOULDN'T BE
AT HOME.



BRICKSTONE JERUSALEM'S PREMIER PRIVATE VAULT CENTER.

Discreet. Secure. Biometric access only. Only you hold the key.
Centrally located in the Clal Building, Jerusalem



24/7
security



International
standards



Personal
service

PRIVATE VAULTS NOW AVAILABLE.

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY, FIRST MONTH FREE FOR JULY-AUGUST CLIENTS.



Clal building,
97 yafa street, Jerusalem.

*9936 Ext. 2
www.brickstone.co.il