

Hashem came from Sinai having shone forth to them from Seir, having appeared from Har Paran. (33:2)

Sifri teaches that, prior to giving the Torah to *Klal Yisrael*, Hashem offered it to the nations of the world. “Are you willing to accept the Torah?” Hashem asked, “What is written in it?” was the immediate reply. No gentile nation was willing to accept a legal system and guide which they thought would be incompatible with its chosen lifestyle. Thus, once the citizens of the three dominant nations of the world heard that moral deviation, theft and murder were prohibited forms of activity, they wanted no part of the Torah. These sins constituted a way of life for them. They could not possibly exist on a diet that excluded such morally repugnant behavior. The Torah did not coincide with their character.

To explain this better, **Horav Aryeh Leib Bakst, zl**, observes that the Torah is given from the *Melameid Torah*, the One who teaches Torah to *Klal Yisrael*. Hashem does not just drop off a Torah scroll and say, “Read”. He “teaches” the Torah to the *lomeid*, one who studies it. Under such circumstances, it is essential that the student of the Torah be appropriately suited to be a vessel for *Hashroas HaShechinah*, the resting of the Divine Presence on him. This is the underlying idea behind the command, *V’yikchu Li*, “And they shall take for Me.” A Jew does not just study Torah. He gives himself over totally to Hashem. The gentiles are unable to cope with such a relationship, since it is contrary to their basic character.

This, explains *Rav Bakst*, is why *Chazal* in the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 29 say that an *akum*, idol-worshipper, who studies Torah is liable for death. *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, morashah kehillas Yaakov*, “The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov” (Ibid. 33:4). It is ours by right. It is our inheritance, bequeathed to us by its Divine Author. Thus, even if by some quirk their wise men – and they do have many brilliant scholars – would attempt to study Torah, they will not succeed in plumbing its depths. In order to achieve knowledge in Torah, it must be given to the student by Hashem. Otherwise, it simply does not take hold. Torah study is not a discipline; it is the tangible representation of the relationship between the student and Hashem. If the student is not on the proper plateau – spiritually and ethically – he will achieve no success. He may amass wisdom, but not Torah!

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In the *Selichos* for *Asarah b'Teves*, the payton writes, *Diachani b'shemonah bo smalis v'yeminis, halo shlashton kavaati taanis*, "He surrounded me on the eighth day with darkness left and right, for these three events I instituted a fast." This is a reference to the time that the Greek King Ptolemy compelled 72 Jewish scholars to render the Torah into Greek. He placed the 72 scholars in separate chambers without revealing to any of them why they had been summoned. He entered each room and said, "Write for me the Torah of Moshe, your teacher," Miraculously, Hashem put in each one's heart an identical translation, so that Ptolemy could find no variations whatsoever among them. Even in those places when the Sages purposely altered the translation, the results were identical. This constituted a *neis galui*, revealed miracle, and created an incredible *kavod Shomayim*, glory of Heaven.

Yet, *Chazal* consider this day, the eighth of *Teves*, a sorrowful day for the Jewish People, comparing it to the day that the Golden Calf was made. *Megillas Taanis* explains this in the following manner. "On the eighth day of *Teves*, the Torah was rendered into Greek during the days of King Ptolemy, and darkness descended to the world for three days. To what may the matter be likened? To a lion captured and imprisoned. Prior to his imprisonment all feared him and fled from his presence. Now, all come to gaze at him and ask, "Where is this one's strength?"

Likewise, as long as the Torah was only in Hebrew and could only be interpreted by our Sages, it evoked awe and reverence. As such, many feared casting aspersion on it. For a non-Jew to study Torah, he first had to become proficient in *lashon kodesh*, Hebrew/Holy tongue, and the various ways for understanding the Torah. Learning Torah required much preparation.

Once the Torah was "imprisoned" in the Greek translation, it was almost as if the Torah had become bereft of its reverence. Whoever wished could now gaze at the Torah; find fault and cast aspersion on its *mitzvos*, and eschew further understanding of its commandments. Herein lies its similarity to the sin of the Golden Calf. A graven image has no reality and no substance. Likewise, the Greek translation is nothing more than that – a translation. It is devoid of the reality and true substance of Torah. Now, the members of the non-Jewish world could imagine that they, too, were privy to the Torah's secrets.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* concludes with one caveat. While *limud haTorah* remains beyond the gentile's purview, *tefillah*, prayer, does not. Yes, a non-Jew may pray, and his prayer has meaning and efficacy. Torah is Hashem's conversation with man, thus requiring man to be on an appropriate spiritual plateau in order to be a part of the dialogue, to understand what is being said, and to accept and incorporate its lessons into his psyche. Prayer is man's conversation with G-d. Man can present his innermost emotions and requests to Hashem, Who understands their origin and responds accordingly.