

DEVARIM: 70 LANGUAGES

Midrash Tanchuma, Devarim (derived from Sefaria translation)

“These are the words that Moses spoke....” (Deut. 1:1) Israel said, “Yesterday you said (in Exod. 4:10), ‘I am not a man of words.’ And now you’re speaking so much?!”

...Come and see. When the Holy Blessed One said to Moses (in Exod. 3:10), “I will send you to Pharaoh,” Moses said to God, “You are doing me an injustice: ‘I am not a man of words.’ (Exod. 4:10). Seventy languages are spoken in Pharaoh’s palace. Thus if people come from another place, they will speak with them in their own language. When I go on Your mission, they will examine me, asking whether I am a representative of the Omnipresent. Then it will be revealed to them that I do not know how to converse with them. Will they not laugh at me, saying, ‘Look at the agent of the One who created the world and all its languages! Does he not know how to listen and reply? See here, something is wrong!’”

...The Holy Blessed One said to him, “But look at the first Adam. Since no creature taught him, where did he [come to] know seventy languages? It is so stated (in Gen. 2:20), ‘And he gave names to [them].’ ‘A name for every beast’ is not written here but rather ‘names’ [in the plural, as he gave a name for each and every beast in seventy languages]! You have [no reason] to say, ‘I am not a man of words.’”

...And so, at the end of forty years [from] when Israel left Egypt, [Moses] began to elucidate the Torah in seventy languages, as stated (in Deut. 1:5), “he elucidated this Torah.” The mouth that said (in Exod. 4:10), “I am not a man of words,” [then] said (in Deut. 1:1), “These are the words.”

Kedushat Levi on Devarim (Rabbi Jonathan Slater, from *A Partner in Holiness*, pp. 186-87)

“On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this Torah, saying...” (Deut. 1:5).

Check out Rashi’s comment on this verse: “He explained it to them in seventy languages.” Why did Moses explain the Torah to them in seventy languages at this particular time? We can explain this with reference to the verse “YHVH will inscribe in the script (lit: “writing” or “record”) of the nations that this one was born there. Selah” (Ps. 87:6). Now sometimes we find Aramaic words in the Torah, such as *yegar sahaduta* (the mound of witness) (Gen. 31:47). So, too, words in other languages appear, such as “*totaphot*”: *tat* in Coptic means “two” and *pat* in African means “two” (Zevachim 37b); likewise we read, “*Hen* in Greek means ‘one’” (Shabbat 31b). Similarly the languages of all the other nations appear in the Torah.

בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּאַרְצֵי מוֹאָב הוֹאִיל מִשָּׁה בְּאֶרֶץ
אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לְאֹמְרֵי: (דְּבָרִים א, ה)

עֵינַי בְּרַשׁ"י - „באר בשבעים לשון.
ולמה ביאר כאן התורה בשבעים לשון?
ובו יבואר הפסוק (תהלים פז, ו) ה' יִסְפֹּר בְּכַתּוּב
עַמִּים זֶה יִלְד־שָׁם סֵלָה.

הכלל, כי לפעמים כתיב בתורה תיבת התרגום,
כגון „יגר סהדותא” (בראשית לא, מז).

וכן הלשון של שאר אומות כגון „טוטפת” -
„ט”ט” בכתפי „שתים”, „פת” באפריקי „שתים”
(זבחים לז:). וכן „הן בלשון יוני אחת”.
וכן שאר לשונות שכתוב בתורה מלשונות הגוים.

There is one reason for all of this. The language of any nation is its root vitality, but Hebrew (lit., the holy tongue) only for the Jews. Now in truth, Israel heard the Torah at Sinai only in Hebrew. But the blessed Holy One sees both beginning and end at the same time and saw that Israel would someday wind up in exile. Therefore, God included the language of all the other nations in the Torah. In this manner, the Jews would gain access to their vital forces, through their language as it appears in the holy Torah, and thus they would be able to survive in exile.

This is hinted at in our verse (Ps. 87:6) “YHVH will inscribe in the script of nations”: the blessed Holy One wrote in the Torah the script of the nations, of all the other peoples “this one [zeh] was born there, *selah*.” God did this so that the *tzaddik* will be able to survive there. The *tzaddik* is called “this one” [zeh], as the Sages taught (Berakhot 6b), “The whole universe was created only in order to connect with this one [zeh].” That is the import of “this one was born there, *selah*”: so that the *tzaddik* will be able to survive in exile. That is why this was taught **in the land of Moab**, since in the Land of Israel there was only *leshon hakodesh*. But in the land of Moab, a land of the nations outside of the Land of Israel, Moses needed to **expound this Torah** in all of the languages, so that Israel would be able to survive in exile.

The Power of Hebrew (Tova Horwitz, author at ulpanor.com)

...The Hebrew words were God’s chosen tool for creation. According to the mystical teachings of the Kabbalah, God’s utterances are eternal; the long ago uttered words and their energies remain active in the heavens, constantly and continuously fueling the world’s state of creation. In other words, if God chose to extinguish the creative energy of those utterances at any moment then the world would cease to exist.

Humans, and specifically the Jewish people, were assigned by God the weighty task of partnering with God to perfect and recreate our intentionally “flawed” world. As the only beings created both in the image of God and gifted with the faculty of speech, it follows that a principal way for us to do this is through our own speech.

...This concept certainly provides some food for thought, especially at this time of year when many of us are searching for new ways to recreate ourselves and deepen our impact on the world. While some embark on a journey, learn a new skill, tackle a project, or chase after a dream, it seems that one area in which we have a meaningful duty to pursue is the sacred realm of Hebrew.”

וחד טעם הוא - כי הלשון של כל האומות הוא החיות מן האומה, ולשון הקודש הוא של ישראל לבד. ובאמת ישראל שמעו התורה בסני רק בלשון הקודש. והקדוש ברוך הוא, המביט מראשית אחרית, שראה שישראל צריכין להיות בגלות. לזה כתב בתורה לשון של שאר אומות שעל ידי זה יהיה להם אחיזה בחיות שלהם, שהוא הלשון בהתורה הקדושה, בכדי שישראל יוכל להיות להם תקומה בגלות.

וזהו הרמז בפסוק „ה' יִסְפֹּר בְּכֶתוּב עַמִּים“, כלומר שהקדוש ברוך הוא כתב בתורה איזה כתב מן העמים, מן שאר האומות, „זֶה יִלְד־שֵׁם סְלָה“. בכדי שהצדיק יוכל לקיים שם. כי הצדיק נקרא „זה“ כמאמר חכמינו ז”ל (ברכות ו:), „כל העולם לא נברא אלא לצוות לזה.“

וזהו הרמז „זֶה יִלְד־שֵׁם סְלָה“, בכדי שהצדיק יהיה לו קיום בגלות. וזהו בארץ מואב, כי בארץ ישראל לא היה רק לשון הקודש. אבל, בארץ מואב, שהוא ארץ הגוים חוץ לארץ ישראל, צריך לבאר התורה בכל הלשונות בכדי לקיים ישראל בגלות: