

Parsha Ponders

Terumah | Feb 15, 2024 | 7 Adar I 5784

Colorful creature characteristics¹

וזאת התרומה אשר תקחו מאתם...וערת תחשים

And this is the donation that you shall take from them...the skins of the *tachash*²

One of the fundamental parts of the *Mishkan*, the portable Temple that accompanied the Jews in the wilderness, was *tachash* skins. Rashi tells us³ that they were beautifully composed of many colors. What animal was the *tachash*? It's hard to know⁴. Our Sages tell us that it was a creature that only existed at that specific time, never to exist again⁵.

Targum Onkelos, the Aramaic translation of the Torah, translates⁶ תחש as ססגונא. Rashi explains⁷ that this is a contraction of two words: סס גונא. The first word is homonymic with שש, rejoicing, and גונא is Aramaic for colors. This teaches us that the *tachash* rejoices⁸ in its colors, as it was a multicolored creature. One could ask how Rashi⁹ knows that ססגונא is a description of the *tachash*, and not simply the Aramaic word for *tachash*.

We can explain based on the understanding that Adam, the first man, named all of the animals, solidifying their identity forever¹⁰. As well, we know that all of the different languages developed only after the sin at the Tower of Babel. This included Aramaic¹¹. Now, our Sages told us that the *tachash* only existed at that time in the wilderness, for the purpose of the *Mishkan*. If so, it would come out then that the *tachash* wasn't around at the time of the Tower of Babel, when the Aramaic language developed. If so, why did the Targum Onkelos translate *tachash* as ססגונא, instead of keeping it as *tachash*? There is no Aramaic word for *tachash*! It must be then as Rashi says, that the Targum is providing us with a *description* of the *tachash*, not a translation. Good Shabbos

¹ Based on [Chanukas HaTorah parshas Terumah § 92](#)

² [Exodus 25:3,5](#)

³ *Ad. loc.*

⁴ [Midrash Tanchuma Terumah § 6](#) presents a dispute about the characteristics/identity of the *tachash*. Rabbi Yehuda says it was a kosher undomesticated animal with a single horn on its forehead, whose skin was composed of six colors (perhaps related to the Aramaic translation; see below and [Radak's Sefer HaShorashim](#)). It sounds somewhat like a unicorn. Rabbi Nechemiah says it existed only at that time. Although, I'm not sure why they have to be arguing. [Shabbos 28ab](#) brings a discussion if the *tachash* was a kosher animal or not, and seems to conclude that it was. Instead of Rabbi Yehuda, it is Rabbi Meir who says that it had a single horn. See also [Yerushalmi Shabbos 2:3](#) with [Korbon Ha'Eidah](#) and [Penei Moshe](#). There, it is Rabbi Hoshaya who says it had a single horn

⁵ *Ibid*, and [Rashi loc. cit.](#)

⁶ [Exodus 25:5](#)

⁷ *Ad. loc.*

⁸ Cf. [Aruch](#), who says that it was Moshe who rejoiced in its colors

⁹ Really, this question is on [Shabbos 28a](#), the source for [Rashi's](#) comment, but the [Chanukas HaTorah](#) asks it on [Rashi](#). He asks further why did [Rashi](#) choose to elaborate on this Aramaic translation, although [Rashi](#) does this on occasion so its unclear if this is a difficulty

¹⁰ See [Genesis 2:20](#) with [Rashi](#). I don't understand the relevance of this point for the [Chanukas HaTorah](#) (besides the issue raised in the next note)

¹¹ This premise of the [Chanukas HaTorah](#) is difficult with [Sanhedrin 38b](#), which says that Adam *HaRishon* spoke Aramaic. In fact, [Gur Aryeh](#) to [Deuteronomy 32:21 § 13](#) says that the Chaldeans, whose language was Aramaic, didn't participate in the Tower of Babel. Their language didn't result from the Tower of Babel, for why should they be punished for something they didn't do? He says that this is why their language isn't included in the "seventy languages" described by [Chazal](#). See also [Gevuros Hashem](#) Chapter 54