

"As The Day The Golden-Calf Was Made..."

At the onset of *Deuteronomy* (-1:5), the verse sets the intent, *"On that side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses commenced [and] explained this Torah..."* (-Rashi:) *'explained this Law': He explained it to them in seventy languages.*" So too, when Moses commanded Israel (ibid 27:4 & 8), *"And it will be, when you cross the Jordan, that you shall set up these stones... You shall write upon the stones all the words of this Torah, very clearly,"* our sages (-Rashi, on the verse) define the words, *"very clearly,"* to mean, *"in seventy languages¹."* From these we see that translating the Torah in the languages of the other nations is a good thing. However, we find our sages teaching (-Tractate Soferim 1:7; Tractate Sefer Torah 1:8), *"It once happened that five² elders wrote the Torah for King Ptolemy (-Link -assumed to be this Ptolemy) in Greek, and that day was as ominous for Israel as the day on which the golden calf was made, since the Torah could not be accurately translated."*

Questions: Why is translating the Torah into Greek an extremely difficult thing, when from the above-mentioned verses and the sages' interpretation, shows that it is a good thing?

Note: We can't say that the emphasis in the story is that it was specifically into Greek that was the issue, because: (i) *The Seventy Languages* of the verses included Greek! (ii) The words, *"since the Torah could not be accurately translated,"* imply that it so in all languages! (iii) On the contrary, we find credence given specifically to Greek (-Megillah 8b; Maimonides, Laws of Tefillin 1:19), as Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel rules that the Torah can only be written in the *Holy Tongue* (Old Hebrew) or in *Greek!* (iv) The Jerusalem Talmud clearly states (-Megillah 1:9), *"They investigated and found that the Torah may be correctly translated only into Greek!"*

The main question here is, how can the sages teach that, *"and that day was as ominous for Israel as the day on which the golden calf was made"?!?*

This precise ominous comparison is found again in the Talmud (-Shabbat 17a): *That day Hillel was bowed and was sitting before Shammai like one of the students. And that day was as difficult for Israel as the day the golden calf was made.* Rashi explains, *"Omnious': Because Hillel was the Prince of Israel and humble."*

The Back Story: Jewish Law is decided by (-Exodus 23:2), *"You shall follow a majority."*

The Mishna states (-ibid 13b), *"And these are among the laws that (the Sages,) who went up to visit him, said in the upper story of Chananya ben Chizkiya ben Garon.* (Since many Sages were there, among them most of the generation's Torah scholars in Israel, they engaged in discussion of various laws of the Torah. It turned out that when the people expressing opinions) *were counted,* (the students of) *Beit Shammai outnumbered* (the students of) *Beit Hillel, and they issued decrees* (with regard) *to eighteen matters on that day* (in accordance with the opinion of Beit Shammai)."

Hillel, who was the Prince of Israel, was forced to sit in submission before Shammai, and the opinion of Beit Shammai prevailed in the vote conducted that day. And this is what the Talmud is talking about when it states, *"And that day was as difficult for Israel as the day the golden calf was made."*

Note: Only the first point of Rashi explains the *'problem,'* being that Hillel was the *Prince of Israel* at the time. However, the second detail, *"And was humble,"* explains the contrary, how Hillel, although being the *Prince* was able to nevertheless, *"was bowed,"* before Shammai? Commentaries explain that Rashi as, *"because they 'trampled' upon Hillel, who was the Prince and was humble."* Thus, we have the comparison, being that with the golden calf, they *'trampled'* upon Moses, who was the *Prince*, and was *humble*.

However, this doesn't suffice. The intensity of the sin of the golden calf was not of their *'trampling'* upon Moses, as much as it was about Israel committing idolatry!

The Explanation: First we must understand the emphasis of, *"And that day was as difficult for Israel as the day the golden calf was made."* After they made the golden calf, Aaron said to them (-Exodus 32:5), *"Tomorrow shall be a festival to G-d,"* Rashi explains Aaron's actions were all in order, *"to stall them."* Thus, *"the day the golden calf was made,"* was not the day that Israel committed idolatry, but only the next day?! Hence, we see that the emphasis of our sages is that this was: *The day of preparation for a future sin!*

So too, concerning the translation. *"Since the Torah could not be accurately translated,"* means that they could not give a precise literal translation, and in the order that the verses are written, leaving place for *future* misunderstandings. When King Ptolemy will *later* read this Greek translation of the Torah, as it is translated precisely, *"accurately translated,"* he might make a mistake, to the point of understanding the *opposite* of what the verse is saying! --Thus, we find that when the 72 sages interpreted the Torah for King Ptolemy, it was through a miracle that G-d placed in each of their hearts to make the same 13 changes!

Similarly, that which, *"Hillel was bowed and was sitting before Shammai like one of the students,"* in itself was not *"ominous,"* for (-Shabbos 15a), *"Hillel remained silence to Shammai,"* and (-ibid, Rashi), *"Did not remain in his dispute."* Meaning, that the ruling was in accordance with the law. What was, *"ominous,"* is that this may lead to *in the future* their ruling in accordance with Shammai, contrary to the rule (-Brochois 36b), *"And (when) Beit Shammai (express an opinion) where Beit Hillel (disagree, their opinion is considered as if it were) not in the Mishna (and is completely disregarded"!* And this is what Rashi is saying with his precise wording, that the reason why the ruling is like Hillel is because of these two traits: (i) *"Because Hillel was the Prince,"* and (ii) *"His humility,"* and therefore, Hillel was the *Halacha* (Legal) *Authority*, even over the *Head of Court*, which was Shammai. So too, Rashi's second message by pointing out the *humility* trait of Hillel is referring to the teaching (-Eruvin 13b), *"Why were Beit Hillel privileged to have the*

law established in accordance with their opinion? The reason is that they were agreeable and forbearing, showing restraint when affronted, and when they taught the law they would teach both their own statements and the statements of Beit Shammai." Thus, here too, the, "ominous," issue was only that this may lead to in the future their ruling in accordance with Shammai, over Hillel.

Deeper Yet: The preciousness of Torah leads us to understanding that the comparison between (i) *Translating the Torah for King Ptolemy*, and (ii) *Hillel was bowed...* with the, "the day the golden calf was made," is not only in that it was a day that can lead to (futuristic) bad outcomes, but also to the context of it being the day in which the golden calf was made (present moment), and the very essence of the sin of the golden calf, in general.

What led Israel to making the golden calf was not a desire for idolatry. Rather (-Exodus 32:1), "When the people saw that Moses was late in coming down from the mountain... because this man Moses, who brought us up from the land of Egypt we don't know what has become of him." Israel was looking for an intermedium to connect them with G-d. Being that, seemingly, G-d has set it up as such that G-d would not directly take them out of Egypt, but, "because this man Moses, who brought us up from the land of Egypt we don't know what has become of him." In other words, G-d wants us to connect with all our faculties, *Intellect* and *Emotions*, and not just through *Faith*. Additionally, G-d wants our *Lower Faculties* to connect with his very *Essence* (-Maimonides, Sefer Hamitzvos, Positive Mitzvah #1), "To know that there is G-d," simply, that G-d, in His purest *Essence* exists. Meaning, that G-d reveals Himself to "Man," here *Below*, a *Body in a Soul*, and G-d clothes Himself within this *man* in a oneness, (-See Tanya Chapter 5), *which of the likes there is no other at all!* And this being a *man* like (-Deuteronomy 32:1), "Moses, the man of G-d," whom we can nevertheless, see and hear! This is what Israel was looking for in the golden calf! A tangible and physical intermedium between them and G-d. And being that the emphasis was upon this intermedium between them and the *Essence* of G-d be, "tangible and physical," so that *Divinity* be drawn in abundance into this physical world, hence they made it to be, not of the *prize* of the world, the highest creature, *man*, but of the lowest, the inanimate golden calf.

Note: And so it was, that G-d then went on to command Israel (-Exodus 25:8), "And you shall make for me a sanctuary (Tabernacle/Holy Temple, of gold, silver, etc.) and I will dwell among them!"

Note: With this we can also understand the teaching of our sages (-Tachumah, Tisa 21:1), "And I also saw that I would descend at Sinai on My Chariot with four animals and they would examine it and unhitch one of them in order to provoke Me, as it is said (-Ezekiel 1:10): And they four had the face of an ox, etc., and it is written elsewhere (-Psalms 106:20): Thus they exchanged their glory for a calf that eateth grass." Being that Israel saw G-d descend, thus understanding that it was G-d's desire to descend into the physical world, hence, they, "unhitched... ox," wanting nothing more than to have here below a being identical to that Above of the *Supernal Chariot* of G-d, connecting them here *Below*. This was the reason that Israel made the golden calf.

More so, simply speaking, if not for the (-Exodus 32:6), "(On the next day) *they arose early*," of the (-Rashi, *ibid*), "*Satan roused them so that they would sin*," then there would have been no, "and they sinned." On the contrary, Moses would have descended, destroyed the golden calf, and there would have been a revelation of (-Deuteronomy 4:34), "There is none other than Him," with a clarity that only Moses is capable of being the intermedium that connects, because G-d sent him and appointed him as the emissary to Israel.

However, in actuality, what came out of Israel making the golden calf was that, "tomorrow," rather than being, "a holiday to G-d," was a sin of the golden calf, the sin of idolatry, and the opposite of the "Unity of G-d." Meaning, that when the physical conduit, such as the Tabernacle, its golden ark and cherubim, is by the command of G-d, then *Divinity* flows through the physical, and the physical's identity is but naught, nullified to G-d. However, when the physical conduit is not by the command of G-d, even with the best of intentions, then the physical is given its own identity and value, and we have created two realms and a separation, rather than, a *Unity of G-d*, in which *G-d is everything and everything is G-d!* This is the meaning of the Midrash (mentioned in the note above), "and unhitch one of them." When the *Face of the Ox*, is Above on the *Supernal Chariot*, it is nullified, transparent, and but revealing *Divinity*. However, when it is *unhitched*, and descends *Below*, it is *separated* from the *Chariots* nullification to its *Rider*, and is in danger of becoming the golden calf of idolatry!

So too, it is with *Translating the Torah for King Ptolemy*. That which Moses translated the Torah into 70 languages, and the commandment of, "You shall write upon the stones all the words of this Torah, very clearly," were commanded by G-d. Being so, within the translation of each language, was felt that this is a commandment from G-d, and therefore, they each carried the same holiness of the Torah as it was written in the *Holy Tongue*, from which can come no mistakes. However, when the driving force behind the translation to Greek is King Ptolemy, it can lead to the negativity of understanding the opening verse of, "Beginning created G-d³," to speak of an existence called "Beginning," created G-d," the opposite of the Torah's true meaning, which is the *Unity of G-d!* And so too, concerning the other verses⁴ that the 72 sages had to reconfigure in their translation, in order for there not to be any misunderstandings of the Torah, leading to a heretical interpretation.

As is the understanding of the actual, "*Day that they made the golden calf,*" and on a more refined level, the day that they, "*Translated the Torah for King Ptolemy,*" so too, on an even more refined level it is on the day, "*Hillel was bowed and was sitting before Shammai like one of the students.*"

On the mystical level, the reason why there are legal disputes between Hillel and Shammai in the Mishna and Talmud is because their soul, each comes from a different *Emanation of Divinity*. Shammai's soul is sourced within the *Emanation of Strictness (Strength; Justice)*, while the soul of Hillel is sourced within the *Emanation of Kindness*. This is why we find Shammai ruling on the side of strictness, and Hillel on the side of leniency.

The difference between *Kindness* and *Strictness* is (-Beraishis Rabba 8:5), "*This is what is written (-Psalms 85:11), 'Kindness and Truth met...' Kindness says, 'Create, for it (the world) is Acts of Kindness.' And Truth (Justice) says, 'Do not create, for it (the world) is all lies.'*" Meaning, that from the perspective of *Strictness* there is no place for the world. Not so, from the perspective of *Kindness*. Getting to the core of the perspectives of *Kindness* and *Strictness* upon the world: *Strictness* sees the world as a *separated* identity from G-d, an identity of its own, and therefore, *Service to G-d* (Torah-rulings) must be to *break, nullify, and to separate* ourselves from the world (*Strict* rulings). While *Kindness* sees that when *drawing Divinity down into the world*, the world is *one* with G-d, and we just need to reveal this *Divinity* that is *in* the world through *engaging* with the world (*Lenient* rulings). Therefore, in the finest of levels, the *Emanation of Strictness* can lead to seeing G-d and the world as, "*two domains,*" and what is needed is to wage war with this *separated* being. While from the *Emanation of Kindness*, what comes forth is recognizing the *Unity of G-d* within His world.

This is the meaning of the teaching, "*That day Hillel was bowed and was sitting before Shammai like one of the students. And that day was as difficult for Israel as the day the golden calf was made.*" Being that on this day the ruling was as Shammai, the overpowering of the *Emanation of Strictness* over the *Emanation of Kindness*, therefore, there was the concern that the ruling will now further be as of *Strictness*, from which may *evolve in the future* to a paradigm that there are, "*Two Domains,*" --as that of the golden calf, once *unhinged* from *Above* and brought *down* into the *physical world Below*-- of which we now need to wage war against the world, and nullify this paradigm.

The concern of *Translating the Torah for King Ptolemy* and the, "*Day Hillel was bowed and was sitting before Shammai like one of the student,*" being like, "*As difficult for Israel as the day the golden calf was made,*" only manifested itself in a *concern*, lest it lead to a *refined* level of being contrary to the *Oneness of G-d*. However, in actuality, nothing negative came forth from it. Deeper yet, just like by, "*the day the golden calf was made,*" Aaron revealed that there was the *potential* outcome of, "*There will be a holiday for G-d tomorrow,*" *if* they will use the situation properly, and serve G-d, *in actuality* it was so by the, "*Translating the Torah for King Ptolemy.*" Not only, through the, "*sages had to reconfigure verses in their translation,*" was there the dissemination of the *Oneness of G-d* among the nations, but even more so, the law was established that, "*the Torah can only be written in the Holy Tongue (Old Hebrew) or in Greek,*" only a Torah written in these two languages carry all the laws of holiness of a Torah Scroll! Likewise, with the, "*Day Hillel was bowed and was sitting before Shammai like one of the student,*" not only did no negativity come forth, but even more so, there was the *bowing* of Shammai (*House of Shammasi; Emanation of Strictness*) to Hillel (*House of Hillel; Emanation of Kindness*), as well! This is why we find throughout the Talmud instances (-Eduyot 4:1) that Shammai rules to the *Lenient* (-Eduyot 4:1), "*The following cases are [examples] of the lenient rulings of Beth Shammai!*"

Even Deeper: Being that the words of the righteous are alive and fulfilled eternally, and even more so, concerning their words that written in the Torah, most definitely the words of Aaron, "*There will be a holiday for G-d tomorrow,*" manifests itself in actuality! The, "*Tomorrow,*" Aaron spoke of was the 17th of Tammuz, the day that Moses descended Mount Sinai, and broke the *Two Tablets of the Covenant*. Hence, we have the teaching (-Sefer Halikutim (and Likuttei Torah), of the Arizal Portion Tisa) of Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the *Arizal* or the *Ari Hakodosh* (-[Link](#)), "*a great secret is hidden in this (words of Aaron, for) G-d will transform it to a holiday, hence, this is in essence a holiday for G-d, and this 'tomorrow' (does not mean literally in 24 hours, but,) at a later time.*"

And Even Deeper: The very original 17th of Tammuz, 2448, itself *is internally the holiday*, through Israel's repentance for making the golden calf, which will reveal itself in the *World to Come*, when even the *Divine Sparks* within the ultimate *Three Husks of Impurity* will be transformed to goodness and elevated into *Divinity*, fulfilling its purpose of being created. And so too, it is with the translation of Torah teachings into all the different languages, for those who don't read or understand the *Holy Tongue*. And especially so concerning the teachings of the *Wellsprings of Chassidus*, through which all the *Seventy Languages* are being refined and elevated into holiness, which hastens the coming of Moshiach, when (-Zephania 3:9), "*For then I will convert the peoples to a pure language that all of them call in the name of the Lord, to worship Him of one accord,*" and both, the Fast of the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av will become great holidays, imminently, Amein!

1. While there are commentaries (Maimonides, Pirush Hamishnayos, Sota 32a) who say that it was a transliteration, nevertheless, the simple meaning of the Talmud (explained in many commentaries) is that it was a translation.
2. in Tractate Sefer Torah has the number at 70, which is the story of *Tractate Soferim* in 1:8. However, in the latter, the number is 72. This is the number brought in Tractate Megillah 9a, and other places, as well. However, there are commentaries who explain that the original 5 sages reported that they couldn't accomplish the task, hence there was a gathering of the sages, from which the 72 were then selected to do the job. Other commentaries separate these two events completely, stating the 72 sages happened with a different *King Ptolemy* altogether. Yet others say that the story of the 72 sages happened *before* the event with the 5 sages, (by the same *King Ptolemy?*).
3. The literal order and meaning of the words, "*Bereishit barah Elokim.*"
4. Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Megillah (-1:9; so too in Tractate Sofrim & Tractate Sefer Torah) states that there were 13 such verses. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah states that there were 15. Shemot Rabba (-5:5) states 18, and Tanchuma (-Shemot 22) states that there were 10 such verses.