

”יפת אלקים ליפת וישכן באהלי שם...”

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Someone asked me a question a short while ago, the answer to which speaks directly to the heart of Chanukah. There seems to be a contradiction between two Gemaras as to how Judaism views Ancient Greece. On the one hand, one of the reasons for the fast of Asara B'Teves is because on that day the Greeks translated the Torah into their language. On the other hand, the Gemara in *Maseches Megila* tells us that out of all the languages, the only one which Torah can be translated into is Greek. The *posuk* cited as the source for this halacha is, ”יפת” (בראשית ט, כט) אלקים ליפת וישכן באהלי שם...” Because Greek is a beautiful language, it is possible to translate the Torah into Greek. How do reconcile the fact that one is permitted to translate the Torah into Greek, but that action itself is a reason for a national fast day?

To do so, we must look at how Chazal view Greek culture. The Ramban, in פרשת אמור, says Greek culture seeks to deny that there is anything beyond what we can detect with our five senses. Teshuvos haRashba says this as well. Greek culture is only the physical world, and entertains no spirituality whatsoever. The issue they have with Judaism is that Judaism believes everything depends upon the spiritual. We worship Hakadosh Boruch Hu and connect to the spiritual side of the world with every mitzvah we do and any action we take. Our view of life is diametrically opposed to that of Yavan, and because of that they hate us and want to destroy us.

We say in *Al Hanissim*, ”להשכיחם תורתך ולהעבירם מחקי רצונך.” They sought to make us forget the Torah-our connection to the beyond; and to remove us from those mitzvos which we cannot rationalize. Particularly, the mitzvos we do which depend solely on spiritual faith to undertake them. In fact, we find in *Megilas Chanuka* that the Greeks came to the caves which Jews were hiding in, and tried to convince them to come out and live as friendly neighbors, to assimilate. They sought only to remove our beliefs in the spiritual side to life. This is the definition of the *machlokes* between Greek culture and that of Judaism.

There is a famous Ramban at the beginning of פרשת בהעלותך, which says the Menorah of Chanukah is an extension of the Menorah of the Bais Hamikdosh. The Menorah of the Bais Hamikdosh represents the *Torah Sheb'al Peh* which illuminates and explains the *Torah Shebiksav*. Without it, the *Torah Shebiksav* is a closed book and we could not do any of the mitzvos. Yavan was against carrying out spiritual ideas through physical actions.

I believe this will answer our original question of the contradiction in translating the Torah into Greek. When they translate the Torah into Greek, the statement being made is that the Torah is a nice historical document with good stories that should be studied at face value. This is absolutely wrong. The day they translated the Torah as an entity unto itself, without any *Torah Sheb'al Peh*, is a fast day indeed. However, when we translate the Torah into Greek, it is with the *Torah Sheb'al Peh* connected to it.

Three things we find in *Megilas Chanuka* that the Greeks tried to stop us from doing were Shabbos, Bris Mila, and Kiddush haChodesh. Shabbos, we understand, as it is the center of Jewish life; Bris Milah is the covenant we have with Hashem which identifies our bodies as being Jewish; but what about Rosh Chodesh? The significance of Rosh Chodesh is that it is a holiday which the Sanhedrin proclaim. Two witnesses must testify they saw the new moon and only when the Sanhedrin are satisfied with their testimony do they proclaim the new month. This process, in turn, dictates when the Yomim Tovim will occur. Essentially, Kiddush haChodesh says that there is a wisdom of Chazal to decide how we relate to the *ruchniyus*. Chazal determine when we will celebrate Pesach, Shavuos, and so on. Rosh Chodesh connects us to the spiritual world by instigating which days will have *kedusha*

in order for their respective mitzvos to take effect, and this is regulated by the Sanhedrin. This is why Yavan was so opposed to the institution of Rosh Chodesh.

Chanukah is the time of year when we have to strengthen our connection to *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. Chanukah is the time to strengthen our Torah learning, our in-depth learning in order to understand it. The way the Chachomim understand the Torah establishes the halacha, how Hashem relates to the world. *Torah Sheb'al Peh* is the key to our connection with other worlds, and Chanukah is the time to strengthen our bounds to it as it is the time we overthrew the yolk of Yavan which attempted to stamp it out.

B'ezras Hashem, we should all be *zoche* to a *Freilichen Chanukah*, and the light of the Menorah should illuminate every single person's neshama. The *kedusha* of the Menorah will help us fight off all the Greek culture around us which says that there is no *ruchniyus*, only the physical world around us with the five senses. This *kedusha* will keep us from being swallowed up into the *umos ha'olam* until the End of Days.