

Parshas Noach - One Language, One Purpose by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Bereishis 11:1 we are told that the entire world spoke one language and one speech. Rashi explains this to mean that the entire world was on one track of thinking; the generation that built the Tower of Bavel was hungry for power and wanted to rebel against Hashem whose power they could not surpass. The simplest meaning of the words, however, is that the entire world spoke one language and there was no difference in the languages spoken in different parts of the world. It was only when they started to build the tower of Bavel that Hashem gave the world different languages to create a communication gap to ensure that this tower would not be built.

While most linguistic scholars would not agree with this notion of how languages originated, this is our mesorah. Linguists, however, do understand that language is a medium of communication and when there is a language barrier, there can be no communication. Furthermore, language itself tells much about the culture and ideology of those who speak it. So the simple meanings of the words as well as the understanding of Chazal quoted by Rashi are closely related. They spoke one language literally, but they also had one evil purpose for which the one language was used which was to rebel against Hashem. Perhaps we can understand this idea better from the Maharsha on the Gemara Avoda Zara.

Chazal tell us that in the future there will be this restoration of this unity of purpose denoted by singularity of language. In the Gemara Avoda Zara 24a there is a discussion about the gentiles wanting to convert to our religion in the future. They will want to bring all of the ‘sheep of Kedar’ as offerings to Hashem. The Gemara discusses the issue as whether or not we can be certain that they will not only renounce their idolatry but also all of the immorality that is so prevalent in pagan societies. The verse is brought from Tzeplaniah 3:9 that Hashem will turn the world to one language to call upon the name of Hashem. The idea is reinforced with the end of the verse which states that they will worship *Schechem Achad*, total unity. This is understood by the Gemara to mean that idolatry and anything immoral that went with it will be totally obliterated.

The original language of the world was *Lashon Kodesh* and will be again in the future. The Maharsha on the Gemara quoted above emphasizes this point that our holy tongue was the original and ultimate language and all languages are considered foreign to it. The Maharsha also explains that

originally one language was served to foster rebellion, an incredible misuse of the language. But in the future this one language will be used to promote hamony and unity of purpose. Literally and figuratively, at this time, all other languages will be useless because there will be no room for any languages or ideologies that are against acknowledging Hashem's rule of over the world in any way. The objective of all language and all modes of expression will be to proclaim to the entire world that Hashem is the creator and king over the entire world.