

LANGUAGE BARRIER

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The lessons of the flood were just washed away. 340 years later the humans were up to their rebellious antics. This time, however, they were unified in rebellion. They decided that they would battle the Almighty by building a Tower that would ascend to the heavens. But their plans would topple like a house of cards. Hashem turned to his celestial hosts and declared, "Let Us descend and confuse their language that they should not understand one another's language" (Braishis 11:7).

Havoc reigned. When one construction worker asked for a brick he was handed a hammer. Someone asked for a ladder and they got a trowel. The only thing being built was discord and mistrust. Within days the project fell apart and the people and their languages were dispersed.

Why, however, did Hashem choose to destroy this project through a most delicate manner. Why not have a wind topple the tower or an earthquake shatter it. What message did Hashem send by confusing the languages? Jacob M. Braude, a former Illinois judge, tells the story of an American visiting the UK who was driving with an Englishman through London. During their trip some mud splattered on the car and the Englishman commented that the car's windscreen needed a cleaning.

"Windshield," retorted the American.

"Well, on this side of the pond we call it a windscreen."

"Then you're wrong," argued the American. "After all, we Americans invented the automobile, and we call it a windshield.

"That is mighty dandy," snapped the Englishman. "But who invented the language?"

My brother-in-law Rabbi Yitzchak Knobel, founder of Yeshiva Gedolah Ateres Yaakov in Woodmere, once noted something amazing. Though Hashem acts independently and needs not consult with any being before executing any decision, the Torah on a few occasions has Him descending to observe, and even consult with his celestial tribunal before taking action.

Last week, before creating man, the Torah quotes Hashem speaking, "Let Us make man." This week, when deciding to confuse the language of humankind, thus inhibiting the ability to communicate, Hashem also consults with inferiors. "Let Us descend and confuse." Hashem does not say, "I will descend and confuse." Both instances must be related.

The power of man over his co-creations is his ability to express his innermost feelings and expressions. The creation of man was more than the creation a physical entity with complex motor

functions. It was the creation of a being with the power of expression the power to communicate. When Hashem decided to remove the ability to communicate, He returned to his original tribunal the ones He originally consulted while empowering speech in humankind.

The greatest downfall of humankind is the removal of his superiority over the rest of the animal kingdom. That is accomplished when he does not communicate.

Recently, a billion dollar project to Mars was destroyed because the language of the metric system was spoken in one factory and feet and inches were spoken in the other.

Hashem taught those builders who wanted to reach G-d that their mortality did not lie in lime or mortar. Rather it lay in the small intangible gift that we all take for granted, yet is so fragile and not utilized properly. Our mortality begins and ends with our power to talk properly and for the correct reasons to our fellow human beings.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky Dedicated in memory of Reb Shimon Sumner by the Oliner Family

If you would like to be on a shiur update list which sends messages regarding Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky's various lectures in NY City and Long Island and other locations, please send a blank email to rmkshiur-subscribe@jif.org.il You will receive bulletins about those classes.

If you want to be on a shiur announcement faxlist, fax request along with your fax number (dedicated line, please) to 516-569-7954

Copyright © 1998 by [Rabbi M. Kamenetzky](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

If you enjoy the weekly Drasha, now you can receive the best of Drasha in book form! Purchase **Parsha Parables** - from the Project Genesis bookstore - **Genesis Judaica** - at a very special price!

The author is the Dean of the [Yeshiva of South Shore](#).

Drasha is the e-mail edition of FaxHomily, a weekly torah facsimile on the weekly portion which is sponsored by ***The Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation***

Books by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky:

