

בשלשה דרכים שוותה סוריא כולי-

is similar to א"י in three ways etc.

OVERVIEW

Numbers in לשון הקודש (as well as words in general) may be masculine or feminine, depending on the gender of the word(s) they are defining. Generally words ending with a 'ה' are נקבה. One exception is the numbers from three to ten where the opposite holds true. The numbers 'שלושה ארבעה וכו' are זכר, while 'שלוש ארבע וכו' are נקבה. Names of places are (usually) נקבה. Tosfos is discussing why we are using שלשה which is זכר instead of שלש which is נקבה.

Tosfos responds to an apparent difficulty:

נקט [שלשה] לשון זכר אף על גב דסוריא לשון נקבה -

The תנא of the ברייתא utilized the masculine form of three [שלשה] as opposed to שלש even though סוריא is a feminine term¹ -

משום דעבד וגט הוי לשון זכר:

for עבד and גט are masculine terms².

SUMMARY

The reason the תנא uses the masculine שלשה is because עבד וגט which are enumerated as part of the שלשה are זכר לשון.

THINKING IT OVER

Why did Tosfos not include that עפר is זכר לשון, and then all three would be זכר לשון?³

¹ Seemingly Tosfos question is not understood, for the number שלשה is defining דרכים not סוריא. However the גמרא in בב, קידושין teaches that the word דרכים is used both in the זכר and נקבה formats. Therefore the gender of the modifier of דרכים (in our case שלשה) depends on the content of the statement. Here, since the subject under discussion is סוריא a name of a country, which is נקבה, it would have been proper to use שלש.

² Of the three items in which סוריא is compared to חז"ל, two of them (the majority), עבד and גט are זכר לשון. Therefore when using the term for three, שלשה, the masculine form, was chosen, since a majority of the three are זכר לשון. See 'Thinking it over'.

³ See מהרש"א הארוך.