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Shema and Tefillah in Any Language

The seventh *perek* deals primarily with the various declarations that must only be said in *lashon ha'kodesh* (Hebrew). The first *Mishnah* however, lists those things that may be said in any language, including the recitation of *shema* and *tefillah*.

In practice however, can we really recite *shema* and prayer in any language? Is there any difference between praying in Hebrew, English or Japanese?

The *Mishnah Berurah* (O"C 62:3) makes two important points when it comes to reciting the *shema* in another language. Firstly, there is a qualitative difference between *lashon ha'kodesh* and other languages. Quoting the *Bach* he writes that it is indeed a *mitzvah min ha'muvchar* to recite the *shema* in *lashon ha'kodesh*. A distinction is also found in that one can fulfill the *mitzvah* of *shema* if recited in *lashon hakodesh* even if he does not understand Hebrew, which is not the case when it comes to other languages.

Interestingly the qualitative difference is to be found at the core of Hebrew and other languages. In the *Bei'ur Halacha* he explains that the ability to recite *shema* or *tefillah* in another language depends on whether the people of that locality, in general, speak that language. The reason is that unlike *lashon hakodesh*, that by its essence is a language, other languages are only considered languages by common agreement. Therefore if it is not spoken in that area, it is not a language!

The second point is that nowadays there is a technical hurdle preventing one from reading the *shema* in another language. It is practically impossible to provide a suitable translation of the *shema*. There are some words which we do not know how to adequately translate (eg, *totafot*). Alternatively, there

are some words that have two meanings, both of which essential to the *shema*. The example he brings is *ve'shinantem* which can both imply learning/teaching and 'having the words [of *Torah*] sharp' so that you can immediately respond to a question. The *Orach Ha'Shulchan* adds unless the translation is accurate word for word, it will no longer be considered *shema*. Consequently, he writes, as today we are unable to translate the *shema* it is forbidden to recite the *shema* in any other language.

But what about *tefillah*? Granted that it may be considered a *mitzvah min hamuvchar* to recite it in Hebrew, are other languages acceptable?

The *Mishnah Berurah* (O"C 101:13) writes that the ability to pray in another language was only infrequently. Modifying the prayers on a permanent basis is a completely different matter. On the one hand, the Hebrew format as penned by the *Anshei Knesset Ha'Gedolah* has far reaching effects beyond our comprehension (see *Bei'ur Halacha* there). Secondly, historically, when people digressed from the original format, the content deteriorated leading to the omission of fundamental components of prayer (see *Mishnah Berura* there). The *Tifferet Yisrael* (*Sotah* 7:1) writes that such initiatives may even border on "*b'chukoteihem lo te'lechu*".

We find that while the *Mishnah* writes that one may be able to recite *shema* and *tefillah* in other languages, today it does not seem practical. First and foremost, our inability to provide accurate translation is a technical barrier. Secondly, there are inherent dangers when we attempt to change the *tefillot* in a fixed manner. Finally we must appreciate that there is a qualitative difference between *lashon ha'kodesh* and all other languages.

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Revision Questions

סוטה ה' די' – ז' ח'

- How was the *shirat ha'yam* sung according to R' Akiva and how was it sung according to R' Nechemya? (ה' די')
- Who learnt that *Iyov* worshipped *Hashem* through *yir'ah* and who learnt that he worshipped *Hashem* through *ahavah*? (ה' די')
- Explain the debate regarding the level of *edut* required for *stirah*? (ז' א')
- What level of *edut* is required to prevent a *sotah* from drinking *mei sotah*? (ז' ב')
- Which witnesses would prevent a *sotah* for drinking *mei sotah* yet not prevent her for receiving her *ketubah*? (ז' ב')
- Which event requires a more formal level of *edut* – *kinui* or *stirah*? (ז' ג')
- From which *p'sukim* is the law described in the previous question derived? (ז' ג')
- If there are two conflicting testimonies regarding whether she was *nitmeit* when does she nonetheless drink *mei sotah*? (ז' די')
- Which seven things may be recited in any language? (ז' א')
- Which eight things must be recited in *lashon ha'kodesh*? (ז' ב')
- From where do we learn that *mikra bikurim* must be recited in *lashon ha'kodesh*? (ז' ג')
- From where do we learn that *chalitzah* must be recited in *lashon ha'kodesh*? (ז' ד')
- Regarding the *brachot* and *klalot*: (ז' ה')
 - On which mountain did *shevet levi* stand?
 - Towards which mountain were the *brachot* said?
 - Towards which mountain were the *klalot* said?
 - What was done when they were completed?
- What are the differences between how *birkat kohanim* was performed inside and outside the *beit ha'mikdash*? (ז' ו')
- What was the *birchot kohen gadol*? (ז' ז')
- When was *parashat ha'melech* read? (ז' ח')
- What did *parashat ha'melech* contain? (ז' ח')
- What was the difference between the *brachot* recited by the *kohen gadol* at '*birchot kohen gadol*' and the *brachot* recited by the *melech* at *parashat ha'melech*? (ז' ח')

Local Shiurim

Sunday -Thursday

Between mincha & ma'ariv
Mizrachi Shul

Friday & Shabbat

10 minutes before mincha
Mizrachi Shul

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
11 th March כ"א אדר	12 th March כ"ב אדר	13 th March כ"ג אדר	14 th March כ"ד אדר	15 th March כ"ה אדר	16 th March כ"ו אדר	17 th March כ"ז אדר
Sotah 8:1-2	Sotah 8:3-4	Sotah 8:5-9:1	Sotah 9:2-3	Sotah 9:4-5	Sotah 9:6-7	Sotah 7:7-8

