

CHEVRAH TORAH 5778...Seeking ✨ Spirituality

Shabbat NO'ACH

Genesis 11:1-9

KEY KOSHI:

WHAT DOES THE STATE/USE OF LANGUAGE [LETTERS] TEACH US ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF OUR WORDS—TO CREATE/DESTROY/BUILD OUR WORLD ?

P'SHAT—AWARENESS... The beginning of knowing about God is simply paying attention, being fully present where you are

<p>1] Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. 2] And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3] They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard.”—Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar.—4] And they said, “Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world.” 5] The Lord came down to look at the city and tower that man had built, 6] and the Lord said, “If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach. 7] Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another’s speech.” 8] Thus the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. 9] That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord confounded the speech of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.</p>	<p>1 וַיְהִי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ שְׂפִיחַ אֶחָד וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים : 2 וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעֵם מִקֵּדִם וַיִּמְצְאוּ בְּקֵעָה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם : 3 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ הִבֵּה נִלְבְּנָה לְבִנְיָם וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשִׂרְפָּה וְתִהְיֶה לָּהֶם הַלְּבִנָּה לְאַבְנֵי וְהַחֲמֵר הִיָּה לָּהֶם לְחֵמֶר : 4 וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִבֵּה נִבְנֶה־לָּנוּ עֵיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַּשָּׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה־לָּנוּ שֵׁם פְּרִנְפוֹץ עַל־פְּנֵי כָּל־ הָאָרֶץ : 5 וַיֵּרֵד יְהוָה לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הָעִיר וְאֶת־ הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם : 6 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֵן עַם אֶחָד וּשְׂפִיחַ אֶחָד לְכָל־ם וְזֶה הַחֲלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעַתָּה לֹא־יִבְצָר מֵהֶם כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת : 7 הִבֵּה נִרְדָּה וְנִבְלָה שֵׁם שְׂפִיתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־ יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שִׁפְתֵי רֵעֵהוּ : 8 וַיִּפֹּץ יְהוָה אֹתָם מִשָּׁם עַל־פְּנֵי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּחַדְּלוּ לְבַנֹּת הָעִיר : 9 עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ בָּבֶל כִּי־שָׁם בָּלְלָהּ יְהוָה שִׁפְתֵי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ וּמִשָּׁם הִפְיָצָם יְהוָה עַל־פְּנֵי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ</p>
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בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ—UN-SELF-AWARENESS... God showed Moses a Torah of black fire written on white fire.

The negative ground on and by which all things can be read is itself a message.

10:32 *These are the groupings of Noah's descendants by their nations, and from these they branched out all over the earth after the flood.*

Prof R.ALTER... "branched out..." Literally, the Hebrew means "separated." The whole table of nations is devised to explain how the many separate nations came into being. The immediately following verse, which begins the tale of the Tower of Babel, announces a primeval unity of all the people on earth. This seeming contradiction might reflect a characteristically biblical way of playing dialectically with alternate possibilities: humankind is many and divided, as a consequence of natural history; and, alternately, humankind was once one, as a consequence of having been made by the same Creator...

11:1 *The whole world had the same language and the same words*

TALMUD.... They all spoke the seventy tongues of the earth so that each could understand the speech of the other. [Yerushalmi, Megilah 1:9]

B'REISHIT RABBAH... "Devarim Achadim" that means they spoke "sharp words—Chadim"... That is, cutting and shrewd, saying, "Once every 1,656 years the Firmament totters, therefore let us go and make supports for it..." Another interpretation, They spoke against the two who were ACHAD—One: against Abraham and against "Adonai our God, Adonai is One." [Deut 6:4] Another interpretation: *Devarim Achadim* means united in thoughts; they all thought the same things. Though R' Leazer disagreed: It means united in things, that is possessions. What one possessed was at the other's disposal.

RASHI... "L'shon HaKodesh—the Holy Tongue." For no other language can be called "one"... Alternatively, they came with one perspective—a single plan of action, saying: "God does not have the right to select for Himself Alone the Higher Realms. We will go up to the firmament and wage war [against Him.]" [NACHALAT Ya'AKOV] **HaEMEK DAVAR...** This "common language," then, was the cause of their wanting to unify and dwell in one location, contrary to the Will of God who created the world for their habitation and outward growth.

11:4 *Then they said to one another: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves, else we shall be scattered all over the world."*

ABRAVANEL... The true implication of the text is that, originally, man shared one universal language and all their possessions were common to them all... Everything was in common, just like their language... But they became interested in building cities... in developing organized political and social realms, imagining this was the goal of mankind... But when they engaged in the tower, they forsook their universal brotherhood, establishing through barter and monopolization a system of private wealth, prompted by their covetousness to take each man for himself, saying, "What's mine is mine—what's yours is yours."

So, our Rabbis expound, "They journeyed Mi-KEDEM"—they separated themselves from KADMON, the original Oneness of the world...

B'REISHIT RABBAH... "make a name..." The school of R' Ish'ma-el taught: "Shem—a name" means nothing other than "an idol." That is, 'Let us make our own name The Name.'

V.6/9 *Behold—if as one people with one language, this is what they do, then... Thus [it was] there that Adonai confounded the speech of the whole earth.*

MUNK ... Man's attempt to establish a universal hegemony in order to rebel against God is punished by the confusion of languages which inevitably leads to the widespread scattering of peoples. There is another lesson: Organized society should have as its goal not the excessive conformity of its elements but rather a harmonious unity—with each component participating according to its own voice and calling...

D’RASH—READING BETWEEN THE WORDS... The words of Torah are holy because they provide a glimpse into the infrastructure of being. They comprise a single “living organism animated by a secret life which streams and pulsates below the crust of its literal meaning

R’ Zvi KOLITZ ... The generation of the tower, or as the Sages called it, “the Generation of Confusion,” was one of conformity and sameness... One speech underlines the meaning of one language. Linguistic sameness was used as a means to assure sameness of thought. The Bible tells us that it was a generation not of thought, but of thoughtless action. In the terrible boredom generated by the sameness of speech and thought, those people decided to build a tower “*whose top would reach unto Heaven.*” Why a tower of such colossal dimensions?... Because the emptier the sameness and the “samer” the emptiness from within, the greater the need for something to fill external spaces, for super structures. Oswald Spengler speaks of this phenomenon, which he calls agglomeration, as the one that preceded the fall of the Roman Empire... The physically colossal, we should remember, is the god of the commonplace, the ultimate expression of “*one language & one thought,*”—of language used for furtherance of action at the expense of thought.

The teacher now spoke of William Blake and his terrible vision about a “one-vision” culture. Blake, a Bible-intoxicated visionary, spoke of a coming of age that would see a *Babylon builded in waste, founded in human desolation*... It is “single-vision” that characterizes the builders of the Tower of Babel. Blake saw the decline of vision as the beginning of the end of poetic genius—not to be confused with, but rather to be juxtaposed to, scientific and rational genius. As spiritual villains Blake singles out such gigantic figures as Newton, Locke, Rousseau, Voltaire—the noblest spirits of the Enlightenment. He suspected, and rightly so, that with them begins the loss of language as a bouquet of flowers... the denaturing of visionary imagination and its confinement to the single vision of “quantitative colossalism.” [The Teacher—An Existential Approach to the Bible, 1982. Crossroad, NY]

Dr. EDWARD HOFFMAN... Judaism has always regarded Hebrew as a sacred language, the medium of divine communication. For millennia, its sages and mystics have taught that the letters are no ordinary vehicle of expression. Indeed, the very word for letter—OT—also can mean sign or wonder; that is, a heavenly revelation...

From the earliest metaphysical text known as SEFER YETSIRAH, Jewish mystics have extolled the Hebrew letters as the manifestation of celestial patterns of energy... as this ancient treatise vividly declares: “Twenty two foundation letters: He ordained them, He hewed them, He combined them, He interchanged them. And with them He created all of Creation and everything that is to be.”

...According to legend, during one High Holy Days, Rabbi Isaac LURIA felt his prayers were especially effective, but an angel revealed to him another’s prayers were far more potent. Intrigued, Rabbi Luria sought out and found the man, an unlearned villager. “What did you do on Rosh Hashanah?”

Apologetically, the man explained he was unlearned and could not even read the whole Hebrew alphabet. So when services came, he sat in Synagogue reciting the first ten that he knew, adding this prayer from the heart: “Please, Holy One of Blessing, take my letters and form into them words that will bring you honor.”

...In traditional Jewish thought, a Torah scroll’s letters must be full and complete—perfect; not a fragment omitted or distorted... No letter to impinge on another... This dictum can be seen to impart a higher lesson: Each person, like each letter in the Torah, has a unique purpose in the Divine plan... No one may impinge on another’s efforts for we all share a sacred mission... as the BaAL SHEM TOV remarked: “All things were created and all will yet be redeemed through combinations of the twenty-two.”

[The Hebrew Alphabet—A Mystical Journey, Introduction; Chronicle Books, 1998.]

SOD—The SELF of the UNIVERSE... God's "I am" has the psycho-theological force not of dissolving individual selves but of reminding us that we were never individual selves in the first place... Our selfhood endures by virtue of its participation in some greater Self,

The S'FAS EMES... [Rabbi Yehudah Leiv Alter of Ger, 1847-1905]

Regarding the generation of dispersion it says, "*And the Lord said: Behold, they are one people and have a single language and this is how they have decided to act...*" [Gen 11:6]

Torah here is teaching us how we lower creatures fell away from the root of Oneness...

The Holy One created everything through the twenty-two letters. Each school of angels flies up to the root of its own special letter. Then the twenty-two are joined together through various and endless permutations. Thus are they made one...

Of Adam it is said, "*Behold, he has become one of us...*" The Rabbis taught, like one of the angels, of whom it is said "*They call to one another: Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh...*" [Isaiah 6:3] That is, they sound forth together aloud, and so, in their union God's words come forth...

So was the state of human beings before the fall. But then we were expelled from Eden "*to work the land.*" Still, we had a single language—the Holy tongue, and by joining the twenty-two letters below, we retained access to the letters above. Thus, the ZOHAR says that "we cleave below to secret Oneness, just as above."

Yet the power to become one below is only preparation for the root of Oneness above. Of this it says, "*He builds His upper stories in the Heavens, but establishes His foundations upon the earth.*" [Amos 9:6]

Because the generation of dispersion was a gathering not for the Sake of Heaven, since they abandoned the root and separated between the unity above and the unity here below, they had no choice but to forfeit their own unity and become divided into nations. This was their undoing. Still, even with the dispersion, the Holy Tongue was preserved for the Children of Israel... So long as they are a gathering for the Sake of Heaven... the rungs of the letters await... and their end will be sustained.

[[The Language of Truth](#), Torah Commentary of the Sefas Emes, pgs 15-16]

Rabbi ARTHUR GREEN...

Warsaw in 1900 was a center of Jewish socialist and communist activity. Many children of Hasidim were attracted by the message of labor organizers, and they began to follow these leaders of the Left as previous generations had followed Hasidic masters. The Rebbe here shows that he was well-aware of such thinking, and attuned to both the good and the bad within it. The desire to draw humanity into a universal bond was an attempt to recreate Eden. But doing it without a sense of true oneness and its divine root would lead instead to Babel.

So the conclusion of his teaching returns to Israel. If humanity is not united for the sake of God's oneness, surely the Jewish people must be! Here we see... a critique of all our secular efforts at proclaiming: "We are one!" If our unity does not see itself as a way to the oneness of all things in God, it is no better than the unity of Babel.