

# Hadracha Choveret



תנועת בני עקיבא  
BNEI AKIVA  
UNITED KINGDOM

BNEI AKIVA'S WEEKLY EDUCATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR MADRICHIM

## Languages



### Aims:

- To learn about the story of Migdal Bavel.
- To look at the links between languages and unity.
- To think about the purpose of languages.

Estimado Madrichim,

Espero que disfruten de este choveret. Bnei Akiva te necesita para educar bien a sviva. Esta semana vamos a aprender acerca de una historia cuando todas las personas en el mundo había una lengua aún trató de apoderarse del mundo. Debemos asegurarnos de que nuestros chanichim no lo hacen.

Mis mejores deseos,

Michael

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***Pictures from the Tikkun Leil Hoshana Rabba in memory of Yoni Jesner z'l and a BA trip to see England v Belarus at Wembley!***

Amod Noach! We're going to leave out the main character in this week's Parasha and focus on the story of Migdal Bavel, otherwise known as the Tower of Babel. This story took place in the (Jewish) year 1996, a few hundred years after the flood, and involved an attempt by all of humanity to build a tower that would reach the heavens. Hashem, however, was not impressed with this idea – Rashi brings an explanation that suggests that their real aim was to make war on Hashem.



We're going to learn about the one positive part to this story – that through having one language, they were united in their purpose. Before we start, have a think about what the world would be like with only one language? Do you think more people and countries would do things together?

Now let's see what actually did happen, via the BBC (Biblical Broadcasting Corporation) website article...

*(By the way, the original story can be found in Bereshit 11:1-9)*

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## **World dispersed after Tower collapse**

Plans to build a city and tower for all the citizens of the world were dealt a blow yesterday by the sudden emergence of different languages.

Prompted by the desire to build a tower to reach the heavens and make a name for themselves, these people, who had travelled eastwards towards Shinar, settled down and built the world's first global village.

Nimrod, rumoured to be the leader of the initiative, commented that there was a strong feeling of world unity and that the sudden appearances of languages could not have come at a worse time.

Experts now predict an exodus from the defunct building site, now being called Babel, to all of the previously uninhabited areas of the world.

[www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) is now available in over 70 languages.

Story from BBC NEWS:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3636207.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/3636207.stm)

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Following the great flood of Noach, all of humanity had lived in the same place (Central Asia). However, the story of the Tower of Babel saw two definitive turning points in the history of mankind, both of which led to the world as we know it today, with people living throughout the globe:

The Torah emphasises the first point through the opening passuk to the story: “And it was that all the earth was of one language and common purpose”. The Hebrew used to denote common purpose is the phrase ‘דברים אחדים’ – literally ‘united things’.

However this unity disappears by the end of the Parasha, and the Torah only comments that Hashem “confused the language of all the earth and from there Hashem dispersed them over the face of the earth”.

The Torah clearly suggests that having a common language leads to unity, whilst having different languages leads to disunity. However much Hashem did not like humans trying to build a big tower against Him, he appreciated the value of unity in their purpose.

Point to Ponder: This shows how we should always see the good in people and things, not the

Let's jump forward a few years...

In the late 1870s a Jewish man called Dr Ludovic Lazarus Zamenhof from Bialystock had a dream. He wanted to create a new world language! Not to replace people's mother tongues but to be an 'auxiliary' or 'second' language for every person in the world to unite behind, leading to more peace and understanding. Here's what he had to say...



*"In Bialystok the inhabitants were divided into four distinct elements: Russians, Poles, Germans and Jews; each of these spoke their own language and looked on all the others as enemies. In such a town a sensitive nature feels more acutely than elsewhere the misery caused by language division and sees at every step that the diversity of languages is the first, or at least the most influential, basis for the separation of the human family into groups of enemies. I was brought up as an idealist; I was taught that all people were brothers, while outside in the street at every step I felt that there were no people, only Russians, Poles, Germans, Jews and so on.*



The result of Zamenhof's idealism was 'Esperanto', a language which took words from other different tongues to be a new super-language! In the early years, poetry, literature and even grammar books appeared in Esperanto. However, it didn't take off in the way he expected - in a recent study, Esperanto is only spoken actively by 160,000-300,000 people in the world. Also, no country adopted the new language in any way. (Though they do have an annual world conference, the next one is in Cuba in 2010!). Out of interest, have you ever heard of Esperanto?

## *Points* TO *Ponder*

- ✚ Do you agree with Zamenhof's idea of a unified language?
- ✚ Was there a realistic chance it could work, and then lead to an increase in brotherhood and peace?
- ✚ Would you have made the effort to learn Esperanto?

We see very clearly that Zamenhof's ideas, however (un)realistic, were ultimately expressing the Torah's message that having one language leads to unity. It's not just about having the same words (although that helps things not to get 'lost in translation'), but about having a joint culture, understanding and meaning. In other words, language is a bond that brings people together - the wider the language is spoken, the bigger that bond.

**OK, we've seen that languages can unite people - but is there something more than that?**

"For then I will make the peoples pure of speech so that they will all call out in the name of Hashem and worship Him with one accord." (Tzeephaniah 3:9)

This quote is from the prophet Tzeephaniah, one of the 'Twelve Prophets' book (Trei Asar) included in the Tanach. Ibn Ezra explains this statement to mean that in the future, everyone will return to one language. But not just for the sake of it – rather, that the aim is to call out in the name of Hashem. This added element is what was missing in both the Tower of Babel story and Zamenhof's plan.

Yes, languages do unite us – but we must have a good purpose too.

The Jewish purpose for languages is to 'call out in the name of Hashem'. By mentioning Hashem and attributing everything to Him, we make the words we say holy and unite with those around us. Notice that the Torah repeatedly tells us that Avraham called out in the name of Hashem. Can you find examples of this?

# The Name of

(that's a dingbat by the way!)



So, just to clarify: until Tzechaniah's prophecy comes true we have many languages in the world, and there ain't much we can do about it! (Unless you're another Zamenhof). Therefore we need to learn the lessons behind language and internalise them – that of unity and attributing things to G-d.

One great way to do that is to look at the Hebrew language. Although this itself could be the topic of a choveret, it is worth thinking about because the one language that *was* and *will be* was of course, Hebrew. For instance, take a look at the following quote from the shacharit service, translate it and note the repetitive nature of the verse. The fact that there are so many different words to describe Hashem tells you something about what we value: (there are many other examples of this).

אֱמֶת, וְיָצִיב, וְנִכּוֹן, וְקַיָּים, וְיִשָּׁר, וְנֶאֱמָן; וְאֱהוּב  
וְחָבִיב, וְנִחְמָד וְנַעֲמִים, וְנוֹרָא וְאֲדִיר,  
וּמְתַקֵּן וּמְקַבֵּל, וְטוֹב וְיָפֵה, הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה עָלֵינוּ  
לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד: אֱמֶת, אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם מְלַכְנוּ צוּר

Another important Jewish lesson about language is not to speak badly about others. The lessons of *rechilut* (gossip), *lashon hara* (evil talk about others that is true) and *motzei shem ra* (evil talk about others that isn't true) are all in place to make sure we use language for the good and not for the bad.

Happy Speaking!

## In Summary...

- ✓ We have learnt about the story of Migdal Bavel – that although they had a bad aim, their unity was praiseworthy.
- ✓ We have seen the same idea resurface in modern times with the founding of a new language, Esperanto, that didn't quite work!
- ✓ In the future we will return to having one language, Hebrew, as Tzephaniah says.
- ✓ In the meantime, it is our job to use language to unite people, not to divide them; and to praise Hashem and attribute all things to Him.



- Conduct the peula in different languages – I'm sure between the tsevet there are those that can speak Ivrit, French, German and Spanish at least! The idea is to confuse the chanichim, so if one madrich is speaking French and the other German, not only do the chanichim find it hard to understand but the madrichim pretend to argue with each other over how to play the game etc
- Give everyone a task to achieve together and then shortly afterwards, stop them. At this point, give each chanich a few words that they are allowed to say (or if you prefer, words that they can't say) and see how the project goes.
- Chanichim have to make up their own language from scratch.
- Teach the song “הן עם” by Yaacov Shwekey – but change the words to a pasuk from this week's Parasha, Bereshit 11:6.

**Hadracha Tip:** When planning a peula, don't just look for tenuous links to fit in as many standard BA games as possible – try and think of the aim of the peula and create a game or activity around it. You will end up with activities that are more focused and more original.



And finally...



Do you remember when chanichim had to come to BA wearing blue and white? The official uniform for a madrich includes a movement shirt (white on Shabbat/festive occasions and blue at other times) with blue trousers/skirt. It also includes wearing an anivah and badges, but only with the white movement shirt!

*The Tower of Babybel* →



## Sviva of the Week: Radlett



**Roshim:** Josh Pomerance & Leslie Silver.

**Madrachim:** Amelia Aaronson, Abi Tarsh, Nicole Grossman, Ariella Midgen, Chloe Calman, Maddie Sinclair, Tom Goldstein & Harry Ingram.

### Some facts about Radlett:

- ❖ Radlett is a village with a population of around 8000 people. Between 25-35% are Jewish, the highest proportion of Jews to an area in the UK. This means that a Radlett BA Shabbat Ha'irgun comprises approx. 1% of the village!
- ❖ Radlett BA has a website: [www.radlettus.org/ba](http://www.radlettus.org/ba)
- ❖ Michael Jordan and Kolo Toure own property in Radlett
- ❖ Pat from Eastenders (real name = Pam St. Clement) lives in Radlett!

