



 “Yiddish” and “Yiddishkeit”

A compilation of the teachings of the Rebbe, about **“Speaking Yiddish”**.

Chazal say¹ that one of the merits by which the Jewish people left Egypt was **“They did not change their language.”**

In a sicha² by the Rebbe Rayatz, he explains that this refers to **“Der Yiddishe galus shprach”** (the Jewish language of exile) which in recent generations is Yiddish.

The Rebbe explains³ at length in a sicha⁴, that there are indeed, exclusively unique qualities that Yiddish has which are not found in other languages⁵. Since for hundreds of years, Jewish practice in chadarim, yeshivos, and batei midrash, has been to speak, learn and translate words into Yiddish (Chumash, Mishnayos, Gemara).

As told in the Ha'Yom Yom⁶, “The Baal Shem Tov used to teach his Talmidim a Shiur in Gemara... The Baal Shem Tov would translate the words (of the text) into Yiddish.”

As well as in Tanya⁷, the Alter Rebbe says: “...The Baal Shem Tov z”l would say divrei Torah in Yiddish and not in Lashon Ha’Kodesh...” Likewise, have all the Rebbeim spoken (and said Chassidus) in Yiddish.

So it's understandable why the Rebbe has so strongly urged that the language spoken in chadarim be specifically Yiddish and not another language,

As we see in the following letters:

B”H, 20 Cheshvan 5714

The Hanhala of the yeshiva and Talmud Torah in Kfar Chabad

... In response to your question that until now you had classes where the language of instruction was Yiddish and you are uncertain about this concerning the upcoming term because of a number of reasons that you mention in your letter and you ask my opinion.

Despite the reasons you mention, you must continue speaking in Yiddish in these classes as it was until now...⁸.

¹ Mechilta Bo 12:6

² Likutei Dibburim vol. 3 p. 406

³ See Likutei Sichos vol. 21, p. 446 and the footnotes there.

⁴ That was said in connection with the siyum of Tanya on the radio in 5741.

⁵ See also Igros Kodesh vol. 10, letter #2987, “the Rebbe, my father-in-law would say, that deep and heartfelt [feelings] express themselves in Yiddish...”

⁶ 13 Cheshvan.

⁷ Igeres Ha’Kodesh, 25.

⁸ Igros Kodesh vol. 8, letter #2271

B”H, 6 Shevat 5714

“... in regard to learning “Ivrit b'Ivrit” - it is known how greatly the Rebbeim fought against this (despite the “claims” of the “educators” who sought, as it were the “benefit” of the Talmidim, which are the reasons cited in your letter)

It is better and easier that the candidates for teachers should learn the Yiddish language.⁹

We see from here how teaching in Yiddish is imperative.

On the other hand, however, there are many teachers and mechanchim that question this concept in a situation where the students are not familiar with the Yiddish language. Shall the teacher's language of instruction still be Yiddish, and he should also translate (teitch) the words of Chumash, Mishnayos etc. into Yiddish, because of the benefits therein? Or should he rather teach it in the language that is most familiar to the students?

The Rebbe answered this question, as we shall see in the following letters and oral answers:

Yiddish – “Who’s Responsibility?”

B”H, 15 Iyar 5728

The honorable representatives of the parents of the students of the Talmud Torah in Kfar Chabad

... I acknowledge the receipt of your letters and its point... the question about the language of instruction with the talmidim of the Talmud Torah.

... My opinion is, that since the main purpose of the Talmud Torah is to be mechanech the students to fear of Heaven and love for Him, and to teach them the Toras Hashem and its mitzvos whose “measure is longer than the earth and is wider than the ocean”¹⁰, which our Sages have therefore warned us¹¹ about interrupting the learning of the tinokos shel beis rabban (schoolchildren) to the extent that we are even forbidden to do so for the purpose of building the Beis Ha'Mikdash.

Based on this, it is obviously clear, that the language they should use to teach the talmidim is not the main thing, rather the

<p>“As for the special qualities of the Yiddish language, it bears looking into whether acquiring these advantages is the task of the school or the obligation of the parents and the</p>
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⁹ ibid letter #2388

¹⁰ Iyov 11:9

¹¹ Shabbos 119b, Hilchos Talmud Torah ADHZ perek 1, halacha 10.

points that were mentioned – the effectiveness and the increase in quantity and quality in the knowledge of Torah and the mitzvos.

Obviously, in a place where the language has an impact on matters of Yiras-Shamayim and the like, this must be taken into account when determining the language of instruction.

..As for your mentioning special qualities of the Yiddish language, it bears looking into whether acquiring these advantages is the task and responsibility of the school or the obligation of the parents and the atmosphere in the home.¹²

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B”H, 28 Nissan 5717

...R' Dovid...

...You wrote asking what the language of instruction should be for the bachurim and talmidim.

Since it is most important to inform them of the Mitzvos of Hashem and those things that we may not do, as this relates to actual practice, obviously there is no time to wait in these lessons until they understand a language other than the one they are accustomed to, and therefore, you need to teach them in the language they presently understand and use the entire time at your disposal to influence them and not for teaching a language, but rather to instill them with a spirit of Yiras Shamayim, Ahavas Hashem, and Ahavas HaTorah¹³.

* * *

B”H, 13 Iyar 5717

You write asking whether the learning with your son should be done specifically in Yiddish and not in English.

Since you and your wife know Yiddish, and the hours your son spends in school are very limited as is the practice in this country. Therefore, the accustoming your son to speaking and understanding Yiddish should rather be something you and your wife are involved in, and in school, until he is used to Yiddish, he should learn in the language that he is more used to, so that he acquires greater knowledge¹⁴.

B”H, 5 Kislev 5704

¹² Igros Kodesh vol. 25, letter #9491.

¹³ Igros Kodesh vol. 15, letter #5404

¹⁴ ibid, letter #5444

To the outstanding young man, R' Yehuda Tzvi Fogelman, Buffalo

Regarding the question about the language of instruction.

As you describe the situation, our advice is to teach the children, temporarily, entirely in English, and at the same time to make an effort, over time, for them to learn Yiddish too, and then you can switch the language of instruction to Yiddish¹⁵.

Let us now summarize the above Hora'os (instructions), which at first glance may seem contradictory:

1-Sometimes we should insist on speaking/teaching in Yiddish.

2-Sometimes we should not insist on teaching in Yiddish; on the contrary, one should not compel the students to learn in Yiddish, but in the language that is easiest and most understood by them.

Though, over time Yiddish should also be taught and then you can switch to teaching in Yiddish¹⁶.

In truth, however, these two Hora'os are not contradictory, but are dealing with entirely different scenarios, as follows:

1-When then Rebbe says the language should not be switched from Yiddish to another language, it is (**as it says in the letter**) because until that time, they had classes where the language of instruction was **Yiddish!**, and this should obviously not be changed.

2-When the students do not understand Yiddish, they should absolutely not be taught in Yiddish, but in the language they understand.

Yet, simultaneously, the Rebbe's instructed, that "**at the same time to make an effort, over time, for them to learn Yiddish too.**"

To illustrate this clearer, I will what Rabbi Cousin *shelita*, former principal in the Chabad yeshiva in London, related:

"In the 1970's, most of the students in our school spoke exclusively in English and the question arose regarding the language of instruction in school, whether to teach in Yiddish or English since some of the parents demanded that Yiddish be used even though most of the students did not (yet) understand Yiddish.

"Since I did not know what to do, when I had yechidus with the Rebbe at that time, I asked him what to do. The Rebbe told me:

¹⁵ ibid volume 21, letter #7787

¹⁶ Ibid.

“If they want the students to be taught the Yiddish language, then speak Yiddish with them in the lunchroom and in the yard at recess but don't use the Chumash as the “tool” to teach them Yiddish. They should study Chumash only in the language that they understand.”

Similarly, the Rebbe stated his opinion on this in yechidus with Mr. Frank Lautenberg in 5732 (the following is a transcript from an actual recording¹⁷):

“I am not (in favor) of ... the Yeshivos who are very enthusiastic about forcing the people to teach all subjects in Yiddish, Gemara etc.

I am not enthusiastic about it. We are spending a lot of time to learn a new language and after they have learned it, they have a language barrier, they cannot speak fluently, then are thinking in English, and it is a pity on the time lost, as I said before, “the building is burning!” It is not a normal time. And to say it in a good way, it is a computer era; a computer must have the results in one second.”

So too, **and in even stronger language**, the Rebbe responded to R' Aron Dov Sufrin a”h, who served for nearly forty years as Director of Education of Lubavitch Foundation, London UK. As follows:

What may C”V turn our children away from Torah and Yiddishkeit?

Notes from R' Aron Dov Sufrin’s Yechidus with the Rebbe, 20 Adar II 5725

Issue:

Most of the children in our school (The school referred to is Lubavitch House School in London UK) speak English at home. However in each class there are at least half the parents who would like their children to be taught in Yiddish, and one child has left because of this.

.. We therefore wish to know what our policy should be for running the school, to teach in Yiddish or English.

The Rebbe’s Response:

“Tell the parents who want everything taught in Yiddish that they most probably also want their children to grow up to be shomrei Torah u'mitzvos, Torah observant Jews.

¹⁷To hear the actual recording of this Yechidus, double-click on this box → 

If their children will be taught in Yiddish, which is a strange language to them, they may develop distaste to everything they learn. This will affect them in the future development of their personal Yiddishkeit (Judaism)¹⁸.

It is appropriate to speak to them in Yiddish during their playtime, recess, breaks, or when telling them a story as this will help expand their familiarity with the language; however, not when teaching them formal Yiddishkeit subjects."

So, the Rebbe's view is clear.

The sole responsibility of the teacher is to use every moment for **teaching Torah and Yiras Hashem**, thus, they must speak in the language the students understand best, whether it's Hebrew, Yiddish, English, French etc.

Remember! If their children will be taught in Yiddish, which is a strange language to them, they may develop distaste to everything they learn. This will affect them in the future development of their personal Yiddishkeit.

Especially as the Rebbe says, **"In a place where the language has an impact on matters of fear of Heaven and the like, then this must be taken into account when determining the language of instruction, in accordance with this.**

Hence, it is obvious that when you speak in the language that the children understand best, you will be more successful in instilling Yiras Hashem. Conversely, when you speak in a language unfamiliar to them.

What a pity for every day and every lesson that the student does not understand. It's a loss that can never be regained.

Let us also add the point:

When 90% of the English-speaking students are struggling to understand Yiddish, it adds another road-block to his success in learning.

Because, while it is obviously quite challenging for a teacher to teach 20-25 students at different comprehension-levels, this adds more to the misery. For while the teacher is "drilling" the Yiddish teitchen (20 or more times!!) to the English-speaking students, who anyway don't grasp it well, they are consequently "turned off".

At the same time, the Yiddish-speaking kids are "bored out of their box"! Because they've already "got it" at the 1st or 2nd time!!! So, they are simply wasting their time hearing the "teitch" an additional 18 times! so they too, get "turned-off" (and in many cases, they become the "trouble-makers" of the class).

So it's a total "Lose-Lose" Situation.

¹⁸The Rebbe is seemingly indicating a(n additional) prevention against "drop-outs". (Compiler's note).

Yet, to our dismay, many of our schools still insist on teaching (and “teitching”) in Yiddish, although for most of the students, this is **not** their language.

Isn’t this diametrically opposed to the Rebbe’s clear instructions?!

A French proverb says: “**Don’t attempt to be more “Royal” than the King himself!**”

Yiddish vs. Yiddishkeit!

Let us not forget what was the mistake of the infamous “**Yiddishisten**” who have erred in this, placing their primary focus on the language of **Yiddish**, and not on “**Yiddishkeit**”.

Likewise, the shitah of “**Ivrit-B’Ivrit**”, against which the Rebbeim have waged many wars. Their mistake was that they focused primarily on learning the language (!) and not the Torah!

Practical Suggestions:

How to follow the Rebbe’s instructions?

Option A.

After attending several teacher-training seminars (from Rabbi Meir Pogro and Rabbi Rietti), I adapted a revolutionary approach in teaching chumash (- in sync with the Rebbe’s Horo’os).

In a nutshell:

Step a) I read and review the new possuk many times with the “Trup” of Ta’amei-hamikra, after 6-7 times, the children join in with me.

Step b) I tell them the narrative of the Possuk, and then I Teitch the possuk, phrase by phrase, in English only (NO Yiddish) and then review it merely a few¹⁹ times with the children, till they know it well²⁰;

The results are amazing: **100% !!**

- The children were able to review the pesukim on their own, **with the “Trup”(!), followed by the English translation (many times - using their own words)**.

¹⁹ Yes! No need to repeat it 10 - 20 times!!

²⁰ (Someone who is teaching in a cheder whose policy is to teitch in Yiddish, will naturally have to take the next step - **step c**) : Once they fully understand the possuk and are able to recite the possuk in their OWN words in English, then you may introduce the Yiddish Teitch. (And, by the way, they “catch” the Yiddish-Teitchen much quicker, since they already understand it in their own language, namely – English.)

In all of my teaching-years, I have never had such a **FULL** participation of my class in learning and understanding the Chumash as this year!

And what more, an extra bonus! They (eventually) were able to recognize and sing the “trup” by themselves, without me having to sing it to them first (although they were never formally taught the “trup” signs and rules).

ALL the children²¹ are full of Chayus and excited to learn. They even beg me to learn more and more.

Some children are even able to go ahead and “teach **me**” the next possuk!

And to top it off:

I have B”H succeeded this year in learning far more chumash (quantitatively and qualitatively) than all my previous years! That is, instead of learning the usual quota of 2-1/3 Parshios (Beraishis, Noach and part of Lech Lecha), we learnt up to Sheini in Vayeira!!

Option B.

To introduce the Yiddish language to the children in **preschool**, by speaking with them exclusively in Yiddish - ***“Total immersion”***.

Consequently, by learning in Yiddish in preschool for two years (nursery and kindergarten), the children (ages 3-4) will quickly pick-up the language²², - much faster than when they are older (age 5-6 etc.).

(It is true, that the “Ideal” way is by speaking in Yiddish at all times, at home, in shul, at play, etc. – as is the case in many chassidishe communities-. Yet, we have to begin “somewhere” ...) ²³

Summary:

Considering all the above, it is clear from the Rebbe’s Hora’os, that we only have one of two choices:

- a) We MUST teach them in Yeshiva in their native-language, namely – English, French, Hebrew etc.**

And so far as learning Yiddish language, the children will acquire this by means of a separately designed curriculum (work-books etc.).

- b) Those who nevertheless INSIST on teaching in Yiddish, then, in order to (rightfully) teach our Talmidim in Yiddish, and succeed in raising them to be Ehrliche Yidden,**

²¹ There are, obviously, some cases where a child may have a learning disability, disabling him to “jump onto the bandwagon”, which must be addressed in particular.

²² Based on proven scientific studies, at age 3-4 a child is able to pick up any language extremely quickly, versus at the age of 5-6, it is much harder.

²³ A few Mosdos Chinuch in Crown Heights (Ohr Menachem and Beis Chaya Mushka), have implemented this idea several years ago, where there is total Yiddish immersion in the entire pre-school. The results are truly amazing: these children are learning totally in Yiddish, with no comprehension difficulties (so far as Yiddish is concerned). There even are many children who play with their friends in Yiddish!

Shomrei Torah U'Mitzvos, then, it must begin with total Yiddish immersion in Pre-School²⁴, resulting in having the children understand and speak fluently in Yiddish.

By exclusively following the Rebbe's horo'os, we will surely see, with Hashem's help, a remarkable advancement on the part of the students, including their behavior, so that they become true and loyal Chassidim of the Rebbe, Ready to march to the Geulah!

SUPPLEMENT

Questions & Answers

Question: For hundreds of years, Yiddish has been the language used for learning Torah. And the Rebbe says²⁵ that the Yiddishe-Golus-Shprach is so important! So how can we be so confident that this change (to teach in their mother-tongue, although it's not Yiddish) will be beneficial? Can we imagine how the cheder and yeshiva students will turn out? What sort of "atmosphere" will the Yeshiva have?

Besides, they will not be able to understand the Rebbe's Sichos (etc.) in Yiddish!

Although we may still teach them Yiddish as a subject, but you know, it's just not the same!

A. Believe me; I too, am personally "torn" in this matter.

For, on one hand, I personally "picked up" Yiddish from being taught Chumash etc. in Yeshiva with **Yiddish teitch!**

(I have also witnessed during over 30 years of teaching English-speaking children in Yiddish, that eventually, they too "picked-up" the Yiddish.)

But, on the other hand, I must confess that I have poorly understood the Chumash, and naturally lacked the Geshmak in learning it.

I undoubtedly believe, that had I learned Chumash in **my native language** I would have learnt much more and with more appreciation of Hashem's Torah.²⁶

Thus, let me ask you: what is the goal of a Yeshiva: **a)** To teach in Yiddish, thereby insuring that the students "pick-up" the Yiddish language, albeit on the expense of **understanding** and **appreciating** Hashem's Torah. Or, **b)** to teach them Torah in their native language, so that they actually learn Torah and appreciate it.

As the saying goes, "**Don't try to act more royal than the King!**" – If this is what the the Rebbe guides us to do, how dare we disobey?!

²⁴ How much more beneficial would it be, if the language home too would be Yiddish. But, this is not in our hands, rather – what is in our hands, is to implement it in school, since we are the one's undertaking the responsibility of the children's chinuch.

²⁵ Likuttei Sichos vol. 6 p. 194

²⁶ Till today I can recall how in 2nd grade, I was once punished to have to spend a day in 1st grade, just because I couldn't translate the words "קמח-סולת" into Yiddish! (I probably had no idea what it meant in English either!)

Q. But, isn't it the yeshiva's responsibility to provide the child with such a vital tool, as Yiddish? How dare we drop it?

A. Let me answer with a parable:

A teacher once planned a class trip to the park. Since it was supposed to be a cold day, he sent a note home to the parents, urging them to make sure that the kids should come dressed warm.

The next day, 2 kids came to school without proper dress. So the Rebbi had to (reluctantly) leave them behind. The Rebbi surely made sure that they have some kind of other activity instead.

That evening, the teacher naturally got a call from one of the two parents, complaining why her son was left behind.

The teacher explained her, "I had no other choice than to leave him behind, because he came to school without a coat. As your son's health is obviously in our mutual interest"

The lesson: The Rebbi would gladly teach in Yiddish had the children his class been "properly dressed" – that is, properly trained **from their home** in fluently speak and understand Yiddish! But, now that the children do not know Yiddish from their home – what is the Rebbi to do? Take them to the park and have them freeze?! That is, to teach them in a **foreign language and turn them off, Chas Vesholom?!**

In other words: had the children been trained into speaking Yiddish fluently at home or at least in pre-school, by means of a "Total-Yiddish-immersion" program, then our question will (probably²⁷) not be relevant, for they are **properly geared to learn in Yiddish.**

Yes, if the parents (and pre-schools) put in the effort to train the very young children to speak Yiddish fluently, that it is their NATIVE language, the entire problem would נ"ע resolved!

Otherwise, the Rebbe writes²⁸: "**it bears looking into whether acquiring these advantages (of speaking Yiddish) is the task and responsibility of the school or the obligation of the parents and the atmosphere in the home**".

Bottom line: The Yeshiva has to focus on the best way to teach the child Torah (not a language!).

Q. But if as you say, that there is absolutely no room for teaching English-speaking children in Yiddish. Then, we are consequently faced with the following dilemma:

At some (early) stage of their Torah-education development, the children will need to attain the ability to express themselves in writing, as well as answer questions on tests, homework etc.

²⁷ "**Probably**" – but (perhaps) not necessarily so, since they still speak at home in English which makes English their **primary** language in thought and speech. In the Rebbe's words: "**.. After they have learned Yiddish, they have a language barrier, they cannot speak fluently, they are thinking in English, and it is a pity on the time lost,**"

²⁸ Igros Kodesh vol. 25, letter #9491.

If they learn in English, wouldn't they need to acquire some basic English reading/writing skills.

In other words, since they speak, learn and *teitch* in English, wouldn't we be forced to teach these children basic English language skills?²⁹

Indeed, the Rebbe says that we should not teach our children "Limudei-chol", yet, there might be room for speculation whether this applies in our situation too, where nearly all of our children speak exclusively English.³⁰

In other words, does the Rebbe's prohibition against young children learning Limudei Chol extend to reading and writing too³¹?

Also, consider the chinuch-circumstances in 1954, When the Rebbe spoke about not teaching secular subjects to children (at least) until the age of 9-12 years old. There were then hardly ANY "kosher" English books to read. So, even if the prohibition extended as far as teaching basic ABC, reading etc. there was a definite danger of exposure to "goyeshe" literature etc.

On the other hand, today, there are ב"ה many thousands of Torah-based books in English, which have brought גגלה and חסידות down to an unprecedented level of understanding to children of all ages.³²

So, perhaps it is OK to teach the children the very basics in reading and writing English.

A. I cannot answer such a question. In fact, I have consulted dozens of Chassidische Rabbonim and mechanchim, who have all said the same thing: "**what you're saying makes sense, but, to make such a drastic move, we need a unanimous consensus and decision from many Rabbonim and Mechanchim**".

Klotz-Kasha!

Q. The entire argument about whether a teacher of English-speaking children should Teitch Chumash (Gemara, etc.) into Yiddish or not (apparently) makes no sense **whatsoever!!**

²⁹ Obviously, by means of an **exclusive** carefully designed Torah-oriented curriculum to give the children the needed skills to read and write. This will not be a Language class, rather a skills class and **once the skills are obtained, these lessons will end.**

³⁰ Especially, upon noting, that the famous series "In Nature's Wonderland" printed in the "Talks and Tales" is replete with the sciences of the world around us, **Al-Taharas-haKodesh.**

³¹ **Plus, consider the following point:** We already teach our children the shapes and meanings of "punctuation marks" (question mark, exclamation mark, comma, period, etc.), as well as "numbers", even though these shapes are not originally based in the Torah!

Consequently, by the same token, we should apparently be allowed to teach them the shapes of the ABCs, which is their native language and will regardless pick up from their surroundings sooner or later?

And, again, we are not speaking about children who speak and think in Yiddish. Rather, we are talking about teaching English speaking children to learn how to put their thoughts into writing.

³² This does not mean that the Yiddish language will be totally abandoned. But, rather, as the Rebbe says, it will be introduced to the children during story-time, recess time etc. and as many schools have implemented the Yiddish language as a subject per se.

First of all, why have Yidden (originally) used the Aramaic translation of the Torah named **“Targum Unkelos”**?

Because there were many Yidden whose native language was Aramaic, and they did not understand the Holy Language of the Torah³³, Lashon HaKodesh, so instead of waiting for them to learn Lashon-Hakodesh and only then teach them the Torah, the **Targum-Unkelos** was made available to them³⁴.

The same is in regard to the Gemara. The reason it was written in **Aramaic** (the native language in those times) was only in order to facilitate its learning to everyone.

Many years have passed, and people once again needed a (new) translation of the Torah, in their native language, namely Yiddish. That’s when the Yiddish-teitchen were introduced³⁵.

Did anyone get up (then) and say **“Chas-veshalom to change our “holy” tradition of translating Chumash into Aramaic. We must keep on using our “Traditional” Aramaic translation of Unkelos!**

Instead of saying “Vayoimer=Un Er Hut Gezugt”, we must say it in Aramaic “Vayoimer=Va’amar”!

The same thing is with the Gemara, the reason why yeshivos began translating Gemara into Yiddish, was only because **Yiddish** was their **Native-language**. We never heard of a yeshiva saying **“How dare we change our Mesora?! We must continue to teach the Gemara in Aramaic!”**

Absolutely not! Why not? Because, as the Rebbe says, a Yeshiva has **ONE AND ONLY** focus and duty, that is, to **teach the children Torah!**

So, when the native language was Lashon HaKodesh, there was no need to Teitch. But when the need to translate emerged, then we translated the Torah into Aramaic, and eventually, into Yiddish!

In fact, the (contemporary) *Teitch* of the word “Teitch” is **“Meaning”**³⁶. **Not “Yiddish-language”!**³⁷

³³ See article of Rabbi Daniel Goldberg (“YIDDISH – VOS VET ZINE MIT DIR?,” which was reviewed and edited/corrected (מגור) **by the Rebbe for Di Yiddishe Heim vol. #103**. This article can be obtained by visiting www.chinuchtime.com/more/ - choose article “Teaching in Yiddish-?”

³⁴ When fulfilling the Mitzvah of “Ma’avir-Sedrah”, we use Targum-Unkelos. But this is mainly due to other reasons, and not for ordinary learning purposes.

For more details on the origin of Targum-Unkelos (that it actually was handed down from Har-Sinai) and the many reasons behind this Mitzvah, See Sefer “Otzar-Sh’nayim-Mikra-Vechad-Targum” by Rabbi Shmuel Laufer, Israel 5750.

³⁵ BTW, to translate Torah into the native language) is not a new concept. When Moshe reviewed the Torah to the Yidden at Arvos Moav, He was instructed by Hashem to translate it into 70 languages. So that when Yidden begin moving into different areas they should have the Torah available to them in any local language.

³⁶ See Yiddish-English dictionary. Uriel Weinreich. Schocken Books, NY. Page 598.

³⁷ Although the actual origin of the word “Teitch” is “Deutch” (Yiddish-Jargon).

Thus, to insist on Teitching the words of Chumash (to English-speaking students) **into Yiddish** is the **exact opposite of what “Teitch” is meant for!**

It is as ridiculous as insisting to translate the Chumash into Targum Onkelos!

Yes, Yiddish is special. But, as the Rebbe says, it must be taught as a separate subject, **not on the expense of learning Torah!**

Let me end with a parable:

Yossi is a yeshivah-boy who lived on 780 Grape Street.

At the beginning of the school-year, Duddy, the Yeshiva bus-driver was instructed to make a trip every day to 780 Grape Street to pick him up and bring him to Yeshivah which he faithfully did for the following 6 months.

Then one day Duddy was told that the boy moved to 163 Main Street and needs to be picked up from there.

But, Duddy, the Bus-driver, refused to do so, and just continued going to Yossi's old address on Grape Street!

When asked, Duddy answered: **“I am following instructions given to me at the beginning of the year, to pick him up from Grape St. - it's not my fault that now Yossi is not there!?”**

The lesson is obvious: a thousand years ago, when Yiddish-Teitch was introduced, it was only because that was the spoken language and the only way the (masses of the) Yidden were able to learn and understand the Torah.

But, in 2012, when the Yidden **“Moved”** to another language, don't we have to “pick them up” from where they are now?!!!

It is true, that over the years, Yiddish had become a holy language because the Yidden have used it for learning Torah. But, isn't Aramaic of the Gemara also a holy language, and yet, when the Yidden “Moved” to Yiddish, their teachers “followed them” and began teaching them Gemara in Yiddish!

So now that the Talmidim “moved” over to English, should we not follow them?

A. I agree.

Q. But there isn't there a better solution. Actually – the BEST solution. That parents put in the effort and bring up their children with a fluent Yiddish.

The fact is, that countless English speaking parents, myself included, have stubbornly insisted on speaking in Yiddish at home with their younger and older children, and the children grew up not only understanding Yiddish, but also speaking (!) a fluent Yiddish.

So all those advocating a change of the yeshiva's system, to teach in English, should rather launch a campaign amongst all parents bring their children up speaking Yiddish fluently, that it becomes their "mother-tongue".

Then, we will be able to continue the teaching and learning Torah in Yiddish, as in the past 1,000 years!

Bottom line: we surely want to teach our children according to the Rebbe's Hora'ah. So we have ONLY two options:

Option A: The English speaking parents, learn the Yiddish language and use that as the "home-language", so that the child acquires it as his mother-tongue, he can then learn torah in yeshiva IN YIDDISH.

- Alternatively, and more practical: Use a well-known "TESTED-AND-PROVEN" method, namely, that Pre-school should go **total immerSSION** in Yiddish;

Otherwise - Option B: Please read the above article once again.

Rabbi Levi Goldstein



WHAT LANGUAGE DID OUR ANCESTORS SPEAK?

One of our ancestors' merits for which they were liberated from Egypt was that they did not change their language (Midrash Shmos Rabba,32).

Was this language Loshon HaKodesh—Hebrew? It is by no means certain. The Kuzari (11:68) states that our father Avrohom spoke two languages, Loshon HaKodesh for holy purposes and the Aramaic of his native land for secular purposes.

This may have continued during succeeding generations. Avrohom's daughter-in-law, our mother Rivka, must have been well acquainted with the Aramaic her brother Lovon spoke (see Vayeitzei 31:47). Her son, our father Yaakov, married four of Lovon's daughters and raised twelve of his thirteen children in Aram. The mothers and their children must have known Aramaic, the language spoken in their native land.

On the other hand, they certainly spoke Loshon HaKodesh, as we see from the names Leah and Rochel gave their children, all based on words of Loshon HaKodesh (Breishis 29:32-35, 30:6-13,

18-24). But it may be that, like Avrohom, they used it only for holy purposes and within the family, otherwise speaking Aramaic.

For 890 years, from the Exodus from Egypt till the first Beis HaMikdosh was destroyed, our people spoke Loshon HaKodesh as a language of daily use. Ever since, however, most of them have spoken other languages for all purposes except prayer and Torah-study (see Alter Rebbe's Hilchos Talmud Torah, ch. 2. Kuntres Acharon 2; Rebbe RaShaB's Igros Kodesh II, letter 459, p. 819).

A THOUSAND YEARS OF ARAMAIC

After the first Beis HaMikdosh was destroyed, most Jews were exiled to Babylonia. There they adopted (the local Aramaic, a daughter tongue of Loshon HaKodesh and very close to it. From then on, the primary language of all Jews both there and in the Holy Land remained Aramaic for over a thousand years.

Later, when Greek and Roman influence spread, Greek was widely spoken in the Holy Land, and Latin less so. But neither superseded

Aramaic as the spoken tongue for most Jews. In fact, pockets of Aramaic-speaking Jews— in remote areas like Kurdistan—persisted until modern times.

Parts of our Siddur are still in Aramaic, dating back to when it was the common language. For ordinary Jews, the TaNaCh was translated into Aramaic—Targum Onkelos (we still review it with the weekly Torah portion), Targum Yonasan ben Uziel, Targum Yerushalmi, and Rav Yosefs Targum on Nevi'im and Kesuvim.

LOSHON HAKODESH NO LONGER SPOKEN

Loshon HaKodesh was now no longer spoken (except by Torah scholars and their families—Hilchos Talmud Torah, *ibid.*).

As RaMBaM expresses it (Hilchos Tefila 1:4): "When the Jewish people went into exile at the time of Nevuchadnetzar the wicked, they mingled with Persians, Greeks and other nations. Children were born to them in the lands of the nations, and the language of these children was confused. Everyone's language was a mixture of many tongues, and when anyone spoke, he could not speak adequately in any one language, but only incoherently. As it is said (Nechemia 13:24): 'And their children spoke half in Ashdodic, and they did not know how to speak the Jewish language, but according to the language of each people.' "

Even Torah scholars no longer spoke the original pure Loshon HaKodesh. This is evident from the Hebrew of the Mishna, which includes Greek and Latin words, and many more in Aramaic. Heavily influenced by Aramaic construction, it includes many words now considered Hebrew, though they are of Aramaic origin and are "Hebraized" only in form (see Maamar A1 Dikduk Loshon HaMishna, standard Mishna editions, vol. I). Since Loshon Kodesh was no longer the language of daily use for most Jews, it became somewhat "artificial" in form and absorbed elements of other languages then prevalent.

WHY DID JEWS STOP SPEAKING LOSHON HAKODESH?

The era of the first Beis HaMikdosh had been one of open miracles, prophecy and exalted Divine revelation, especially in the Beis HaMikdosh itself. This high spiritual level enabled Jews to better

control their speech, keeping it devoted to holy purposes.

The misdeeds culminating in the Destruction, however, plunged Jews to a lower level, void of prophecy and open Divine revelation. No longer were they able to use Loshon HaKodesh in everyday life for its exalted holy purpose. After the Talmudic era, even Torah scholars no longer spoke Loshon Hakodesh (see Rebbe RaShaB's Igros Kodesh II, letter 459, p. 819-821).

JEWISH-ARABIC, PERSIAN & SPANISH

When the Arabs conquered the Middle East and North Africa during the 7th-8th centuries, the language of Jews in these lands became Arabic, another daughter tongue of Loshon HaKodesh. Arabic became so firmly rooted among Jews that it was used for many Halachic responsa and some of the greatest classics of Jewish thought: Saadia Gaon's writings, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi's Kuzari, Rabbi Bachayei ibn Pakudei's Chovos HaLevovos, and all RaMBaM's writings except his Mishne Torah Halachic code.

Jews in these lands speak Arabic till today, studying these works in the original Arabic written in Hebrew script. But the Arabs were unsuccessful in imposing Arabic on Persia. Jews, like their non-Jewish neighbors, continued speaking Persian, producing Torah works in Jewish-Persian, also written in Hebrew script.

Meanwhile, Jews had migrated to Italy, Spain and Northern Europe, where they spoke the local languages. RaMBaM apparently did not know Spanish from his childhood in Arab Spain. But RaMBaN (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman), who lived in Christian Spain in the following century, clearly knew Spanish well.

Spanish ("Sefaradi") Jews, after their 1492 expulsion from Spain, brought their native Castilian to many communities— Salonika in Greece, Istanbul and Izmir in Turkey, Sarajevo in Yugoslavia, Adrianople in Bulgaria, and cities of North Africa.

This Jewish-Spanish is known as Ladino ("Latin" tongue) or Judaismo, also written in Hebrew script. Ladino's great classic is Me'am Loez, a series of popular Torah commentaries initiated by Rabbi Yaakov Culi, and continued by others. Ladino was widely spoken till the Germans exterminated Salonikan and Balkan Jewry in World

War II. Israel still has Ladino newspapers, attesting to its continued prevalence, at least among older Sefardim.

A THOUSAND YEARS OF YIDDISH

Early Jewish communities in France and England spoke French. French t/words made their way into many Torah works of the early Middle Ages. Every Yeshiva child has encountered the "B'laaz"—Old French words RaShI uses to translate unusual Loshon Kodesh words or explain concepts in familiar language for his students of all ages—from the five-year old starting Chumash (the five Books of Moses) and up.

RaShI uses occasional words of German origin, for his town in North-Eastern France was close to German-speaking areas, and there was constant movement between the cities. In the following years, cruel persecutions and expulsions shifted the focal point of Northern European Jewry from France to Germany.

Jews had lived in Germany since Roman times, and important communities flourished when Rabbeinu Gershom, teacher of RaShI's teachers, taught there. As the center of Jewry moved eastward, German Jewry became the spiritual successors to RaShI's school of teaching, under the influence of his disciples and their disciples—collectively known as the Baalei Tosafos. Thus arose the great community of Ashkenazi (i.e. "German") Jewry.

Ashkenazi Jewry spoke Old German (from which Yiddish and modern German both evolved—not, as early 18th-19th century "Maskilim" thought, that Yiddish was a corrupted form of the "pure" German language). Known originally as "Teitsch" (i.e. "Deutsch"—German), more recently as "Zhargon" ("jargon" or dialect), Jewish-German is now universally known as "Yiddish."

Until the late 19th century in Germany and Austria, and until World War II elsewhere, Yiddish was spoken universally by all Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe, from Alsace-Lorraine to the Ukraine, from Latvia to Rumania.

Within Yiddish are many local dialects. Even Germany had its own Yiddish, naturally closer to modern German than dialects of Jews further east. Jews of German-speaking areas—Austria, Czechoslovakia, Western Hungary and Western

Poland—likewise spoke a Yiddish much closer to German. Other principal dialects of Yiddish have been in Lithuania-White Russia, Ukraine-Volhynia, Poland-Galitzia, and Eastern Hungary-Rumania-Carpathia.

All are easily distinguishable by their differing accents, though the wider groupings include many local variants in accent and vocabulary. In the past, Jews from one area often could not understand the unfamiliar accents and dialect of other areas!

These days we expect every language to have "standard" usage, spelling and grammar. But such a standard language never really arose for Yiddish, despite efforts of secular Yiddishists in the present century. None of the local dialects can be considered more standard or educated usage than others.

ELEVATING OTHER LANGUAGES

These languages adopted by the Jewish people were always written in Hebrew script. All included many Hebrew and Aramaic words, especially for Torah practices and concepts. Most significantly, all differed from non-Jewish usage.

Jewish-Arabic dialects in lands like Morocco and Iraq differed from those spoken by the local non-Jews.

Ladino has remained amazingly similar to Spanish even 500 years after the 1492 expulsion (An Israeli I know learned Ladino in his Turkish born parents' home, yet has no problem conversing in Spanish with a non-Jew from Peru!). Nevertheless, Sefardim have always spoken it with differences from non-Jewish usage, especially after it absorbed words of Hebrew, Turkish, Arabic and Italian (depending on the locale).

Yiddish has come so far that Yiddish speakers unfamiliar with German do not easily understand a full conversation in that language. German speakers have an even harder time because of the many Hebrew and Slavic words and usages Yiddish has absorbed.

One reason Jews spoke these languages differently was doubtless to avoid any possibility of assimilation through unnecessary socializing. The Chassam Sofer (Even HoEzer 2:12) suggests that Jews intentionally adulterated foreign languages to comply with Beis Shammai's prohibition against using languages of non-Jews (Talmud Yerushalmi, Shabbos 1:4). In other

words, though these languages derived from non-Jewish sources, they were proudly and deliberately changed in order to turn them into "Jewish" languages— "Yiddish" and "Judaismo."

The Alter Rebbe (Torah Or, p. 77d-78c) gives a profound perspective on why we use other languages: One positive reason for G-d's dispersal of the Jewish people among all seventy' nations is so that we use the nations' languages for earning our livelihoods and taking care of our material needs. With the money earned we buy food to sustain us, and clothing and housing to benefit us. Then we utilize this sustenance and benefit in order to pray devoutly, study Torah or do a Mitzva.

By doing this, we reveal and raise back to their spiritual source the "sparks" of the Divine concealed within the languages (just as such "sparks" exist within all aspects of the material world). For example, by studying Gemora, written in Aramaic, we elevate the sparks of holiness within that language. Languages thus become elevated into instruments for fulfilling the will of G-d, thereby attaining a certain level of holiness.

CHASSIDUS AND YIDDISH

Of all these languages, Yiddish is special. Spoken only by Jews, it is the only language now known universally as "Yiddish"—the "Jewish" language.

Before World War II, Yiddish was "Mama Loshon" (the native language) for about eleven million Jews, almost three quarters of the Jewish people. For centuries, Yiddish has been the language of most of our nation's greatest Torah leaders and saintliest personalities. Loshon HaKodesh remained the universal written language for Torah scholars, but Yiddish has been the language they used for study and teaching of Torah. and for spiritual exhortation of their communities.

From the Alter Rebbe's explanation, we can assume that Yiddish—used so much and for so long for purposes of Torah and Mitzvos—has become elevated into a great medium for revealing G-d's will in the world, reaching an exalted level of holiness.

Furthermore, Yiddish has been the language of all leaders of Chassidus from the Baal Shem Tov till our own day. It was not only their spoken language, but also the medium in which they expounded their Torah insights (though these were recorded, by them or by their disciples, in Loshon HaKodesh): "The Baal Shem Tov. of blessed memory, would say words of Torah in the Ashkenazi [i.e. Yiddish] language and not in Loshon HaKodesh," writes the Alter Rebbe (Iggeres HaKodesh XXV—Tanya p. 141a).

All the ChaBaD Rebbes wrote in Yiddish. There are Yiddish letters by the Alter Rebbe. The Mittlerer Rebbe wrote and published an entire ethical work in Yiddish—Pokeiach Ivrim, the first time a Chassidic leader published a work in Yiddish (to benefit the less-scholarly Jewish public). He also wrote several Maamorim (discourses) in Yiddish, as did the Tzemach Tzedek (addressing the Jewish soldiers in Petersburg), and these were published after their passing. The Rebbe MaHaRaSh and Rebbe RaShaB wrote several Maamorim in Yiddish, recently published.

The previous Rebbe, of blessed memory, wrote and published in Yiddish scores of Maamorim, transcripts of his Sichos (talks), and thousands of letters for public dissemination, as part of his efforts to strengthen Yiddishkeit among Jews of all levels, even those far from scholarly. The present Rebbe, shlita. has also written in Yiddish thousands of public and private letters, and edited thousands of Yiddish transcripts of his Sichos.

The Rebbe, shlita. indicates (Likkutei Sichos XXI, p. 446- 9) two aspects of the close connection between Chassidus and Yiddish: 1) Since Divine Providence determined that Yiddish become the primary medium for expounding Chassidus, it must have had special advantages over other languages even before it was so used: it was particularly well-suited to become the vehicle for teaching Chassidus. 2) Now that Yiddish has been used for expounding and propagating Chassidus, especially for so many generations, it has become elevated even higher than before.

YIDDISH TODAY

Today Yiddish is declining. Jews who still know Yiddish may number several million.

However, except among various Chassidic groups, those whose everyday language is still Yiddish are almost all elderly Jews born in Eastern Europe.

This is unfortunate. Yiddish has been an integral part of our history and religious life for close to a thousand years. Yiddish has come to incorporate the collective national expression of our Jewish experience over that vast span of time. It is a language deeply expressive of inner Jewish feeling.

How did it happen that Yiddish must now fight for its life?

The past century's cataclysmic events wrought chaos in all aspects of Jewish life. Migrations to the West. World War I (uprooting vast Jewish populations), the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, onslaught of secular ideologies. World War II and the Holocaust—all combined to prevent or confound the chain of transmission of traditional Jewish values, practices and customs.

In the new lands and communities, great Jewish leaders and ordinary Jews with insight struggled to re-establish Torah institutions. But it was an uphill job. So many Jews had acquired attitudes alien to the Torah that Jewish leaders considered themselves fortunate to accomplish anything at all.

In such circumstances, many leaders felt unable to demand high standards. It was more urgent to encourage Jews to keep Shabbos, don Teffillin and eat kosher than to insist that they speak Yiddish. On the contrary, insistence on Yiddish, alien to the youth, might have discouraged thousands, who by now have become Torah-observant, from any contact with religious Jews.

If insistence on Yiddish would mean less students learning Torah, there was no choice but to discard it. The language of instruction in most Yeshivos became English. Even children familiar with Yiddish from their homes now become accustomed to the local language, speaking it more naturally than their native Yiddish (especially if they also study secular subjects).

This has happened at Lubavitcher schools, too. Lubavitch works to bring all Jews closer to the Torah. So the language of study has usually been the local language. This has enabled tens of thousands to receive a Torah education, and many have later been instrumental, as Shluchim and

privately, in bringing Yiddishkeit to hundreds of thousands more.

EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

We don't regret this approach that has helped so many. But one casualty has been Yiddish.

Most Lubavitch men understand Yiddish. But a smaller proportion—even of those from a Torah-observant background—speak it well. Among Lubavitch women, the proportion speaking a good Yiddish is far smaller, and many understand very little. It has come to a point where younger women, even when they know Yiddish, feel uncomfortable speaking it, certainly among themselves but even to older people whose language is Yiddish.

This is even sadder, because it is unlikely that their children will learn a good Yiddish. Experience shows that young children learn a language from their mother (hence "Mama Loshon"), not from their father, who comes home late and has less time and patience for them.

Many parents do speak to their little ones in Yiddish (see Igros Kodesh IX of the previous Rebbe, p. 444-445: "Certainly you should get [your son] used to understanding Yiddish").

But the language of instruction at pre-school is English (not all good teachers know Yiddish well). Soon after children enroll, they find it easier to express themselves in English and are unwilling to speak Yiddish. It's not long before parents face a fait accompli—the children answer them only in English, till the parents weary of the struggle and accept the inevitable.

The process is accelerated when older children in the family already speak English among themselves; then the younger ones may hardly learn Yiddish at all. Even to the older ones it is usually only a second language, and often a "pidgin" tongue, childish and ungrammatical. For example, they may say "du" instead of the more respectful "ir" when addressing someone older. Worse, their spoken Yiddish may be a verbatim translation from English, with its different idiomatic usages and constructions, so that Yiddish speakers have difficulty understanding them.

Most children unfamiliar with Yiddish (even many whose parents started out speaking it to them) are at great disadvantage when they learn

Chumash. The main skill taught at first is to memorize translations of Hebrew vocabulary, with less emphasis on understanding. The class is usually conducted in English, but the Chumash is translated into Yiddish.

The five-year old knows neither Loshon HaKodesh nor Yiddish. Even children who know Yiddish may not understand all the Yiddish they encounter in "Chumash"—often far different from mother's "kitchen" Yiddish. Perhaps the reason we still translate the Chumash into Yiddish is that we sense the intrinsic holiness Yiddish has acquired. But the child finds it hard to digest.

Children often have difficulty even getting their tongues around the Yiddish word. There is no choice but to repeat it many times till they can pronounce it, then countless more times till they memorize it. All this time, don't forget, they may not understand a word they are saying (even if the teacher explained it—by the time they finish repeating it so often, they have had time to forget what they heard). Linguistically, they might as well be translating from Chinese into Japanese!

Inevitably, this is boring. Well-motivated and smarter children do eventually learn to memorize the "Teitshen." But no one learns to speak Yiddish by this method. And children less motivated or intelligent become turned off.

First impressions and attitudes to learning are formed at the earliest stages: a negative attitude now toward Torah study can have calamitous effects upon the child's learning career and Jewish future.

Furthermore. Torah-study should be understood. True, if one just says the words of Torah ShebiKsav ("Written Torah"—Chumash and NaCh) without understanding, it is still considered Torah study. But it is far better to understand what one is studying. Also, the child prepares now for study in higher grades, where subjects of study are Mishna and Gemora. These are Torah Sheb'al Peh ("Oral Torah") which, Halacha stipulates, must be understood to be considered Torah study.

In younger grades, students are a captive audience, having no choice but to repeat the words after the teacher. But as they ascend to higher elementary grades, where study-subjects (Gemora in particular) and the child's intellectual development require a deeper level of

understanding, we find use of Yiddish declining even further. It's hard to explain intellectual concepts to anyone, especially a child, in a language he does not understand.

Eventually, when boys reach Mesivta (high-school level) grades, they usually learn a better Yiddish by necessity, since lessons are usually in Yiddish (though in many Lubavitcher Yeshivos this is changing). But some students still have a hard time. And for others, the harm may already have been done....

SOLUTIONS - DOES YIDDISH HAVE A TOMORROW?

Have we reached the point of no return?

The answer depends on what we want. Is Yiddish important to us? If so, we must take drastic steps to preserve it. If, on the other hand, we feel Yiddish has little chance of survival beyond our generation, we must take drastic steps the opposite way.

To determine the importance of Yiddish, let us examine the views of the Rebbe, shlita. At virtually all public occasions, the Rebbe speaks only Yiddish. At rallies for children, too, he speaks in Yiddish (sprinkled with occasional English words). But he demonstratively acknowledges that many don't understand by asking that his words be translated into English.

Recently (winter 5748) the Rebbe reminded us that one of our ancestors' merits for which they were redeemed from Egypt was that they did not change their language. Likewise, said the Rebbe, those who know Yiddish should at least use that language for discussing Torah, particularly Chassidus (unless, of course, the person one is teaching does not understand Yiddish well).

On the other hand, in a significant letter (15 Iyar, 5728—Likkutei Sichos XXII, p. 411-412), the Rebbe, shlita, puts the educational question in a different light. In a Lubavitcher community in the Holy Land, there was a debate among parents about whether their children's language of instruction should be Yiddish, as it had been for many years (but it was becoming less and less familiar to the students), or Ivrit (Modern Hebrew), the native language for almost all the students. The Rebbe replied (points relevant to our discussion, on our sole responsibility): "... My opinion is that since the main purpose of the

Torah-school is to educate the students to have fear and love of G-d, and to teach them G-d's Torah and His Mitzvos . . . according to this, it is understood that the language in which the students study is not the most important aspect, but rather the aforementioned points—effectiveness and increase in quantity and in quality of knowledge of the Torah and its Mitzvos.

"[It is also understood that in a place where the language of instruction has any influence on aspects of Yiras Shomayim (fear of Heaven) and likewise, then determination of the language also has importance accordingly.] . . .

"Under certain conditions, when parents wish to decide the language of instruction, and with the aforementioned condition that this has no relation to Yiras Shomayim and aspects of Shulchan Aruch etc., then one should not force upon parents the language of instruction in which their children will study, but it should be explained to them: if not justified in their arguments, and as [is the rule] in similar matters—the language of instruction should be decided according to the opinion of a majority of the parents, for 'One follows the majority.'

". . . Concerning what they mention of special virtues connected with the Yiddish language, it requires weighty consideration [to determine] whether acquisition of these virtues is the purpose of the Torah school or is part of the parents' responsibility and the home atmosphere: this is straightforward."

This letter's significance is that, despite the Rebbe's obvious preference for Yiddish, he is flexible when it comes to education. Education's prime aim is to instill Yiras Shomayim and knowledge of Torah and Mitzvos. For this we must be pragmatic, seeking the most practical means of accomplishment. If these aims suffer from the language we use, we have no justification for keeping it, even if it means changing from Yiddish.

TIME TO COME DOWN ON ONE SIDE OF THE FENCE

In light of this, the time has come to make far-reaching decisions about the role Yiddish is to play in the education of our children, and ultimately in the Yiddishkeit of the future.

If we opt to keep Yiddish, we have the duty to take it very seriously, otherwise responsibility for the potentially serious educational problems

will be ours. We must go all out to ensure that our students understand Yiddish and speak it well.

The only effective way to ensure this: Institute a firm rule in all grades from kindergarten and up that all teachers always speak to the children only in Yiddish. For weeks or months there will be difficulty in communication. But it will not last long. The younger children are. the faster they pick up a new language. This is the proven method; it has been employed successfully in Lubavitch Cheder-schools out of town where most students are not from Yiddish-speaking backgrounds.

Admittedly, this course is a drastic one. Some excellent teachers, through no fault of their own, never had a chance to learn a good Yiddish. They may be hard-pressed to speak full-time in a language with which they are not so familiar. It may mean that such teachers will be passed over when applicants for new teaching positions are being considered.

It is essential to prepare a coordinated system of Yiddish language textbooks for all grades, responding to the needs of our time. Textbooks originally prepared in Europe for children whose native language was Yiddish are not suitable for American students who need to learn much more Yiddish vocabulary. New textbooks need considerable investment of time, funds and expertise, and we must be ready to back such a project.

On the other hand, we may decide that, desirable as Yiddish is, we are simply "hacken a tchainik," as the saying goes. We have already reached the point where most of our children do not know Yiddish. Only after many years in Yeshivos do they become a little familiar with it as an artificial language. Therefore we may feel it is not worth the risk of the possible educational problems to try and revive an unfortunately dying language.

If we thus decide, we will have to take the logical next step of translating Chumash directly into English. In present circumstances, there can be no doubt that our students, by now all English-speaking, will in this way cover more ground and find it more interesting, with positive results for their entire career of Torah learning and their entire lives.

At the same time, students can spend time each day studying Yiddish as a language. This will enable them to understand lessons in higher grades, and later the Rebbe's Sichos. Yiddish may not be revived as the living language we would prefer, but it will be understood—at least as much as Aramaic by those who study Gemora, and probably more, since Yiddish is still a living language for many of the older generations.

As to our merit for "not changing our language" (i.e. for those who do not now know Yiddish), it is a problem faced in ages past—when there were changes from Loshon HaKodesh to Aramaic, to Arabic, Spanish, Italian and French, from French to German-Yiddish etc. Most certainly there were problems then, too, but the changes proceeded anyway, inexorably.

Besides, a version of "Jewish-English" is already developing in Jewish neighborhoods, especially among Yeshiva children. The new dialect has somewhat irregular English grammar and usage, influenced by Yiddish forms (use of the word "by," for example, instead of "at" and other prepositions), together with many Yiddish and Loshon HaKodesh additions to the vocabulary.

But we can no longer leave the question hanging as we have for decades. The problems we have mentioned will not go away but can only get worse, as less children grow up knowing Yiddish, finding it ever harder to relate to an unfamiliar language.

It's time to make far-reaching decisions, one way or the other. Upon our decision rests much of the educational future and wellbeing of our children.