

TXTING THE TEXT:
CREATING A MODEL FOR A NEW TRANSLATION OF
TORAH

JEREMY GIMBEL, MAHL, MAJE

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Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Rabbinic Studies
Los Angeles, California

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Adviser: Dr. Kristine Garroway

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Introduction

“Look, this mitzvah which I am commanding you today isn’t too tough for you, and it’s not too far away either. It’s not all up in the sky!...Hey, this idea is super close to you; it’s in your mouth and on your mind, so make it happen!”

(Deut. 30:11-12a, 14 - Author original translation)

Jewish education has made incredible strides in our lifetime. Traditional static and stale Hebrew school classroom environments are out, experiential education and developmentally appropriate designs are in. However, one thing has remained a relative constant: Torah translations. While most Hebrew and Day school classes that use Torah have transitioned from the 1917 Jewish Publication Society (OJPS) translation to the 1985 edition (or the 2006 updated gender-sensitive edition, the NJPS), these translations are meant for adults. They employ a language style that is too elevated for many teens to gain understanding. Instead of connecting to the text of the Torah, teens and educators encounter a barrier. Educators become frustrated and students grow bored. In truth, though, it is not the educator’s fault. There are few — and even fewer that would be considered “Jewish” — useful tools that present the Torah text in language that makes sense to their students. TXTing the Text attempts to provide that resource.

TXTing the Text is a new translation of Torah into colloquial teen English with an intended audience of post-b’nai mitzvah Jewish students. While the scope of this project only covers six selections of Torah, the larger goal is to translate the whole Torah.

The Christian community is dealing with a similar problem and has made some attempts at its solution. There are “Teen Bibles,” which are graphically appealing with identity-focused study questions, insights surrounding the text, and employ easier to digest translations, such as the *New International Version* (NIV) or the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV). Other translations are more colloquial, such as *The Message* and the *Common English Bible*. The problem with these translations, however, is that they are designed for Christians to use, their

translation can sometimes reflect New Testament ideas and references, and they rely on Latin or Greek as their source text, in addition to, or sometimes rather than, the Hebrew original. For example, at the end of the Akedah narrative (Genesis 22:16), the JPS translates the Hebrew as, “Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one.” However, *The Message* translation ends (emphasis added), “have not refused to *give me* your son, your dear, dear son,” reflecting the addition in the Samaritan, Septuagint, Peshitta, and Vulgate manuscripts. Although a relatively minor shift, it represents a broader point: to Jews, the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible is the original, the only valid text for translation. Another example illustrates how *The Message* reads these texts with a Christian lens. In a faithful translation of Deut. 30:10, we read (emphasis added), “certainly you will obey the voice of Adonai your God in order to keep [God’s] *mitzvot* and laws, what is written- **in this scroll of Torah**, when you return to Adonai your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” JPS and other translations render the phrase “this scroll of Torah” as “book of the Teaching.” However, *The Message* renders the phrase as, “this Book of Revelation.” To Christians, the Bible as a whole is a book of revelation. However, Jews do not add that layer – the Torah is a book of teaching. Thus, a Jewish approach to a teen bible is necessary.

Translations are informed by their methodology and intended audiences. A Christian translation indicates the use of Christian commentaries for its primary tool for understanding the text and is specifically for a Christian community. A Jewish translation uses the Hebrew as its source and Jewish sources (Rabbinic commentaries, Jewish scholarly work, etc.) for insights. A Jewish translation is also written for the intended use by a Jewish audience. All translations are, inherently, interpretations whose processes and purposes are reflected in its language. TXting the Text will rely on the Hebrew as its source text and, primarily, Jewish scholarship for

additional insights in dealing with issues in the text, but will present it in language more accessible to today's youth. Further, this intended Jewish audience informs the choice to use culturally familiar terms like "Shabbat" instead of "Sabbath," "Sukkot" instead of "Booths," and "Adonai" instead of "The Lord" or "YHWH."

Attempting to translate the entire Torah in the scope of this text immersion/project is unrealistic. The project will establish a model and guiding philosophy for a teen translation, and provide select samples of how to translate the Torah for teens, namely, the Torah readings for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Pesach, and Shavuot. The capstone will, therefore, serve as a model for later translation work in this style.

TXting the Text is not intended to be the definitive translation for all teen Jews. There will be times in education and study when a more scholarly translation is necessary. Indeed, this translation will likely need revisions after its completion, due to the quickly changing nature of colloquialisms. For now, though, this capstone project is intended to begin that work of putting the Torah into language that resonates with teens in order to help their understanding of the text.

Role of Torah Translations for Jews

The time for a new translation of Torah into colloquial teen English is now.

Hebrew Scriptures have been translated into Aramaic and Greek since before the beginning of the Common Era.¹ After the Babylonian exile, Jewish knowledge of classical Hebrew diminished, creating a need for Bible translations. In the centuries that followed, the

¹ Crim, Keith R. "Translating the Bible: An Unending Task." *Religious Education* 85, no. 2 (1990): 201.

Bible was translated into Aramaic (Targum), Greek (Septuagint), Latin (Vulgate), Syriac (Peshitta), Arabic, and today is available in every written language. While all translations are interpretations and have some flaws, nearly all translations followed a word-for-word method of translation. Yet, that changed in the late 18th century when Moses Mendelssohn, who wanted German Jews become more enlightened, like their fellow citizens, attempted a translation of the Bible in fluent, idiomatic German.² By contrast, the first American Jewish Bible translation was composed by Isaac Leeser in the mid-19th century and “sought to help Jews preserve their own [American-Jewish] identity intact.”³ Leeser’s translation “derived from the original Hebrew, and depended...only on traditional Jewish commentators and [modern Jewish German scholars].”⁴

Jewish learning begins with the Torah. While there are those who self-identify as more “culturally Jewish,” when one examines those cultural artifacts, rituals, and practices, it is clear that their roots always come back to the Torah. Studying Torah involves more than just about reading for comprehension. As Jonathan Sarna explains:

The educated, committed Jew to whom study of the Bible is at one and the same time a religious obligation, a spiritual exercise, a mode of worship, and a moral as well as an intellectual discipline, is confronted with a vast array of texts which, if not of equal authority, and most have no authority at all, yet command his attention, his concentrated thought and study. It is a literature that has long been endowed with a life and energy of its own, and in its independent existence the light of the Hebrew Bible has become

² Greenstein, Edward L. "Theories of Modern Bible Translation." *Prooftexts* 3, no. 1 (1983): 20. Sarna, J. D., and N. M. Sarna. "Jewish Bible Scholarship and Translations." *The Bible and Bibles in America* (Atlanta, 1988) (1988): 86.

³ Sarna, *Jewish*, 86.

⁴ Sarna, *Jewish*, 87-88.

refracted through a thousand prisms. In discussing the role of the Bible in any Jewish community, this circumstance must be taken into account.⁵

Of course, in the United States, translations of the Hebrew Bible are ubiquitous in nearly all teaching environments, no matter the setting. As Shoshana Schulman notes in her thesis, *Diversity in Modern Jewish Bible Translations*, “The purpose of [Jewish translations] is to draw the modern English-speaking reader closer to the Hebrew Bible.”⁶ Indeed for Jews, “The received Hebrew text forever remains the sole authentic and valid basis for Jewish study and interpretation. Translations of the Bible have no authority for Jews.”⁷ In other words, the sacredness is ascribed to the Hebrew text; the purpose of translation is to help the reader dive into the sacred texts, not to supplant the Hebrew text’s sacredness. When the editors of the NJPS Bible translation began their work, they reflected the two items for which there was general agreement: “there was nothing sacred about an English translation, and that a revision of [the Old JPS] translation into modern colloquial English was highly desirable.”⁸ Surely, this, too, is a driving force for TXTing the Text.

When learners engage in Torah study, it is an exercise in Peoplehood and Jewish identity. For all of the Jewish People’s diversity, one common thread is a connection to the Torah. “All [Jews] share a common recognition and conviction that the Hebrew Bible is a living force within

⁵ Sarna, *Jewish*, 83-84.

⁶ Schulman, Shoshana Jordan. *Diversity in Modern Jewish Bible Translations*. University Microfilms, 2000: 7.

⁷ Sarna, *Jewish*, 84.

⁸ Schulman, *Diversity*, 14.

the community of self-identifying Jews from which the structure of values to which Judaism subscribes ultimately derives.”⁹ Throughout Jewish history, translations have served as one way to live out the philosophies which underpin the Jewish identity of the time. For Saadya Gaon in Egypt in the 10th century, it was to renew Hebrew through Arabic; for Franz Rosenzweig in the 20th century, it was to familiarize the Jewish populace with both Hebrew and German.

Formal translations of Torah present unnecessary barriers to learners. Instead of engaging learners with familiar language, students are forced to trudge through translations with elevated, unfamiliar language just in order to gain a beginner’s comprehension of the material. This not only becomes an issue for the student, but the teacher’s higher level instruction becomes obstructed and minimized. Rabbi Harry M. Orlinsky, a scholar who advised the processes of the Revised Standard Version and was the editor-in-chief of the NJPS translation of the Bible, argued that the “Bible [in translation] frequently enough does not lend itself to ‘do-it-yourself’ comprehension, and the modern would-be reader found himself doubly frustrated in his attempt to understand what he was reading.”¹⁰ What Benjamin Franklin wrote of the King James Bible also rings true: “The language in that time is so much changed and the style, being obsolete and thence less agreeable, is perhaps one reason why the reading of that excellent book is of late so much neglected.”¹¹ Indeed, when we teach Torah in translation with words such as “shall” and grammatical constructs like “let this be for you,” not to mention the infamous “thee,” “thy,” and

⁹ Sarna, *Jewish*, 84.

¹⁰ Orlinsky, Harry M. "The New Jewish Version of the Torah: Toward a New Philosophy of Bible Translation." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82, no. 3 (1963): 250.

¹¹ Orlinsky, *New Jewish*, 250.

“thou” of the OJPS, we are doing a disservice to our learners and to the Jewish people at large. It is not hard to imagine a post b’nai mitzvah student unnecessarily struggling through, “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven...But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.” (Deut 30:11-12a, 14 OJPS) It is also not hard to imagine that student’s parent having the same struggle. To that end, many institutions have done away with OJPS texts, but the use of elevated language is still an issue, a barrier, for students and their families.

Comprehension is not just a base-line tool from educational theory; comprehension of and understanding of the Torah is foundational to strengthening Jewish identity formation. While knowledge of the whole of Torah is not essential for a Jewish identity to exist, engaging in Torah study in any form builds a relationship with Torah which deepens one’s Jewish identities. While a goal of text study has typically been to immerse students in identity formation and growth, the various resources are not supporting this goal. Instead, they are hindering it. How can our students *Sh’ma Yisrael* — “listen, Israel” — if the text presented causes them to tune-out? In reading, writing, or studying a TXTing the Text translation, teens’ Jewish identities will strengthen. Taken seriously, this means educators should not only provide a translation that puts their sacred text in a voice their students can understand.

Indeed, putting the Torah in a modern voice, with dynamic linguistic variation is a very substantial part of our tradition. Around 2,500 years ago, Jewish storytellers would retell biblical stories in the vernacular, bringing an ancient story understandable to a contemporary audience.¹²

¹² Voloj, Julian. “In the Land of Unlimited Opportunities.” JDC International Centre for Community Development. Retrieved from <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=3760> (2006).

In the late-20th century, this was given the term, “Biblio-drama.” Today, we are experiencing “a social climate that has created a more fluid American Jewish identity, [where] self-definition takes on greater importance, and language use becomes a crucial means of straddling the realms of modernity and religiosity.”¹³ The Jewish community does not need just one, universally accepted translation, but teens need the tools that help them grapple with and deepen their connection to our shared tradition.

While there are many translations of the Bible in the marketplace, according to Schulman, there are three qualities which typify Jewish renderings: “1) an attachment to the Hebrew original; 2) a commitment to Jewish tradition; and... 3) Jewish translations of the Bible are versions prepared by Jews primarily for the benefit of other Jews, or for specific Jewish communities.”¹⁴ In a Jewish translation, the Hebrew is the source text, and as much as possible, each anomaly in the text should be dealt with or, at least, noted. “Since the revealed text encodes in the merest elements, every characteristic of the Hebrew must find a corresponding one in the translation.”¹⁵ To support this effort while maintaining the “commitment to Jewish tradition” a Jewish translation also includes Jewish exegesis and commentaries.

At the same time, these new translations should not, and indeed cannot, minimize or change the Torah’s teachings. Translators should work to strike a balance between the meaning

¹³ Nove, Chaya. “Language Syncretism and the Hybridization of Religious Jewish Identity in Postmodern America.” Columbia University. Retrieved from <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=11735>. (February 2011), 27.

¹⁴ Schulman, *Diversity*, 8.

¹⁵ Greenstein, *Theories*, 19.

of the text and its presentation. One example is how *The Message* translates our Deut. 30:11-14 as

“This commandment that I’m commanding you today isn’t too much for you, it’s not out of your reach. It’s not on a high mountain—you don’t have to get mountaineers to climb the peak and bring it down to your level and explain it before you can live it. And it’s not across the ocean—you don’t have to send sailors out to get it, bring it back, and then explain it before you can live it. No. The word is right here and now—as near as the tongue in your mouth, as near as the heart in your chest. Just do it!” (Deut. 30:11-14 *The Message*)

One problem with this translation and ones like it is that they are not Jewish translations in that they do not always connect to the Hebrew original (as was demonstrated earlier) and are primarily intended for Christian readers (as is evident by their inclusion of Christian texts). Additionally, there should be limits to a translation’s accuracy. A readable, usable translation does not imply that the stories or laws should be changed. Students should still grapple with the text of ancient tradition, and all the conflicts it presents for us today. Further, the translators engaging in this task must not make the text a caricature. A Jewish, colloquial translation will resonate with its readers while retaining integrity.

I do believe there is a time and a place for using more scholarly translations such as *The Torah*, *Etz Hayim* and other translations. Using culturally familiar language builds tribes.¹⁶ Most can recite from memory a translation of the Sh’ma: “Hear, O Israel, Adonai, our God, Adonai is one.” And in a prayer service, that language is very appropriate. For its gendered, archaic language, I cannot imagine reciting Psalm 23 at a funeral with any other words than the good ‘ole King James language. But our cups have not runneth over with linguistically appropriate

¹⁶ Benor, Sarah Bunin. "Do American Jews Speak a Jewish Language?": A Model of Jewish Linguistic Distinctiveness." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99, no. 2 (2009): 230-269.

translations for our students to learn from in the classroom. A modern translation of Sh'ma or Psalm 23 might be helpful when learning about those texts, but there are limits to their usage.

Because the Torah is central to Jewish text study, the time has come for educators and their students to put the Torah into modern, familiar language. A more colloquial translation fulfills the “real demand” of our learners: “Not the best literal equivalent for a part of a foreign system, but the most equivalent unit in our own.”¹⁷ If students are to own the Torah, if they are to make it my book as well as our book, educators should meet the learners where they are by making the language used in Torah study more current and relevant. As Moses taught: “Look, this mitzvah which I am commanding you today isn’t too tough for you, and it’s not too far away either. It’s not all up in the sky!...Hey, this idea is super close to you; it’s in your mouth and on your mind, so make it happen!” (Deut. 30:11-12a, 14 Author original)

TXting the Text’s Translation Principles & Process

TXting the Text (TTT) is a new translation of Torah into colloquial teen English with an intended audience of post-b’nai mitzvah Jewish students. TXting the Text is an idiomatic, dynamic equivalence, content-oriented translation of Torah with the goal of helping the reader achieve understanding and appreciation of the text’s content, meaning, and challenges. As a Jewish translation, TTT is rooted in the Hebrew original and, broadly speaking, attempts to

¹⁷ Hoffman, Lawrence A. "Blessings and their Translation in Current Jewish Liturgies." *Worship* Collegeville, Minn. 60, no. 2 (1986): 160.

maintain the intended grammatical meaning. TTT is not intended to be the definitive translation for all teen Jews - it is a gateway for students to explore the Torah.

The process of creating TTT will follow a three step process that follows this theoretical outline¹⁸: 1) The process begins with the Hebrew text, specifically the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS); 2) Consult Jewish exegesis (i.e., exegesis from traditional Jewish sources from Midrash and Rashi through modern day Jewish commentaries) as well as other translations to create a faithful translation of the text, employing a word-by-word/formal equivalence translation method.; 3) Restructure the faithful translation into colloquial English. Footnotes will note where the translation makes interpretive choices.

Each of the principles and steps in this process was developed by navigating various tensions in translation philosophy. What follows is an exploration in these tensions, unpacking and justifying these choices.

Translation Tension 1) Literal vs. Idiomatic

The first translation tension goes by many names: literal vs. idiomatic, formal equivalence vs. dynamic equivalence, and word-for-word vs. sense-for-sense; yet, the basic idea is the same. While the final product of TTT is idiomatic, its process includes creating a faithful translation which is a more literal understanding of the text. Literal translations seek to make a straight line from source-language to target-language, “keeping ambiguous in the translation

¹⁸ Variations on this theme are presented in Greenstein, *Theories*, 21; Brunn, Dave "Form and Function in Bible Translation: Where Theory Meets Practice." *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry*. 12, no. 1 (2015): 8; and Crim, *Translating*, 202.

terms and phrases that are ambiguous or undefined in the original...leaving it to the modern commentator and preacher to define and explain them.”¹⁹ “Literal translations can cover a wider spectrum of literary features...[while disclosing] the more idiosyncratic aspects of [the culture in the text.]”²⁰ Many consider literal translations to be truer to the source and more accurate. “The words themselves must somehow be gingerly transferred from text to translation.”²¹

Literal translations place a great emphasis on maintaining style. Everett Fox’s translation, for example, works “with careful attention to rhythm and sound. It tries to mimic the particular rhetoric of the Hebrew wherever possible, preserving such devices as repetition, allusion, alliteration, and word-play.”²² Literalists argue that one cannot separate style from meaning: “meaning in literature entails tone, mood, attitude, feeling, the voice of a speaker, not merely information.”²³

Yet, that commitment to style over meaning is one of the reasons these translations do not work for many readers. Greenstein argues, “Instead of telling us how we would say it, a literal translation tell us how they would say it.”²⁴ To illustrate his point, he uses an example from Amos 1:3 that shows the difference between using modern idiom (“Because of outrage after

¹⁹ Ellis, E. Earle. “Dynamic equivalence theory, feminist ideology and three recent Bible translations.” *Expository Times* 115, no. 1 (2003): 7.

²⁰ Greenstein, *Theories*, 20.

²¹ Greenstein, *Theories*, 10.

²² Fox, Everett. *The five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy: a new translation with introductions, commentary, and notes*. Vol. 1. Schocken, 1997., ix-x.

²³ Greenstein, *Theories*, 12.

²⁴ Greenstein, *Theories*, 13.

outrage committed by Damascus I will not relent!") and Amos' own idiom ("For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn it back"), concluding, "We wouldn't say it that way, but Amos more or less did."²⁵ This is what is not working with current translations for teens - they do not understand, nor I would argue care to understand, Amos' idiom. Indeed, the role of the teacher is to facilitate that conversation and, yes, even encourage some struggle with the text; however, then the lesson becomes more about Biblical Hebrew style, and less about the meaning of the text. TTT attempts to put the Torah in a modern voice - not to completely lose the style of the Hebrew, prioritizing meaning over style.

Indeed, this is a common critique of literal renderings. Fox, who followed an identical translation philosophy as a Buber-Rosenzweig translation in German, "considered the sound and syntax of the original text to be more important than the clarity of the translation in the receptor language."²⁶ Greenstein notes, "In the [literal] view it is perhaps more crucial to convey the rhetorical features of the text and the manifold connotations of its words than it is to convey the denoted or ideational message of the text."²⁷ In the introduction to the NJPS, the editors acknowledged the shortcomings of the literal method, noting, "It surrenders only the peculiar yet deeply imbedded notion that the Bible must speak to us in a language that is strange, archaic and far removed from our own daily parlance."²⁸ Emphasizing style over content also does a

²⁵ Greenstein, *Theories*, 13.

²⁶ Schulman, *Diversity*, 10.

²⁷ Greenstein, *Theories*, 15.

²⁸ Leeman, Saul. "The Old and The New JPS: A Comparative Study." *The Jewish Bible Quarterly*. 22, no. 1 (1994): 4.

disservice to the sacredness of the text itself. As Aryeh Kaplan notes in his translation, “Translating idiomatic expressions literally all of the time is seriously wrong because the translator needed instead to differentiate between what should be taken literally and what is to be understood idiomatically.”²⁹ A good translation should navigate that balance between idiomatic and literal expressions. Similarly, because of the emphasis on, not to the exclusion of, style over content, TTT is an idiomatic translation.

Instead of working word by word, idiomatic translations bring out the meaning of the text by conveying sense for sense. “The wording has changed, but the sense, it is suggested, is in continuity with the original.”³⁰ Any idiomatic translation is a response to literal translations, attempting to remove linguistic barriers to understanding. “All Bible translators should aim to make their translations understandable...the Bible was written in order to communicate certain messages from the ancient writers to us and, in spiritual terms, to communicate”³¹ our tradition’s sacred message to each generation. Yet, “if [the language] is confusing, either because the style is too heavy or the vocabulary too strange, readers will be misled or discouraged.”³² TTT does not seek to answer all of the questions nor challenges the text gives us. As an idiomatic translation, TTT attempts to remove linguistic barriers between the reader and the text, encouraging the readers to grapple with the meaning of the text rather than the translation.

²⁹ Schulman, *Diversity*, 83.

³⁰ Ellingworth, Paul. “Theory and practice in Bible translation.” *Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 165.

³¹ Crim, *Translating*, 203.

³² Crim, *Translating*, 203.

Idiomatic translation, however, does not mean that our sacred text will lose its dignity nor honor. Idiomatic is intentional, but does not dumb-down. One of the guiding principles for the most popular idiomatic Jewish translation, the NJPS, argued, “what was needed was a ‘simplified and modernized’ style and vocabulary, ‘without undue loss of majesty and dignity.’”³³ “Convinced that word-for-word translation did violence to the spirit of the Hebrew original, the translators permitted themselves wider latitude than their English language predecessors ever had. They spoke of their fidelity to the deeper meaning of the biblical text, in contradistinction to the surface meaning.”³⁴ Although it will use modern colloquialisms, TTT attempts to carry on this tradition of maintaining the honor the Torah deserves while conveying its identity-forming message in modern language.

Idiomatic translations also tacitly acknowledge that their translation is somewhat time, and even geographically, bound. That, to me, is a good thing as it forces each generation to grapple with the text in a new way with new lenses to uncover new meanings. For Kaplan, by using “modern idiomatic language, the Torah would seem like a living document.”³⁵ This does not mean that previous scholarship is tossed aside. On the contrary, each translation builds upon that scholarship and creates a new chain of transmission for the purpose of engaging its readers. This is exemplified in the introduction to the Union for Reform Judaism’s commentary on the Torah which notes, “The producers of the present edition...chose to incorporate sense-for-sense

³³ Sarna, *Jewish*, 107.

³⁴ Sarna, *Jewish*, 109.

³⁵ Schulman, *Diversity*, 16.

translation, in order to provide contemporary readers most quickly with a grasp of the text, and to underscore its relevance in the present day.”³⁶

It is also worth noting that TTT is an idiomatic translation and not a revision. There are numerous examples of biblical translations which are less translations and more revisions of older versions, such as the English Revised Version which was merely an update and revision to the King James Version. While levels of meaning reveal themselves when biblical texts are translated from language to language in order to connect to contemporary identities, even if it is translating from ancient English to modern, revisions assume that the previous translators made the proper interpretive choices, generally speaking, but did not use the right language for the present day. Of course, many revisions include updates based on archaeological findings or other academic developments. Yet, the most pronounced evidence that TTT is not a revision is the first step in the translation process: beginning with the Hebrew original. Similarly to the NJPS, TTT seeks first “to determine what the text means to convey, then find a way of expressing it in good contemporary English.”³⁷ What TTT adds is the component of colloquialisms.

TTT will also attempt to emulate the style of the Hebrew when possible — narrative when it is narrative, poetry when poetry — but not to the prioritization of style over the meaning. When style informs meaning, it will be maintained to the best ability. For example, Genesis 1:2 says the land was *תהו וָבֹהוּ*. While JPS render this as “unformed and void,” translating this phrase

³⁶ Plaut, W. Gunther. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary Revised Edition*. New York: Union for Reform Judaism, 2005.: xliii.

³⁷ Schulman, *Diversity*, 25.

as “chaos and chasm” maintains meaning and the alliterative style. Further, TTT is not a concordance style translation, meaning that the same Hebrew word will be translated differently in different stories, based on what brings out the clearest meaning. Similar to the NJPS, “the same word could and should be translated differently depending upon context.”³⁸

Yet, what differentiates TTT from NJPS is a stronger reliance on colloquialism, rather than idiom. An idiom is a type of expression which “has more of a meaning than the individual words used.”³⁹ An example from NJPS is how they handled the Hebrew idiom found in Genesis 6:8 and 11 other times in Genesis alone, “למצוא חן בעיניו” - (literally) to find favor in somebody’s sight.” NJPS translated this phrase differently depending on context. For example, “Joseph was so efficient, ‘his master *took a liking to*’ him;” and “when the Hebrew prefaces Jacob’s requests with ‘*if I have found favor in your sight*’ that means ‘*if it please you.*’”⁴⁰ Colloquialisms, however, are phrases that come from verbal speech.⁴¹ An example is in our previously mentioned Deuteronomic passage, where I translated the Hebrew word “כי” — which often means “because,” “that,” “for,” or “when” — as “Dude,” a colloquialism used in this context to introduce and lead up to what comes next.

³⁸ Schulman, *Diversity*, 31.

³⁹ “Idiom vs colloquialism.” Grammarist. Accessed December 22, 2016.
<http://grammarist.com/spelling/idiom-vs-colloquialism/>.

⁴⁰ Schulman, *Diversity*, 30.

⁴¹ “Idiom vs colloquialism.” Grammarist. Accessed December 22, 2016.
<http://grammarist.com/spelling/idiom-vs-colloquialism/>.

That is not to say there are no limits to the interpretations TTT will take when it comes to conveying the meaning of the Hebrew original. In Marcia Falk's contemporary translation of Song of Songs, she deviated from the Hebrew in a number of ways, one of which was by changing third person to second person.⁴² Greenstein presents an example to critique how he believes source languages should be translated: "The NJPS and most other recent English translations abandon any adherence to Hebrew word order because in their view an English translation must employ English sequence. Imagine reversing the notes of a melody or the frames of a film."⁴³ While an illuminating example that gives one to pause, it is inherently flawed. The problem with this example is that if you are not trained to hear those harmonies, or notice the effect of filming techniques, you will not hear or see them. What is left, then, is dissonance - exactly what this translation seeks to address. This is not to say that TTT will abandon the Hebrew structure altogether. When word order adds or alters the meaning, it will be conveyed through the translation and/or footnotes. Additionally, whenever possible, TTT will maintain general Hebrew grammar conventions (i.e., person, active voice and passive voices, commands, etc.).

Further, TTT seeks to be a translation, and not a transculturation. Transculturation pushes extra-biblical interpretations into the text, where it does not exist, for the purposes of fitting an ideology. For example, while NJPS translates Leviticus 15:16 as, "When a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body *in water* and remain unclean until evening," Kaplan's

⁴² Greenstein, *Theories*, 16.

⁴³ Greenstein, *Theories*, 18.

rendering adds rabbinic understandings of that generic water: “When a man discharges semen, he must immerse his entire body *in a mikvah*, and [then] remain unclean until evening.”⁴⁴ This version ends up being more like a targum instead of a translation. “Translation proper replaces one set of essentially arbitrary linguistic signs by another; transculturation involves a change of objects and events in the world to which language refers.”⁴⁵ Just as a chunky, word-for-word translation does a disservice to its readers, transculturation assumes the reader does not want to deal with the complexities the text presents Jewish tradition and, instead, just desires the final answer. However challenging the message of the text is, TTT will preserve what the text says and will footnote some of the tradition’s contributions to the text (of course, it would be impossible to include every comment from tradition about every verse!).

Transculturation, however, does not mean the text can be devoid of cultural influences. On the contrary, that is what makes this a particular Jewish translation. For example, some culturally familiar terms — such as “Adonai” for יהוה, calling שכות “Sukkot” instead of “booths” — will be maintained when appropriate.

In the scholarship surveyed for this paper, there are four common critiques on idiomatic/sense-for-sense/dynamic equivalence translations, well articulated by American Biblical scholar E. Earle Ellis of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. It is necessary to address how TTT responds to each of these critiques.

⁴⁴ Schulman, *Diversity*, 102.

⁴⁵ Ellingworth, *Theory*, 165.

“1) It rejects the verbal aspect of biblical inspiration.”⁴⁶ I disagree that an idiomatic translation totally rejects the verbal aspect of biblical inspiration. Ellis expands on this point by arguing, in essence, that if it was good enough for the KJV, it should be good enough for us. That, of course, has been disproven by the success of a variety of other translations. Indeed, when we present our sacred biblical text in a way that is more verbally pleasing, more readers are engaged and are opened to the world of the bible. Similar to the critique of the Buber-Rosenzweig/Fox philosophy of creating a version which mimics the verbal features of the text, the dedication to that value is unfortunately placed as a higher priority than conveying the meaning of the text. Put another way, literalists emphasize form *over* function, where idiomists demand that form *follow* function (i.e., the stories and laws of our tradition).

“2) It gives to the translator the right that rightly belongs to the preacher, commentator and reader.”⁴⁷ While “right” may be a strong word, it does imply that the preacher, commentator, and reader should have more authority on teaching this text than the translator. Put another way, this argument says that the translator makes the choices which should only be made by those teaching the text. The problem with this argument is that by definition, a teacher translates knowledge and skills to their learners. Ellis does not want a translator to do the job of translating, he wants a teacher to be the translator. The broader point Ellis seems to be making, though, is one of who has the knowledge base to make interpretive choices. That is a fair critique. Idiomatic

⁴⁶ Ellis, *Dynamic*, 9.

⁴⁷ Ellis, *Dynamic*, 9.

translations do make more interpretive choices than literal translations. The way TTT will address this is by footnoting as much as possible when it makes interpretive choices.

“3) It assumes that the present-day translator knows what contemporary words, idioms and paraphrases are equivalent to the prophets' and apostles' wording.”⁴⁸ This critique could be made of any translation, literal or idiomatic. Because of scholarship conducted between the 1600s and today, we know very compellingly what words, idioms, and paraphrases the KJV got wrong when it tried to approximate biblical language. An idiomatic translation, however, attempts to choose contemporary words, idioms and paraphrases which are closest to the biblical language based on today's vocabulary. TTT does not attempt to be a translation that will stand the test of time. Instead, its final product is intended to be a snapshot, while its process of creation is repeated by consecutive generations to keep the language fresh, relevant, and to maintain the core message of the text. Further, if something remains unclear, TTT will acknowledge this.

“4) It advocates conforming biblical language and concepts to the modern culture rather than conforming the modern culture to biblical language and concepts.”⁴⁹ As previously mentioned, TTT is a translation, and does not seek to be a transculturation. The task of TTT is not to apologize for, nor gloss over the challenges the text presents us, including what biblical culture tells us. A goal of TTT is not for students to not confront those challenges, but to be

⁴⁸ Ellis, *Dynamic*, 9.

⁴⁹ Ellis, *Dynamic*, 9.

introduced to them in a language that resonates. The culture of the bible is absolutely important, and TTT seeks to present that culture, not what we wish that culture could or should have been.

Of course, resolving the tension between a literal and idiomatic approach to translation means situating one's self on a spectrum between the two extremes. As Richard Elliot Friedman notes in the introduction to his translation, "There is no single rule. Some passages are clearest when translated literally. Some passages cannot possibly be translated literally without becoming misleading and sounding absurd. It is the art, the skill, and the sensitivity of the individual translator that makes the difference."⁵⁰ This is one of the reasons why the process of TTT begins with the Hebrew original, then craft a faithful, more literally focused translation that is rooted in multiple sources before creating the idiomatic, colloquial final product. This process is crucial for achieving the ultimate goal: creating a translation that emphasizes understanding.

Translation Tension 2) Author/Form-oriented vs. Audience/Content-oriented

A similar tension in creating translations is based in the translation's orientation: should a translation be more oriented to the author in an attempt to convey the form of the original, or be more oriented to the audience in an attempt to convey the content. No translation can replicate the linguistic, stylistic, or even convey the whole meaning of a given text, so it is up to the translator to choose an orientation will give the translation its focus.

The author-oriented style of translation attempts to convey everything the author presents in the text. The Buber-Rosenzweig translation followed this path. "For Buber-Rosenzweig, the

⁵⁰ Friedman, Richard Elliott. *Commentary on the Torah*. Harper Collins, 2012.: xiii.

most outstanding quality of the Hebrew Bible was its intention to be declaimed, its ‘spokenness.’ Buber and Rosenzweig sought to confect a translation that would by its very nature be voiced.”⁵¹ However, because of this dedication to conveying the spokenness of the original, it has “been lambasted (ironically) as ‘unspeakable,’ erecting ‘a barrier between the reader and the meaning of the text.’”⁵² Additionally, Greenstein notes that a reader “can negotiate a literal rendering only through efforts greater than those required my texts of comparable complexity in its own language.”⁵³ This is terribly unfortunate. Text study should open doors of the spirit and soul, taking down barriers to tradition, not erecting them.

The audience-orientation approach is based in the notion that “the meaning must have priority over the stylistic forms.”⁵⁴ One of the most explicitly audience-oriented translations is the Christian translation, *The Message*, which uses “contemporary idiom, keeping the language of *the Message* (Bible) current and fresh and understandable.”⁵⁵ Its translator, Eugene Peterson, knew exactly who his audience was, as, unlike many translators, he did his translating work while working as a clergy in the field. “If there is anything distinctive about *The Message*,” he wrote, “perhaps it is because the text is shaped by the hand of a working pastor.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ Greenstein, *Theories*, 22.

⁵² Greenstein, *Theories*, 17.

⁵³ Greenstein, *Theories*, 17.

⁵⁴ Greenstein, *Theories*, 11.

⁵⁵ Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message: the Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002.: 3.

⁵⁶ Peterson, *The Message*, 7.

Similar to the tension of literal versus idiomatic translations, translation orientation falls along a spectrum. In the introduction to Robert Alter's translation, while more form oriented, he addresses this tension: "The present translation is an experiment in re-presenting the Bible — and, above all, biblical narrative prose — in a language that conveys with some precision the semantic nuances and the lively orchestration of literary effects of the Hebrew and at the same time has stylistic and rhythmic integrity as literary English."⁵⁷ Indeed, all translators make choices and attempt to find a balance of the various notes the text gives us.

Translation Tension 3) Truth vs. Interpretation

All translation is interpretation. The question of translation as "truth" vs "interpretation" is one of balance between the two. "Translation by its very nature involves interpretation," Sarna notes.⁵⁸ Greenstein adds that many translations place a great deal of import on "the effort to capture a greater measure of truth. [But] different translation bring various funds of knowledge and insights to bear on the interpretation of the Bible, its meaning. Each may offer a different slice of the truth."⁵⁹ As Ellingworth argues, "Transformational grammar often seeks to make explicit elements of meaning which are implied, but not expressed, in a sentence."⁶⁰ Many argue that expressing those grammatical features makes a translation more or less "true," but each

⁵⁷ Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses: A translation with commentary*. WW Norton & Company, 2008.: xvi.

⁵⁸ Sarna, *Jewish*, 88.

⁵⁹ Greenstein, *Theories*, 9.

⁶⁰ Ellingworth, *Theory*, 162.

choice the author makes to achieve their truth is merely yet another interpretation. Indeed, as Nida and Taber note, “It is axiomatic in modern translation theory that we cannot draw a sharp dividing line between translation and interpretation.”⁶¹ One of the foremost critiques of literal translations is the idea that by translating literally, the translator is not making interpretive choices. This is untrue - all translators make interpretive choices. “Calls for ‘literalism’ or movements ‘back to the Bible’ ...really seek to cloak with legitimacy efforts aimed at replacing one mode of interpretation with another.”⁶² In other words, literal translations attempt to be “truer” to Biblical Hebrew and its nuance. But a post-modern reading questions what is truth and how can we know it. TTT unabashedly leans on the side of interpretation, recognizing that taking an ancient text and putting it in a colloquial tongue will mean a great deal of choices and interpretations, and while acknowledging the value in making some literally leaning translation choices. As an idiomatic translation, it will “include more interpretation than a literal version.”⁶³ At the same time, though, TTT attempts to be as explicit as possible in noting where those choices are being made.

Translation Tension 4) The Process of Translation

As an educator trained in “backwards design,” where the desired outcomes are first articulated before designing a sequence of achieving those outcomes, I knew that the process of

⁶¹ Ellingworth, *Theory*, 165.

⁶² Sarna, *Jewish*, 88.

⁶³ Brunn, *Form and Function*, 18.

crafting TTT had to be the enactment of its principles, and something I cannot approach without serious, sober contemplation and intention. After all, “for most readers of a translation, the translation is the text; they depend on it entirely; there is no appeal beyond the translation to the original.”⁶⁴ While I do hope TTT will be a gateway, TTT cannot put a student on the wrong path. Yet, I also understand that translating the Torah is a somewhat absurd task to get right. Even Rosenzweig admitted, “Only one who is profoundly convinced of the impossibility of translation can really undertake it.”⁶⁵ After all, “translation is an art, not a science.”⁶⁶ And, as Alter notes, “No translation is a perfect thing.”⁶⁷ Yet, at the end of the day, TTT attempts to be an aid to understanding the Torah, not a replacement for our sacred text.

Step 1) The process begins with the Hebrew text, specifically the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS). This first step is necessary as it grounds the translation definitively as a Jewish translation. While the text of the Torah as we know it goes back centuries, TTT will use the BHS codification of the text and masoretic notes (i.e., cantillation marks, verse and paragraph breaks, etc.) as its starting point. Sometimes verses will be maintained, and other times not, based on the context of the text.

Step 2) Consult Jewish exegesis (i.e., exegesis from traditional Jewish sources from Midrash and Rashi through modern day Jewish commentaries) as well as other translations to

⁶⁴ Ellingworth, *Theory*, 166.

⁶⁵ Greenstein, *Theories*, 29.

⁶⁶ Friedman, *Commentary*, xiii.

⁶⁷ Alter, Robert. “Robert Alter: The Challenges of Translating the Bible.” Lecture, October 8, 2015, University of Chicago. <https://youtu.be/TIM1pXa4KPA>.

create a relatively faithful translation of the text, employing a word-by-word/formal equivalence translation method. Among the translations and commentaries employed for this step are (in no particular order): The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (translations & interpretive lens), OJPS (translation), NJPS (translation), JPS Torah Commentary (commentary), JPS Mikraot Gedolot (classic Rabbinic commentators), *The Torah: A Modern Commentary (Revised Edition)* (commentary), *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (commentary), *Etz Hayim* (commentary), the translations and commentaries of Everett Fox, Robert Alter, and Richard Elliot Friedman. Although not primary, a goal is to present the Hebrew in its appropriate literary form. Robert Alter notes, “There is not one diction in the Hebrew Bible, there are three: narrative prose, which does not use fancy language and employs a limited vocabulary; poetry, which does use fancy language and a wide vocabulary; and dialogue, which tends to speak correct literary Hebrew with gestures towards the vernacular.”⁶⁸ TTT will attempt to convey those dictions in ways that also maintain the larger goals of achieving reader understanding. For the purposes of this capstone, a listing of broad-stroke Hebrew grammar principles follows this section.

For the six examples presented here, this deep dive into the texts was illuminating and a necessary component. The process of going through the text and Jewish exegesis allowed me to get familiar with the texts in a way that just relying on another translation, even a Jewish one, would not have provided. The next articulated step was actually the easiest because of the work involved in these first two steps.

⁶⁸ Alter, Robert. “Robert Alter: The Challenges of Translating the Bible.” Lecture, October 8, 2015, University of Chicago. <https://youtu.be/TIM1pXa4KPA>.

Step 3) Restructure the faithful translation into colloquial, teen English. Footnotes will note where the translation makes interpretive choices. Like all translations, TTT is a product and cultural artifact of its time. In order to achieve this, TTT, like *The Message*, “stands on the border between two worlds, getting the language of the Bible that God uses to create and save us, heal and bless us, judge and rule over us, into the language of Today that we use to gossip and tell stories, give directions and do business, sing songs and talk to our children.”⁶⁹ While I do not agree specifically with Peterson’s beliefs in terms of God’s role in our lives and salvation the way he means it, the essence remains true. As has been noted elsewhere, translation is about making choices, “Deciding which intention you want to bring forth from the text.”⁷⁰ Therefore footnotes will be used to convey interpretive choices made by the translation, include certain relevant comments from these sources, commentary, citations, and questions for a reader’s further consideration.

Tone is an important feature of a translation. To that end, there are moments where more colloquial expressions are more and less appropriate. For example, Moses’ death scene retained a somber tone with few changes from the faithful translation. However, other narratives, such as the Rosh Hashanah readings, allowed a greater opportunities to play with the text. The principle, though, is understanding when colloquialisms and slang enhance the text and when they detract.

One of the primary sources for defining colloquialisms is Urban Dictionary. This website is a user-generated online dictionary that provides definitions of colloquial words and

⁶⁹ Peterson, *The Message*, 8.

⁷⁰ Hoffman, Joel. "Joel Hoffman." Speech, Rereading the Bible: Text, Subtext, and filling in the gaps in between, URJ Biennial, Orlando, FL, November 7, 2015.

expressions. Once submitted, definitions are voted up or down by the community based on their accuracy. Although Urban Dictionary is not an ideal source, as anyone can go on the site and submit a definition to a word, it is the most reliable source available to help define colloquialisms. As of now, there is no equivalent Merriam Webster for colloquialisms. In later drafts of the TTT text, it will be incumbent on those helping to edit the text to make sure that colloquialisms are being used correctly and not insensitively.

Broad Hebrew Grammar Principles

It would be impossible to write in this space every Hebrew grammar rule that TTT will employ. Instead, what follows are principles, followed by some examples, which will inform TTT's creation. These come from *Biblical Hebrew: A Compact Guide* by Miles Van Pelt, the introductions of some of the above translations and commentaries, and notes from various Bible classes throughout my rabbinical school experience.

I. Verbs

- A. Every attempt will be made to keep verbs in their proper form (i.e., passive voice is translated as such, active voice is not translated in passive, etc.)
- B. Generally speaking, perfect forms are equivalent to past tense, imperfect forms are equivalent to future tense, imperative expresses direct commands or requests, infinitive construct means "to [something]" or "in order to [something]." Negatively speaking, לֹא is used to negate the imperative that is often something short-term (e.g., "Don't say that."), whereas אַל is an emphatic negative with eternal implications (e.g., "Don't ever say that.")
 - 1. Infinitives are negated with bilti or l'vilti, not with al or lo.
 - 2. Infinitive construct could mean "to," "in order to," "about to," could function like a noun, prefixed or not with lamed, "by [word]ing," or if prefixed with bet or kaf to mean "when" or "while."
 - 3. Infinite absolutes are meant to convey emphasis of some kind
 - 4. The infinitive of emphasis - "Since the function of this infinitival formulation in Hebrew is to emphasize, I think that it is best translated by the usual mechanisms of

emphasis in English. The usual ways to convey emphasis in English are the use of either italics or exclamation points.”⁷¹

5. Participles are verbal adjectives, acting like both. When functioning as a verb, participles can be active or passive. When functioning as an adjective, participles are gendered and numbered.

C. Forms:

1. Qal - simple form (ex. he killed; he will kill; kill!; to kill)
2. Qal - active (ex. killing)
3. Qal - passive (ex. being killed)
4. Niphal - simple, passive or reflexive (ex. he was heard / he heard himself)
5. Piel - intensive action with active voice (ex. he smashed), can also be repetitive action
6. Pual - intensive action with passive voice (ex. it was smashed)
7. Hiphil - causative with active voice (ex. he made (someone) king)
8. Hophal - causative with passive voice (ex. he was put to death)
9. Hitapel - intensive action with reflexive voice (ex. he sanctified himself)

II. Nouns

A. When a noun is gendered in a way that affects its meaning, gender will be preserved in translation. Whenever possible, nouns will retain singular, plural, and dual meanings, except where it provides an unnecessary barrier to the reader's understanding. Strategies to avoid gender ambiguities in the English may include, “rendering a singular collective noun in the plural, using an equivalent English idiom, supplying additional nouns for clarity, and employing ‘the’ and ‘that’ to convey the specificity of a possessive pronoun.”⁷² TTT does not aspire to be gender neutral in its treatment of nouns, but does aspire to be gender accurate, staying faithful to the text. When substantial changes are made, they will be noted in footnotes.

1. “In terms of gender, Hebrew nouns are either masculine or feminine (though a few are both masculine and feminine). In terms of number, Hebrew nouns may be singular, plural, or dual (meaning “two”).”⁷³
2. Ex: Horse, horses, two horses; law, laws, two laws.
3. Ex: bamim - depending on context could be sons, sons & daughters, or children
4. Ex: b’nei Yisrael - depending on context could be Israelites, children of Israel, or sons of Israel.

III. Pronouns

A. Personal pronouns - Could be simple meaning (ex. I, we, you, he, she, it, they) or "to be"

1. Ex. “And Joseph was (hu) the ruler over the land” (Gen. 42:6)

B. Relative pronouns

⁷¹ Friedman, *Commentary*, xv.

⁷² Plaut, *The Torah*, xxviii.

⁷³ Van Pelt, Miles V. *Biblical Hebrew: A Compact Guide*. Zondervan, 2001., 14.

1. Asher - who, whom, whose, that, which
- C. Interrogative pronouns
 1. Mah - What?
 2. Mi - Who?
 3. Lamah - Why?
 4. Eich/Eichah - How?
 5. Ei/Ayeh - Where?

IV. Adjectives

- A. "Adjectival usage falls into three categories: attributive, predicative, and substantive." (Van Pelt, 36)
- B. Attributive: modifies a noun while agreeing with its gender, number, and definiteness. (ex. the good king, a great darkness, etc.)
- C. Predicative: asserts something about a noun. Usually indicated by the verb "to be" in English. (ex. the day is great; the famine was severe)
- D. Substantive: used independently as nouns (ex. take now your son, your only one.)

V. Particles

- A. Interrogative Particle hai - equivalent to a question mark
- B. Directional particle "-ah" - to/towards; equivalent to prepositional phrase "el"
- C. Hinei - a demonstrative interjection - "behold," look, check it out, whoa, etc.

VI. Prepositions / Prefixes

- A. Single letters:
 1. bet - in, by, with
 2. lamed - to, for
 3. kaf - like, as, according to
 4. vav - and, or, now, when, so, then, thus, thereupon, although, but, yet
 5. Definite Article Hei - be aware of, and deal with when it comes. Could mean "the," "this/that," referring directly to the person if attached to a name or title, superlative use of adjective (good/best/most), possessive.
 6. mem - from
 7. Shin - (relative pronoun) who, whom, whose, that, which
- B. Structures:
 1. al- - on, upon, concerning
 2. el- - to, toward
 3. ad- - until, as far as
 4. min- - from, than (in comparative use), some (in partitive use)
- C. Word prepositions:
 1. Echad/Achat - when used as an indefinite article, means "a man" or "a woman"
 2. Tachat ha-[noun] - under
 3. Achar ha-[noun] - after
 4. Bein ha-[noun] - between
- D. Compound prepositions
 1. Meial - from upon
 2. Mitachat - from under
 3. Meieit - from with
 4. Al-d'var - on account of
 5. B'toch - in the midst of

6. Mitoch - From the midst of
7. Lifnei - before, in the presence of
8. Mipnei - away from, out from, from the presence of, from before, on account of, because of
9. Milifnei - away from, from before, from the presence of, on account of
10. Al-p'nei - in the face of, in the sight of, in front of, before, up against, opposite to
11. Mikol - lit. "from every," but means something more superlative (ex. "The most clever...")

VII. Names & Identifiers

- A. As a translation rooted in the Hebrew, and a Jewish translation for a culture that uses Hebrew names for people and places, people and place names will be transliterated and presented in italics. As Judaism has a rich history of depth in name meanings, which is conveyed either through breaking down the Hebrew or through extra-biblical sources, those explanations will be included in the footnote the first time that character's name appears.
- B. Similarly, God, who goes by many names in the text, will go by "God" in most cases, but יהוה, the most familiar God name, will go by "Adonai," as it is read by most Jews. With regards to gendered language, TTT will follow *Torah: A Modern Commentary Revised*'s policy: "God-language [will be] rendered in gender-neutral terms... This policy is not meant to deny the original, grammatically masculine wording; rather, it sits alongside the original text and hopefully builds a more solid bridge to it."⁷⁴ In short: אלהים will be rendered as "God," יהוה as "Adonai," and the compound יהוה אלהים will flip syntax for the sake of clarity, "God, Adonai."

VIII. Commands & Mitzvot

- A. Among the multitude of considerations when doing these translations was the idea of commands. Nearly all translations take the imperative forms and render them as, "You shall x," or "You are to y." However, and this was especially relevant for these particular sets of texts, the Torah makes it clear that each person needs to take on the mantle of Mitzvah individually. This was articulated most clearly in the Yom Kippur and Shavuot readings, which make it clear that while there is a communal responsibility to itself and the tradition, each individual must be personally responsible for seeing themselves standing at Sinai and agreeing to the laws and customs of our tradition. Therefore, this translation is highly informed by Rabbi Richard Levy's understanding of mitzvot: "This is something very important to Me that you do." (Levy, *A Vision of Holiness*) The phrases "You shall" and "You are to" are replaced with "You should." The lone exception to this is the Ten Commandments, due to their heightened importance, where each command is rendered as a command: "Do not x," "Remember y," "Honor z."

⁷⁴ Plaut, *The Torah*, xxix.

Testing The Idea With Teens

It would be disingenuous for me to suggest that I have such a grasp on the current state of teen language and colloquialisms that whatever translations I develop of TTT would be accepted as satisfactory by today's teens. After all, a term that is used by teens in northern California could be meaningless to those in London. Therefore, the long-term goal of this project is to create a foundation upon which teens could augment the colloquialisms to fit their understanding. My version should not be the last. Indeed, it should only be a first draft to be reviewed and edited by teens. To begin to meet that goal, I knew I would need to develop a sense of balance in determining how far off the normative path a translation can take for the text to still be considered somewhat serious. As mentioned earlier and reinforced by some of my students to whom I have taught my "TXting the Text" curriculum, not all translations fit every place and time. In more prayerful settings, colloquialisms can be distracting. Similarly, not enough colloquial influence when presenting a TTT version of a text can make the premise of this project less impactful and meaningful. I wanted to test this concept with teens to make sure this idea would resonate with them.

What follows are three examples of texts that were written by teens. All three were given nearly the same instructions: Take these primary source texts and translate them into modern, colloquial English. Since the students did not have a background in Hebrew, they were asked to work from other translations (the first was offered five different translations to source his, the other two used the translations in the Machzor, *Mishkan Hanefesh*). What the students returned was illuminating and informative. The three texts were *Sh'ma* and the first paragraph of *V'ahavta* (Deut. 6:4-9), the Haftarah reading for Rosh Hashanah morning (I Samuel 1:1-2:10), and the Haftarah reading for Yom Kippur morning (Isaiah 58:1-14). While the last two are

prophetic works and not from Torah, their narrative nature and the process by which the students created these translations still made the outcome meaningful and useful.

Sh'ma & V'ahavta (Deut. 6:4-9 Joe S., San Diego, CA)

Listen up Israel: You see Him? He is your God, the only God. You shall love Him and respect Him your entire life. You see these commandments here? You must live by them your entire life. Take them into your heart. You are to teach them to your children and make them live by them their entire lives. You see these commandments? You put them on your door to remind you about them your entire life. These commandments are how to live a good and a holy life.

While some of the language may not be a perfect representation of the Hebrew, the style Joe presents is a wonderful first draft what TTT is attempting to accomplish. This text, even without using colloquialisms, presents a known text in a style that is more approachable; yet, what Joe is also able to do is maintain the seriousness and, to me, the sanctity of the text. This translation attempt strikes a wonderful balance between modern style and sacred character for such a known and beloved piece of text and liturgy.

Rosh Hashanah Haftarah (I Samuel 1:1-2:10 Max & Rose S-L., West Hollywood, CA)

Once upon a time there was this dude from Ramatayim-Zophim, like near Ephraim. This guy's name was Elkanah- he was that dude Yerocham's son, who was Elihu's son, who was Tochu's son, who was the son of Zuph of Ephrat- so basically this guy's got a big fam. He had two wives...which was a thing... one named Chana and the other Penina. Penina had a lotta children, but poor Chana had no kids. Now this guy Elkanah used to go up and make offerings to Adonay of Hosts at Shilo where the 2 sons of this guy Eli named Chofni and Pinchas, were super tight with God. One day after Elkanah had gone up there, he gave some portions to one of his wives, Penina, and all her kids, and gave a little more to Chana to cheer her up, because he did actually love Chana and God basically made her barren, which wasn't so cool. Penina would sometimes be all annoying about it and make fun of her because she couldn't have kids, and Elkanah would be all like "nah fam, that ain't cool". Penina wasn't so chill- Chana was usually so upset she didn't eat a thing.
(text abridged for this document)

What Max & Rose have done very well is employ colloquialisms and apply an informal structure to telling this story. I appreciated the way that they maintained the Hebrew names and places, and how they were able to internalize what each character was saying and how they might say it if the story took place today. While there are times when the colloquialisms may appear to get in the way of the message (which was a piece of feedback we received from the congregation), that concern can be ironed out in subsequent drafts. The process of creating this version also taught me about the necessity of the role of the mentor. The students should not be completing these translations in a vacuum, and should work with a guide. As their guide on this text, I was able to help them alter certain lines. For example, in their first draft, they added the comment, “[Elkanah] was a bit of a player – he had two wives.” I pointed out that while that seems odd from our worldview, it was not odd from theirs. To bridge that, I suggested the change they used: “He had two wives...which was a thing.”

Yom Kippur Morning Haftarah (Isaiah 58:1-14 Kevin G., West Hollywood, CA)

“Yo listen up bro” said the man in the clouds.
Come on chill and sing like the sounds of the shofar
Tell them what they have done wrong and the House of Jacob their bad doings.
Ya you see me around town frequently
Because u know everyone wants to be like me, the almighty
As if you all played by the rules
And have not played by my rules
They ask me how do i become so cool like you
You all say, ‘why did you not see us when we fasted’
We do all this stuff for you and you don't even see it?
Well, all u even do while you fast is desire other things
While being lazy and making everyone work for you
Because your fasting is filled with struggle
And with your hateful fists you swing
No, fasting this way is no good for you
Is this the fast that I asked for dude?
(text abridged for this document)

The translation Kevin presents shows moments of “getting it” and moments of “phoning it in.” Certain lines are in a modern, colloquial style with slang and a modern tempo, while others are near replicas of the translation with which he started. The latter is not a bad thing, per say; but it does raise the point of how much change needs to happen for TTT to be differentiated from other translations. The lesson, I believe, is that TTT should be different, but not just different for its own sake. If a translation happens to be like a rendering in NJPS, for example, that may not be a bad thing, as long as the translation stays true to the goals and purpose of TTT. Both Max & Rose’s and Kevin’s translations were read during High Holiday services and were extremely well met. Even if they did not fully understand each colloquialism, congregants loved the fresh take to what can sometimes feel like rote, stale texts⁷⁵.

Conclusion

In order for TTT to be considered a success, it will put Jewish learners in conversation with the Torah. Ellingworth notes, “In order to have a useful conversation, three conditions must be met. First, the people talking must be interested in the subject under discussion. Second, they must speak the same language. And third, they must approach the subject from different points of view, so that they can say something fresh to another.”⁷⁶ Jewish learners are interested in studying Torah, and they most definitely always come with different points of view - TTT attempts to fill the second need by giving the Torah and its learners a similar language in which

⁷⁵ I am not endorsing that view, I am merely reflecting comments that were made to me

⁷⁶ Ellingworth, *Theory*, 158.

they can discuss. The drafts that come out of this capstone will need to be checked - not only by other scholars, but by teens themselves. In an ideal world, TTT would go through an editorial process that included both adults and teens. The adults can help achieve balancing the sacred nature of the text with the colloquialisms. Similarly, if a colloquialism isn't being used correctly, the teens are the best ones to correct it. Indeed, what better way for teens to have ownership of a text than by giving them a hand in its crafting.

Lastly, TXTing the Text is not intended to be the definitive translation for all Jews everywhere for all time. This is meant to be a helpful guide to teens today, understanding that in 10-20 years, the languages of slang may be completely different. This translation is specifically designed, to paraphrase Rabbi Ben Bag Bag in Pirkei Avot, to be redone and redone again and again so each generation can find meaning through its words.

List of Abbreviations & References

Alter	Alter, Robert, <u>The Five Books of Moses</u> (2008)
BDB	Brown, Driver and Briggs, <u>Hebrew and English Lexicon</u> (1994)
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (2006)
Etz Hayim	Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary (2001)
Fox	Fox, Everett, <u>The Five Books of Moses</u> (2000)
Friedman	Friedman, Richard Elliot, <u>Commentary on the Torah</u> (2003)
Gen. R.	Genesis Rabbah (~300 CE)
JPS Commentary	The JPS Torah Commentary Series (2001)
JSB	The Jewish Study Bible (2004)
Kaplan	Kaplan, Aryeh, <u>The Living Torah</u> (1981)
MLS	Mahzor Lev Shalem (2010)
MG	The Commentators' Bible, The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot (2005)
Orlinsky	Orlinsky, Harry, <u>Notes on the New Translation of the Torah</u> (1969)
Parker	Parker, Julie, <u>Valuable and Vulnerable</u> (2013)
RJ Torah	The Torah: A Modern Commentary, Revised Edition (2015)
TWC	The Torah: A Women's Commentary (2008)
UD	Urban Dictionary

Rosh Hashanah Torah Readings (Gen. 21:1-21, 22:1-14)

Faithful Translation of Rosh Hashanah Torah Readings

Gen. 21:1-21

1 When¹ Adonai attended to² Sarah as Adonai³ said, Adonai⁴ did for Sarah just as God⁵ spoke:
2 Sarah conceived, then gave birth for Avraham a son in his old age, at the time at which God had told him.

3 Avraham named his son — the one born to him, whom Sarah bore for him — Yitzchak⁶

4 Then Avraham circumcised Yitzchak, his son who was eight days old, just as God commanded him.⁷

5 Avraham⁸ was a hundred years old when Yitzchak, his son,⁹ was born to him;¹⁰

6 And Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me! Everyone that hears this will laugh at/with¹¹ me!”

7 And she said, “Who would have said to Avraham / that Sarah would nurse children¹²! / Yet, I gave birth¹³ to a son in his old age¹⁴!”

¹ The verse says just about the same thing twice in parallels. Thus, the ך becomes “when.”

² Most “took note of,” etc. Per BDB, God is attending to Sarah’s desire to have a child, which God had promised.

³ Lit. “He said;” however in the interest of presenting God in gender-neutral language, “Adonai” is used instead of “he”

⁴ The ך is represented in the comma.

⁵ See note above re: “He said.”

⁶ Yitzchak is the only patriarch who does not undergo a name change. Although Avraham declares it, it was given by God in Gen. 17:19. Yitzchak means “He laughs.” “The repeated laughter of humans in connection with the birth of Isaac is, in a sense, the inverse of God’s laughter, for it is a questioning of divine sovereignty. The person of Isaac, therefore, represents the triumph of the power of God over the limitations of nature. No wonder he receives his name from God Himself.” (JPS Commentary, 127) “The name recalls the scene when Sarah had laughed at the possibility of giving birth.” (RJ Torah, 132) This naming is unique, as “usually in the Bible it is the mother who names her son.” (TWC, 97)

⁷ “He is the first person reported to have been circumcised at that age, thereby emphasizing his role as the one true heir to the Abrahamic covenant.” (Etz Hayim, 113)

⁸ ך just breaks sentences and does not add meaning when translated.

⁹ The commas are interpretive, but I think help express the pacing best.

¹⁰ A semi-colon, as Sarah’s statement is connected to Avraham’s age.

¹¹ The ך could mean “to, for, at, with.” The laughter is complex. It could be laughter of joy, an expression of “the absurdity of a nonagenarian becoming a mother,” or a mocking laugh at Sarah. (Alter, 102) The Rabbis found it to be a joyful laughter, putting these words in Sarah’s mouth: “My experience will give new hope to other childless couples.” (Gen. R. 53:8)

¹² “Children” is a plural noun, but it “is merely indicative of species,” not a prophesy that Sarah would have multiple children (which she doesn’t). (JPS Commentary, 146)

¹³ Samaritan and Targum Jonathan texts add “to/for him.”

¹⁴ Note the symmetry of “in his old age” with Gen. 18 and 21:2. She does not look at her own short-comings, she just notes his. BHS notes that in Targum Jonathan and the Samaritan versions, there is a “ך - to him” just like we saw in verse 3.

8 The child grew up¹⁵ and was weaned. Avraham made a great feast¹⁶ on the day Yitzchak was weaned¹⁷.

9 Now¹⁸ Sarah saw Hagar the Egyptian's son, who was born to Avraham¹⁹, playing²⁰.

10 So she said to Avraham, "Drive out²¹ that handmaid²² and her son, for the son of that handmaid shall not share in the inheritance with my son, with Yitzchak."

11 But the matter was very evil in Avraham's eyes²³, [the matters] regarding²⁴ his son.

12 So God spoke to Avraham: "Let there not be evil in your eyes over the boy or over your handmaid. Everything which Sarah said to you, hear her voice, for it is through Yitzchak that your offspring shall be proclaimed.

13 "And the son of your handmaid, I will make him a nation²⁵ too, for he is your seed."

14 Avraham got up early²⁶ in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar.²⁷ He placed them on her shoulder, and the child²⁸, and he sent her. She²⁹ went and wandered about in the wilderness of Be'er Sheva.

¹⁵ There is clearly a passage of time from circumcision to this ritual.

¹⁶ I Sam. 1:23 and II Macc. 7:27 note a ritual between child and mother at about three years of age when children are weaned.

¹⁷ Although an infinitive construct, it does not mean "to," etc.

¹⁸ This clearly is happening during the feast.

¹⁹ Unlike how Yitzchak was born for Avraham through his primary wife (who in this polycoity society would have been his socio-economic equal), because of Hagar's lower status as a secondary wife who is not a socio-economic equal, this child is born "to" Avraham, instead of "for" Avraham.

²⁰ The Hebrew is a pun on the name Isaac, but it is unclear exactly what Ishmael is doing when he is "playing." He could be laughing in a mocking or joking way. Perhaps he was giggling. Rashi guesses it is some "expression of idolatry...[or] an expression of illicit sexual relations." Perhaps he is "Isaac-ing," by playing the role of Isaac, "presuming to be the legitimate heir." (Alter, 103) Whatever he was doing, we don't know exactly what it is, but it was something worthy of Sarah's severe action.

²¹ Most have as "cast out" or "cast away," but there is a beautiful symmetry about Sarah driving out an Egyptian, whose clan will later be slave drivers of the Israelites. "Drive out" also packs a bigger, active punch for the פָּעַל verb.

²² "Handmaid" and not "slave," as the word comes from the length of the hand/arm, and the extension of the hand. Additionally, it is worthy to note that Sarah uses distancing language, as if to put her at arm's length away. She does not refer to them by name, only by their status.

²³ Others, "the matter distressed Avraham greatly." The version presented is a more faithful, less idiomatic rendering.

²⁴ אֵינֶנּוּ is a plural noun - lit., "causes" - repeating "[the matters]" attempts to bring that plural feeling into the English.

²⁵ Other versions add "גִּדְּוָה" - i.e., "a great nation"

²⁶ Avraham will again arise early for the Akedah.

²⁷ Note the narrative shift back to Hagar and not "handmaid."

²⁸ The text is rather confusing because it literally says, "Placing them and the boy on her shoulder;" however, Ishmael is a teenager, so Hagar carrying him is unlikely. Some rabbinic sources argued that she did actually carry him because he was ill. They continued that the reason she later ran out of water was because he was sick and needed more water than they had been given.

²⁹ We will see later that at the end of the Akedah, the text only notes Abraham came down the mountain. Similarly, the text only mentions Hagar wondering about, even though Ishmael must be with her. This is because in both instances, the story is more about the parent than the child.

15 When the water finished from the skin, she threw³⁰ the child under one of the bushes,
16 and went and sat³¹ by herself³², opposite [him] far, about a bowshot away³³, for she said, “let
me not see when the child dies.”³⁴ She sat opposite, lifted her voice, and wept³⁵.

17 But God heard³⁶ the voice of the boy³⁷ and an angel of God cried out to Hagar from the
heavens and said to her, “What’s going on with you³⁸, Hagar? Do not fear, for God heard the
voice³⁹ of the boy where he is.

18 “Arise, take⁴⁰ the boy, and grasp your hand on him⁴¹, for I will make him a great nation⁴².”⁴³
19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water.⁴⁴ She went and filled the water skin
and let him drink.⁴⁵

20 God was with the boy as he grew. He lived in the wilderness and became a shooter of bows.⁴⁶

21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran and his mother betrothed him a wife from the land of
Mitzrayim.⁴⁷

³⁰ This seems harsh, but it is what the text says. Perhaps she threw him out of frustration of the situation, or acted out at him for whatever “playing” he did earlier to bring about this shift in their world. Whatever it is, this is what the text offers.

³¹ Before she went and wandered. Now it appears she is walking with more of a purpose.

³² per Fox

³³ “Hagar was afraid that in his anger, Ishmael might shoot an arrow at her; so she made sure to get out of range.” (Panache Raza per MG, 248)

³⁴ i.e., “do not let me see him die.”

³⁵ This is a hebraism. (Orlinsky, 96) The Septuagint suggests Ishmael may have been the one to “lift up his voice and weep.”

³⁶ “The phrase ‘God heard’ has the same meaning as the name Ishmael.” (Etz Hayim, 115)

³⁷ We don’t know that Ishmael has said anything. But clearly, it is his anguish that brings God’s attention.

³⁸ Admittedly, this is an idiomatic rendering; however, every other translation researched has a version of “what troubles you,” when any word for “trouble” is absent. Literally, the phrase should be rendered, “What with/for you.”

³⁹ Other manuscripts of תָּשָׁע and not לָשָׁע - the former meaning “God heard the voice,” the latter, “God heard toward the voice.” This translation follows the reading תָּשָׁע, as it makes more sense contextually.

⁴⁰ Most render “lift,” as he has been thrown into the thicket; taking him by the hand is a more caring, conciliatory, subtextually apologetic action.

⁴¹ Most “take him by the hand,” but this is causative.

⁴² What God said to Abraham, God says to Hagar.

⁴³ “These words are spoken by the angel, but they certainly appear to be the words of God, not the angel itself. Angels do not make great nations in the Tanach. This is another demonstration that angels are not independent beings in the Hebrew Bible but are rather expressions of God’s presence.” (Friedman, 72)

⁴⁴ “God performed a miracle, not by creating a well where none had been before, but by opening Hagar’s eyes so that she could see what she previously had been blind to, the existence of life-sustaining resources in her world. Once again, we encounter the theme of seeing.” (Etz Hayim, 115)

⁴⁵ More literally, “made him drink,” or “caused him to drink,” but there is a sense of tenderness conveyed which those renderings do not. It should be clear, however, that this is not a permissive “let him drink,” as if she were holding back water for herself.

⁴⁶ There is a doubling of the professional designation, hence this rendering. “Targum Jonathan renders: and he was a teacher of archers.” (MG 249)

⁴⁷ “Unlike most biblical women, Hagar herself finds her son a wife. Ishmael’s wife is from Egypt, like Hagar herself.” (TWC, 100)

Gen. 22:1-24

1 It happened after these things⁴⁸ that God⁴⁹ tested⁵⁰ Avraham. God said to him, “Avraham!”⁵¹ And he said, “Here I am.”⁵²

2 So⁵³ God said, “Take, please⁵⁴ — your son, your only⁵⁵, whom you love — Yitzchak⁵⁶, and go⁵⁷ to the land of Moriyah⁵⁸, and offer him up there as a whole burnt-offering⁵⁹ on a mountain which I will say to you.”

3 Avraham rose early in the morning and readied⁶⁰ his donkey and took two servant boys⁶¹ with him and Yitzchak, his son. He split wood for a whole burnt-offering and started to go towards⁶² the place which God had told him⁶³.

4 On the third day Avraham lifted his eyes and saw the place from afar.

⁴⁸ Clearly some time has passed from the previous episode. “According to the Rabbis, Isaac was 37 years old when this story occurred.” (RJ Torah, 135) Their reasoning is that Sarah’s death is directly connected to this story, and it is noted that she died at 127 and gave birth to Isaac at 90.

⁴⁹ written “האלהים - The God.” Why is the ה present, and what is it meant to represent? It is a definite article ה, used to refer directly to Avraham’s God, not just any God.

⁵⁰ Every instance of a test is a test of faith. In Ex. 15:25, God tests the Israelites’ faith. In Ex. 17:7, the people test God’s faith in them.

⁵¹ “The Greek and Samaritan version have his name called twice here.” (Friedman, 73) This would mirror how Avraham is called in v. 11.

⁵² This is “a term frequently used to convey readiness, usually in relation to a superior’s command or address,” i.e., “you have my attention” or “yes?” (Fox, 93)

⁵³ Since Avraham has indicated his readiness, God proceeds.

⁵⁴ “The Hebrew adds the participle ‘נָא’ to the imperative, which usually softens the command to an entreaty, as noted in b. San. 89b, G. Rab. 55:7, and Rashi’s commentary. Abraham has absolute freedom of choice. Should he refuse, he would not incur any guilt.” (JPS Commentary, 151)

⁵⁵ “Some scholars, bothered by the technical inaccuracy of the term, have followed an ancient reading of *yadid*, ‘favored one,’ instead of the Masoretic *yachid*. This seriously misses the point that in regard to Abraham’s feelings, Isaac, this sole son by his legitimate wife, is his only one.” (Alter, 108-9)

⁵⁶ I have tried to maintain, in good English, the syntactic chain, leaving Isaac for the last. Alter notes this is “forged to carry a dramatic burden.” (Alter, 108) The Sages imagine a dialogue between God and Abraham: “Take your son.” “I have two sons.” “Your only son.” “Each is an only son to his mother.” “Whom you love.” “I love them both.” Finally, God is explicit: “Isaac.” (BT Sanh. 89b, per Etz Hayim, 118)

⁵⁷ The Hebrew לך-לך is a literary connection to Avraham’s call narrative earlier in Gen. 12:1.

⁵⁸ Mt. Moriyah is thought to refer to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

⁵⁹ Per BDB, “the whole burnt-offering (beast or fowl) is entirely consumed and goes up in the flame of the altar to God expressing the ascent of the soul in worship. All of the victim is laid on the altar except the hide and such parts as could not be washed clean.” (BDB, 5930)

⁶⁰ Per BDB, “of equipping a beast for riding”

⁶¹ Lit. “boys” or “youths,” but in context, they are clearly servants/attendants. Calling them “servant boys” maintains both ideas. While this translation uses “servant boys” here, it is worth noting that there is a great deal of discussion in a variety of commentaries as to how to understand this term.

⁶² This is a hendiadys. Literally, the Hebrew reads, “[he] arose and [he] went,” but as a hendiadys, it is one action. In order to maintain the imagery of Avraham “going up” in his travel, I have used the phrase “went up.”

⁶³ Is this place already a holy place, or will Avraham’s actions make it a holy place?

5 Avraham said to his servant boys⁶⁴, “Stay here with the donkey, while I, and the boy⁶⁵, go up there, and worship, then we will return to you.

6 Avraham took the wood for the whole burnt-offering and put it upon Yitzchak, his son. He took, in his hand, the firestone⁶⁶ and the cleaver⁶⁷. And the two of them walked together.

7 Now⁶⁸ Yitzchak spoke to Avraham, his father, and said, “My father?⁶⁹” He replied, “Here I am⁷⁰, my son.⁷¹” And he said [continuing], “Here is the firestone.⁷²” “And the wood; but where is the lamb for the whole burnt-offering?”

8 And Avraham said, “God will see to the lamb for God’s whole burnt-offering, my son.” And the two of them walked together.

9 When they arrived to the place God had told him, Avraham built there the altar and he arranged the wood and bound⁷³ Yitzchak, his son. He set him on top of the altar, atop the wood.

10 Then Avraham stretched out⁷⁴ his hand and took the knife to slaughter⁷⁵ his son.

11 But an Angel of Adonai⁷⁶ called to him from the heavens and said: “Avraham! Avraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”

⁶⁴ see note in v. 3.

⁶⁵ Idiomatically, “The boy and I,” but the syntax adds to the drama: “I, and the boy...” It is as if the boy is an afterthought. Indeed, as we will see at the end of the story when Avraham walks down alone, the story is ultimately about Avraham, not Avraham and Yitzchak. Further, it is worth observing that the “boy” implied here, Yitzchak, is noted as נער, the same word used earlier in the verse to refer to the servant boys.

⁶⁶ Per JPS. “Since it is considered unlikely that a flame would be carried for three days, this seems a more likely rendering than ‘fire.’” (JPS Commentary, 152)

⁶⁷ Because of how the story uses butchering terms, rather than sacrifice (to slaughter in verse 10, to bind in verse 9), some use the butchering “cleaver” and not just “knife.” (Alter, 109) The only other time in Tanach when this word is used is in Judges 19:29 as part of a disturbing scene when a husband cuts up his concubine. Further, “There may be wordplay here: the instrument of death is ma’achelet, and the rescuing agent is a mal’ach.” (JPS Commentary, 152)

⁶⁸ What timing for Yitzchak to finally speak up! This is his first statement in the Torah.

⁶⁹ Others “Father!” or “My father!” “The Hebrew is literally ‘My father,’ but that noun with the possessive ending is the form of intimate address in biblical Hebrew,” therefore, this translation presents אבי as “Father?” because it is clear he is addressing his father. (Alter, 109) Further, this is similar to God’s request for Avraham’s attention earlier in the story.

⁷⁰ Trad. “Here am I” fails to do justice to the sundry nuances of *hinne* in dialogue. After walking side by side for two days and more, Abraham would hardly have responded to his son’s opening remark by “Here am I.” (Orlinsky, 97)

⁷¹ This is the first time Avraham refers to Yitzchak as his son.

⁷² It is noted earlier that Avraham carried the firestone. All other translations have this full clause in Yitzchak’s voice, but that does not make sense since we know he carried the wood while Avraham carried the firestone and knife.

⁷³ This is where we get the title of the story: Akeidah - the Binding of Isaac. “The Hebrew stem of the word ‘bound’ - עקד - is found nowhere else in connection with sacrifices in the Bible.” (Etz Hayim, 120)

⁷⁴ The implication is that he lifted his hand, but the text uses the word “he sent,” which, per BDB, could mean he stretched out his hand against a human subject.

⁷⁵ “A verb used to describe animal sacrifice; the throat is slit.” (Fox, 94) Also a butchering term.

⁷⁶ Note the shift in God language from אלהים to יהוה. This is the first time Adonai is used.

12 And he said, “Do not stretch out your hand against⁷⁷ the boy and to not do anything to him, because now I know that you fear God, and you did not hold back your son, your only, from me.”⁷⁸,

13 When Avraham lifted his eyes, he saw⁷⁹ and, lo and behold, a ram⁸⁰ which was caught in a thicket by his horns. So Avraham went and took the ram and offered him as a whole burnt-offering instead of his son.

14 So Avraham called the name of that place “Adonai Yir’eh”⁸¹ hence the saying today, “On the mountain Adonai will see”⁸².

15 Then the Angel of Adonai called to Avraham a second time from the heavens,

16 and said, “By myself, I swear, Adonai declares⁸³: ‘On account of what you have done, this thing, and not held back your son, your only [one]’⁸⁴,

17 that certainly⁸⁵ I will bless you⁸⁶! And your seed will be very numerous,⁸⁷ just like the stars in the heavens and the sand which is on the seashore⁸⁸! And your seed will possess the gate⁸⁹ of its enemies.⁹⁰

18 All the nations of the land will bless themselves by your seed, because you heard⁹¹ my voice.⁹²

⁷⁷ The Samaritan, Greek Septuagint, and Latin Vulgate use the word *על*, rather than *אל*, changing the meaning, in essence, to, “Do not lay a hand *on* the boy,” instead of “*to* the boy.”

⁷⁸ One point of this story, and this statement, is that Avraham also loves God, not just his son.

⁷⁹ Ibn Ezra notes that Avraham only noticed the ram “after it was caught.”

⁸⁰ “The Masoretic Text reads ‘a ram behind [אֶחָד],’ but scholarship is virtually unanimous in following numerous ancient versions in reading אֶחָד, ‘one,’ a very similar grapheme in the Hebrew.” (Alter, 111) To mitigate this, Fox translates, “a ram caught behind in the thicket...”

⁸¹ Some manuscripts propose “יֵרָאֵה - Adonai will appear.” “The phrase at the end means literally either ‘he sees’ or ‘he will be seen,’ depending on how the verb is vocalized...It is also not clear whether it is God or the person who comes to the Mount who sees /is seen.” (Alter, 111) “The Hebrew may also be read ‘God is seen’ or as ‘the supplicant is seen.’” (MLS, 105)

⁸² Although we do not pronounce the divine name YHVH (we use “Adonai” as a substitute), “in biblical times God’s name was pronounced and was most likely alliterative with *yir’eh*. It meant that Abraham had ‘seen’ God - hence the popular saying quoted in the verse.” (RJ Torah, 136)

⁸³ Although this is admittedly clunky language, it is a faithful translation of the text. This is oath language, which involves repetition.

⁸⁴ The Samaritan, Septuagint, Peshitta, and Vulgate suggest this likely used to be read, “your only from me,” mirroring v. 12.

⁸⁵ Per BDB 3588 1e.

⁸⁶ Infinitive of emphasis

⁸⁷ Infinitive of emphasis

⁸⁸ i.e., “on the shore”

⁸⁹ “Hirsch takes ‘gates’ to mean the public forums where people sat to discuss significant matters. Thus Abraham is given the blessing that his ideas will prevail in many lands.” (Etz Hayim, 121) Alternatively, this could be a stand-in for “city.”

⁹⁰ “The same blessing is received by Rebekah, when she parts from her family.” (RJ Torah, 136)

⁹¹ Others “listened to” or “obeyed”

⁹² Lit. “In my voice.”

19 Avraham returned to his servant boys⁹³. They got up and went together to B'er Shava⁹⁴, and Avraham settled in B'er Shava.

20 So it was after these things and Avraham was told, "Lo and behold, Milkah has also borne children to Nachor, your brother⁹⁵.

21 Uz⁹⁶, his firstborn, and Buz, his brother, and K'muel, the father of Aram;

22 Chesed⁹⁷ and Chazo and Pildash and Yidlaf and B'tuel."

23 B'tuel bore Rivka. These eight Milkah bore for Nachor, the brother of Avraham.

24 And his concubine, her name was R'umah. And she also bore Teach and Gacham and Tachash and Ma'achah.

⁹³ Why do we not include Isaac? There are many explanations: 1) Midrasnhic sources that say Isaac actually was sacrificed; 2) he stayed behind because he was so hurt by his father's actions; 3) according to Friedman, verses 11-15 were added by the redactor of the texts known as J and E, meaning the story goes from Abraham taking the knife to slaughter his son straight to God ("in the original E text it is God who speaks," and not the angel of God), and Isaac never appears again in E after this. (Friedman 2003, 65) However, the story is about Abraham. We know Isaac survives because of what follows. Abraham and Isaac, however, never speak to each other after this episode.

⁹⁴ Known as "Be'er Sheva"

⁹⁵ The following list of names "represent twelve tribes or princes. They parallel the twelve tribes of Israel and illustrate a duodecimal principle of tribal organization found also in extra-biblical sources." (RJ Torah, 137)

⁹⁶ Uz is the same area that Job lives in.

⁹⁷ Kesed, or Chesed, is probably related to Chaldeans (Kasdim). (RJ Torah, 137)

TTT Translation of Rosh Hashanah Torah Readings

Gen. 21:1-21

1-7 At last, Adonai made good [on God's promise] to Sarah, just as Adonai said God would. Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to a son for Avraham, even in his old age, right when God said.¹ Avraham named his son -- his little boy², Sarah's baby³ -- Yitzchak. When his son Yitzchak was eight days old, Avraham circumcised Yitzchak, just as God said he should.⁴ At the time his son, Yitzchak, was born, Avraham was a hundred years old.⁵ Meanwhile, Sarah was all, "What a joke! When everyone hears this, they're going to crack up!"⁶ She went on, "Who would have said to Avraham that Sarah would have a baby! Yet, I gave birth to a baby boy for the old man!"

8-10 The kid grew up and the day he was weaned, Avraham threw a big party.⁷ Then it went down.⁸ Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, who was Avraham's son, playing.⁹ So she clapped back¹⁰ to Avraham, "Get rid of that handmaid and her son. There is no way your sidepiece's son is going to share in MY son, Yitzchak's, inheritance."¹¹

11-13 Avraham could not bear the sight¹² of what was happening with his son,¹³ so God spoke to Avraham: "Don't get salty¹⁴ over the boy or your handmaid. Do everything Sarah tells you. Your family will continue through Yitzchak. I will also make the son of your handmaid a great nation — he is your son after all."¹⁵

¹ Syntax shifted for clarity.

² The Torah text provides distancing language ("The one born to him"), but the narrative tells a different story. Although not his first son, Avraham does have a loving connection to Yitzchak. Hence, this rendering amplifies the familiarity in their relationship.

³ Again, the Torah gives us distancing language - Sarah bore Yitzchak for him. This also tells us that Yitzchak was, perhaps, more closely connected to Sarah than to Avraham. Thus, this rendering emphasizes the relationship between Avraham and Sarah's connection to Yitzchak: Avraham's little boy, but Sarah's baby.

⁴ Syntax shifted for clarity.

⁵ No, really! That's not just a euphemism! Syntax shifted for clarity.

⁶ The faithful translation notes that there is ambiguity with whether Sarah thinks others will laugh with or at her. This rendering maintains this ambiguity - they could be cracking up with her or at her.

⁷ Syntax shifted for clarity & brevity.

⁸ An expression to indicate something significant is about to happen.

⁹ Other translations presume to know what "playing" means. Some choose that he was "poking fun" or playing the role of Isaac. Others suggest some other form of mockery. This rendering keeps it intentionally vague, leaving it for the reader to choose for themselves what kind of "playing" would elicit the response.

¹⁰ "to insult someone after they insult you" (UD)

¹¹ Syntax shifted for clarity.

¹² This idiom maintains the connection to the text (Lit. "the matter was very evil in Avraham's eyes") while providing a more familiar expression.

¹³ Syntax shifted for clarity.

¹⁴ "Being angry, agitated, upset." (UD)

¹⁵ Syntax shifted for clarity.

14-16 Avraham got up early in the morning, took some food and water, and gave them to Hagar. He put them on her back and sent her and the child away. She *mozied*¹⁶ aimlessly in the wilderness of Be'er Sheva. When the water ran out, she threw¹⁷ him under a bush, went off and sat by herself, far enough away from him¹⁸. She sat there crying out, "Do not let me see the child die!"¹⁹

17-19 Meanwhile, God heard the boy's voice. An angel of God cried out to Hagar from the heavens and said to her, "What's going on with you, Hagar? Do not be afraid. God heard the boy's voice on the spot²⁰. Get up, take the boy, hold his hand tight. I will make him a great nation. Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went to it, got some water, and let him drink.

20-21 God stayed with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an archer. He lived in the wilderness of Paran. His mother got him a wife from Mitzrayim.

Gen. 22:1-24

1-2 After a few years²¹, God tested Avraham. God said to him, "Avraham!" And Avraham replied, "What's up?"²² God said, "Take Isaac — your son, your only, whom you love — and head up²³ to Moriyah. On a mountain I will tell you, sacrifice him."²⁴

3-5 Avraham got up early in the morning and saddled²⁵ his donkey. He took two servant boys²⁶ with him and his son, Yitzchak. He cut up the wood needed²⁷ for a sacrifice. Then, he hit the road²⁸, going towards²⁹ the place God told him. On the third day, Avraham looked up and saw

¹⁶ Another way of saying "wandered."

¹⁷ Similar to the note above re: "playing," the word in the Hebrew is "throw" - not "left" or any other euphemism.

¹⁸ The text says "about a bowshot away," but the reasoning for that distance appears to be connected to Ishmael's ability to hear her cries. Thus, this rendering just puts her vaguely "far enough" away.

¹⁹ Syntax shifted for clarity.

²⁰ This has a double meaning here. Simply, it means, "In an exact moment and under pressure," which applies here. (UD) Secondly, it ties in the Hebrew, "the voice of the boy where he is," giving a directional connotation.

²¹ Clearly some time has passed from the previous episode. While the timing is unclear from the text, rabbinic commentators suggest Isaac was 37 at this moment.

²² "A casual greeting or conversation starter, somewhat of a rhetorical question...syn. What can I do for you?, What would you like? What's on your mind?" (UD)

²³ To go towards somewhere. There's also a lovely word play that happens here that ties into the theme of the story - keeping your head up, keeping faith, and keeping your eyes open.

²⁴ Syntax shifted for clarity.

²⁵ There is a double meaning here. 1) The donkey is being equipped for riding. 2) The materials that will go atop the donkey will be a difficult burden and responsibility for Abraham to carry out.

²⁶ See discussion in faithful translation for the rationale of this choice.

²⁷ Although this is an added word, it is helpful for understanding the text.

²⁸ "Slang. to begin or resume traveling" (dictionary.com)

²⁹ These two phrases are meant to indicate one action.

the place in the distance. Avraham said to his servant boys, “Chill³⁰ here with the donkey while I, and the boy, head up there and worship. Then we will come back to you.

6-8 Avraham put the wood for the sacrifice on his son, Yitzchak,³¹ and held the firestone and the cleaver³². And the two of them walked together.

7-8 At this point, Yitzchak spoke up to his father³³, Avraham: “Daddy?!” “Yes, my son. Here is the firestone.”³⁴ He interrupted, “And the wood; but where’s the lamb for the sacrifice?”³⁵ Avraham replied, “God will make sure there is a lamb for the sacrifice, my son.” And the two of them walked together.

9-14 When they got to the place God told him, Avraham built the altar and set up the wood. He bound³⁶ Yitzchak, his son, and set him on top of the wood on the altar.³⁷ Avraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.³⁸ But [in the nick of time³⁹] an Angel of Adonai cried out to him from the heavens: “Avraham! Avraham!” And he said, “I’m here!”⁴⁰ “Don’t lay a hand on the boy! Don’t do anything to him! I now know that you fear God.⁴¹ You don’t hold anything back from me, not even your son, your only [son/one].⁴² And, would you look at that⁴³, Avraham looked up and saw a ram, caught by its horns in a thicket!⁴⁴ Avraham took the ram and offered it as a sacrifice instead of his son. Avraham named that place, “Adonai Yir’eh,” which is why today we say, “On the mountain, Adonai will see.”

³⁰ To stay in one place, to hang out.

³¹ Syntax shifted for clarity.

³² See notes from faithful translation for this word choice.

³³ Yitzchak speaks for the first time while going up the mountain to be offered as a sacrifice. He is speaking up for himself, and he is literally speaking upwards towards his father.

³⁴ See faithful translation notes regarding parsing these quotations to the characters. Avraham is so focused and intent on doing this deed for God that he is somewhat blinded to caring for his child. This also explains why this translation renders Yitzchak’s “Daddy” in a familiar way and “my son” in purely descriptive, distancing language.

³⁵ Syntax shifted for clarity.

³⁶ This is an example where a more familiar term (such as “tied up”) might have worked better; however, since this is the word that gives the story its title (the Binding of Isaac), it is necessary to maintain “bound.”

³⁷ Syntax shifted for clarity.

³⁸ While we often think of the drama of this moment as being Avraham raising his hand above Yitzchak, the text only tells us that he stretched out his, seemingly in order to take the knife. The intervention happens, it appears, as soon as he grabs the knife, not when it is in the air.

³⁹ Although this is additional language, it is strongly implied. Others “Just then.” This rendering also has the added play on words — with the word “nick”/“knick” — to add more cutting/butchery language.

⁴⁰ A turn on “Here I am.”

⁴¹ Syntax shifted for clarity.

⁴² Syntax shifted for clarity.

⁴³ This idiom combines the amazement of “הינה” with the idea that the revelation happens through Avraham’s sight.

⁴⁴ Syntax shifted for clarity.

15-18 The Angel of Adonai called to Avraham from the heavens a second time:⁴⁵ “I swear through the words of Adonai: ‘Because of what you would have done, not even holding back your son, your only [one], you’re darn right⁴⁶ I will bless you! Your family is going to be so big, as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the sand on the shore! And your kids will conquer their enemy’s cities. Every nation on earth will be blessed by your children, all because you obeyed me.

19 Avraham went back to his servant boys and they went to B’er Shava, where Avraham settled.⁴⁷

20-24 After all of this, Avraham received an announcement: Whoa! Nachor, your brother,⁴⁸ has started a family with Milkah: Uz, his firstborn, and Buz, his brother, and K’muel, Aram’s father; Chesed and Chazo and Pildash and Yidlaf and B’tuel.” B’tuel was Rivka’s father. Milkah had these eight kids for Avraham’s brother, Nachor. His concubine R’umah also had kids: Teach, Gacham, Tachash, and Ma’achah.

⁴⁵ Syntax shifted for clarity.

⁴⁶ Meaning “of course,” “certainly.”

⁴⁷ Syntax shifted for clarity.

⁴⁸ Syntax shifted to emphasize Nachor’s importance in this narrative.

Yom Kippur Torah Readings (Deut. 29:9-14; 30:1-20; Lev. 19:1-18, 32-37)

Faithful Translation of Yom Kippur Torah Readings

Deut. 29:9-14

9 You stand¹ this day², all of you³, before Adonai your God⁴ — your leaders⁵, your tribal leaders⁶, your elders, and your officials, every man of Israel,
10 your children⁷, your women⁸, and the stranger who is among your camps⁹, from your woodcutter¹⁰ to your waterdrawer¹¹ —

¹ “That is, ‘you are presenting yourselves’ before God. Hebrew *nitzsav* has a more formal connotation than *omed* (v. 14).” (JPS Commentary, 277)

² *Hayom* - this day - is the leitmotif, “functioning as a message to the double audience of Deuteronomy, namely, the implicit audience at the time of Moses and the audience contemporary with the author(s) of the book of Deuteronomy, centuries later.” (TWC, 1220)

³ “The whole of the community is greater than the sum of its parts. Each individual Israelite may be flawed and imperfect, but when all of them join together, the strengths and good qualities of each are reinforced and magnified. This also teaches that no one should say, ‘It is not my responsibility.’ Everyone must do his or her share. (Barukh of Medzibozh)” (Etz Hayim, 1165)

⁴ “Moses lists those present in order of their social status.” (Etz Hayim, 1165)

⁵ lit., “your heads”

⁶ lit., “your rod/scepter/tribe” Deeper analysis shows this word, when not referring to the rod/scepter object, refers to the tribal leader. Many combine this word and the preceding into “tribal heads,” however the construct in this verse of noun+2mp suffix (admittedly זקניכם is an adjective+2mp suffix, but its function is the same) indicates that each of these should be treated as different entities in the social structure being addressed.

⁷ Julie Parker notes that the word for children here, בָּנֵי, “suggests dependents, or a particular group of dependents...Overall, בָּנֵי are vulnerable, especially when this word portrays children.” (Parker, 66) In this context, the children are not merely another category of vulnerable people but are considered an integral part of the Israelite community. “Not only the leaders and the adult males but each individual member of the community takes part in affirming the covenant...all must commit themselves personally, and not through the action of a parent, husband, or superior.” (Etz Hayim, 1165)

⁸ It makes more sense that this is meant to be understood as “women” and not “wives” as some translations use. “In Deuteronomy, all, including women, are included in the covenantal community” (JSB, 434)

⁹ It is curious that the “stranger” is singular while “camps” is plural.

¹⁰ “Since all categories of Israelites have already been listed, this phrase must refer to aliens who served as menial laborers.” (JPS Commentary, 278)

¹¹ “Equivalent to ‘every man jack among you.’ (Fox, 988) “In literary English, ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ has come to stand for menial service.” (RJ Torah, 1373) “It has been suggested that both ‘woodchopper’ and ‘water drawer’ had figurative meanings, the former a reference to Avraham (who took wood for the sacrifice of Yitzchak), the latter referring to Eliyahu (who used water in his contest with the Baal priests).” (RJ Torah, 1373)

11 by your¹² passing through¹³ into a covenant of Adonai your God, and with this oath which Adonai your God is establishing¹⁴ with you this day,

12 in order that God may establish you this day, for God¹⁵, as a people, so God¹⁶ will be your God, just as God spoke to you¹⁷, and just as God had sworn to your fathers¹⁸: to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov.

13 Thus, not with you alone do I establish¹⁹ this covenant and this oath²⁰,

14 but [with] the one²¹ who is standing here with us this day before Adonai our God²² as well as [the one] who is not here with us this day²³.

¹² Switch from plural “you” to singular “you.” This could perhaps reinforce the idea that each individual must establish the covenant.

¹³ The idea of passing into a covenant is believed to be an ancient ritual where animals were cut in two and the two parties passed between their parts. “It is a reasonable guess that the old -- perhaps archaic -- idiom is used here to underscore the binding solemnity of this covenant.” (Alter, 1022) Fox believes this may be a word play with what comes later in verse 15, where the Israelites “crossed amid the nations.” (Fox, 988)

¹⁴ lit. “cutting,” comes from the aforementioned covenant ceremony involving cutting an animal and passing through it. “As in the colloquial expression that joins a promise (“cross my heart”) to a pronouncement dooming oneself for noncompliance (“and hope to die”), so in the ancient Near East were covenants validated by means of a concluding imprecation.” (JSB, 434)

¹⁵ lit. “for Him”

¹⁶ lit. “He”

¹⁷ “Refers to the mutual relationship God promised to the Exodus generation (in Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12).” (JPS Commentary, 339)

¹⁸ “According to translator David Stein, this term can have either a male-only or an inclusive sense, depending on context. He argues here the term refers specifically to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), those with whom God formed a covenant in their capacity as (male) heads of their corporate households. It goes without saying that each patriarch represents the entire household, and that God's covenant applies to all its members - women and men alike.” (TWC, 1070)

¹⁹ see note in v. 11 re: “cutting”

²⁰ While the syntax here sounds awkward, it is presented this way to faithfully reflect the Hebrew syntax.

²¹ Logic would tell us that this should be plural, but the Hebrew indicates this is singular.

²² Others, “your God,” not “our God.”

²³ The rabbis teach from this that all unborn generations were also standing at Sinai, “that is, future generations. The reference cannot be to absentees, since verses 9-10 indicate that all are present. According to Midrash Tanhuma, the phrase refers to those who were spiritually present: the souls of all future generations of Jews (and, adds Bekhor Shor, of future converts) were present and bound themselves to God by this covenant. In any case, the point of the text is that the mutual commitments made here by God and Israel are binding for all future generations. Ancient Near Eastern treaties likewise stipulate that they are binding on the parties' descendants.” (JPS Commentary, 278) How should we reconcile the idea from the teaching in v. 9 & 10 that each of us has a responsibility to the community and must commit themselves personally with the idea that our ancestors imposed these obligations of the covenant on us?

Deut. 30:1-20

1 So it will be, that all of these things will come upon you, the blessing and the curse²⁴ which I put before you²⁵, and you reflect²⁶ in²⁷ your heart, [when you are] there²⁸ among all the nations which Adonai your God banished you²⁹,
2 and you return³⁰ toward³¹ Adonai your God and you will obey God's³² voice according to all which I am commanding you this day, you and your children, with all of your heart and with all of your soul³³,

²⁴ "The blessing and the curse" "The blessing within the curse. There is no calamity that does not have a kernel of blessing concealed within it, even if it only motivates us to seek the cause of the calamity and prevent it from recurring." (Etz Hayim, 1169)

²⁵ "The blessing and the curse that I have set before you" "That I have offered you as alternatives. This idiom, repeated in vv. 15 and 19, harks back to Moses' preamble to the laws in 11:26." (JPS Commentary, 284)

²⁶ "The term 'turn back'/'return' is the thematic center of this passage, alternating between Israel and God in dialectic interplay." (Alter, 1027)

²⁷ Some לִבְבְּךָ אֵל, not על.

²⁸ "there" comes at the end of the verse, but refers to the place to which God has banished.

²⁹ "your God has driven/banished you." "The word 'driven' is ironic here. It has been used three times until now, always referring to persons who would drive Israelites away from their God (Deut. 13:6, 11, 14). But now it describes how YHWH drives Israel away to other lands because of Israel's apostasy. The term is thus another allusion to the fact of divine punishment to fit the crime, which is to say: there is justice." (Friedman, 657)

³⁰ Some "shuv't'cha" not "sh'vut'cha" "Shuv, 'return,' is the verb from which teshuvah, the Hebrew term for repentance, is derived...the Hebrew term does not refer only to contrition but to a change of behavior, literally a "return" to God and to the behavior that God requires...In the Torah it is mentioned only as something that occurs after punishment has taken place: if the people take their punishment to heart and return to God, God will terminate their punishment. The prophets developed the concept further. They called upon people to repent before it is too late, and to thereby avert punishment altogether. The concept of teshuvah in classical Judaism combines both ideas, with emphasis on the latter." (JPS Commentary, 54) "The root shuv holds several different meanings in its eight occurrences in this unit, all of which exemplify an internal process of change and transformation: return from the bad ways, regret, leaving the evil deeds behind, changing the way of life, and finally approaching God in a close relationship. The intertwining occurrences of the root shuv emphasizes the reciprocal nature of the God-human relationship." (TWC, 1224)

³¹ "return" "T'shuvah, turning to God in repentance with a plea for forgiveness, is a mitzvah in its own right." (Etz Hayim, 1169) "return to" "Literally, 'turn around toward.' Similarly, a phrase in v. 10 means 'return to.' This variation in languages reflects two stages in the process of repentance. The first stage is a realization that our behavior is wrong and requires a change of direction. This is 'turning toward' God. The second stage is coming into the presence of God as the result of one's new way of life, 'returning to' God. (Malbim)" (Etz Hayim, 1169)

³² lit. "his"

³³ "With all your heart and soul" "In Hebrew, 'heart' usually refers to the interior of the body, conceived of as the seat of thought, intention, and feeling, and 'soul' refers to the seat of the emotions, passions, and desires...To do something with all the heart and soul means to do it with the totality of one's thoughts, feelings, intentions, and desires." (JPS Commentary, 77)

3 then Adonai your God will return your captivity³⁴ and have compassion for you³⁵. [God] will return and gather you from all the other peoples, there³⁶, which Adonai your God scattered you.
 4 If one of your banished³⁷ ones is at the end of the sky³⁸, from there Adonai your God will gather you and, from there, collect³⁹ you.
 5 Then Adonai your God will bring you in⁴⁰ to the land which your fathers⁴¹ inherited, and you will possess⁴² it. [God] will deal well with you, and you [will] prosper more than your fathers.
 6 And Adonai your God will circumcise your heart⁴³ and your offspring's⁴⁴ heart⁴⁵ so that you will love Adonai your God⁴⁶ with all your heart and with all your soul for the sake of your life.

³⁴ "Hebrew *shav et shevut*, literally, 'return a return,' is an idiom meaning 'restore.' Midrasnic exegesis takes it to mean 'God will return with your captives,' meaning that God ... returns from exile when Israel does. God accompanies Israel in exile, suffers along with them, and returns only when God brings them back. This interpretation, homiletically attractive in itself, is reached by disregarding the idiomatic meaning of *shav et shevut* and assigning each of the three words a meaning which it has when it appears separately elsewhere: 'return,' 'with' and '(your) captivity.'" (JPS Commentary, 284) This expression occurs about twenty-five times in the Tanak. It is grammatically unclear. The verb (b) would normally be in the Hiphil, but here (and usually) it is in the intransitive Qal. The noun may reflect the root wb, "bring back" (making it a cognate accusative with the verb), or it may reflect the root bh, "captive." On the former root, the phrase would mean "to produce a coming back." On the latter root, it would mean "to bring back a captivity." These two meanings are very close to each other in any case. Those who take this phrase to mean figuratively "to restore your fortunes" have a good parallel in Job 42: 10; but all the occurrences in Jeremiah, which is linked closely with Deuteronomy, fit the meaning of "coming back" or "captivity" far better. Note especially Jer 30: 16– 23 and 48: 46– 47, in which this expression occurs in proximity to the related word for captivity: *ebi*." (Friedman, 657) The meaning of *shevut*, here rendered as "former state," has long been disputed. Many interpreters derive it from the root sh-b-h and hence understand it to mean "captivity." The use of the same verb (*shuv*) with this noun *shevut* in Jeremiah 48:47 immediately after the term *shivyah*, which unambiguously means "captivity," would seem to lend support to this understanding. But precisely this idiom is employed for the restoration of the fortunes of Job (42:10), where there is no question of Job's having been in a prior state of captivity." (Alter, 1028)

³⁵ "Take you back in love" This verse is quoted in the modern 'Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel,' urging God to continue gathering Jews from all corners of the Diaspora to Israel." (JPS Commentary, 284)

³⁶ See note above re: "there"

³⁷ "outcasts" "Literally 'your banished ones' echoing the same root as in 'banished' in v. 1." (JPS Commentary, 285)

³⁸ "The heaven was pictured as a dome standing atop pillars situated at the ends of the earth; hence the ends of heaven and of earth were coterminous." (JPS Commentary, 55)

³⁹ lit. "fetch"

⁴⁰ Most translate simply "bring you," but "bring in" (per BDB entry 2) maintains the imagery of scattering [out] and bringing in.

⁴¹ Per TWC, see note above.

⁴² Although the Hebrew word is the same, the Patriarchs inherited the land, and the Israelites took possession of it.

⁴³ Literally, "will circumcise your heart." NJPS, "will open up your heart." "Figuratively, to peel away the 'thick' part, thus enabling one to love / be loyal to God." (Fox, 898)

⁴⁴ Others, "seed's"

⁴⁵ "Meaning, the hearts of your progeny." (Friedman, 658)

⁴⁶ "Love of God in Deuteronomy is not only an emotional attachment to God, but something that expresses itself in action...When Deut. describes God's love for humanity, it means a love expressed in benevolent acts...Israel's duty to love God is likewise inseparable from action; it is regularly connected with the observance of God's commandments...In such contexts 'love' means 'act lovingly.' This usage is comparable to that of ancient Near Eastern political terminology where 'love' refers to the loyalty of subjects, vassals, and allies...the command to love God may accordingly be understood as requiring one to act lovingly and loyally toward God...For post biblical

7 Then Adonai your God will set all of these curses⁴⁷ upon your enemies and upon [those who] hate you, who have pursued you.

8 When you will return and obey Adonai's voice and do all of God's *mitzvot* which I command you this day.

9 And Adonai your God will make you abundant in all of your handiwork, your offspring⁴⁸, and in the offspring of your animals, and in the fruits of your land for good; because Adonai will return to rejoice over you for good⁴⁹, just as [God] rejoiced over your fathers,

10 certainly you will obey the voice of Adonai your God in order to keep [God's] *mitzvot* and laws, what is written⁵⁰ in this scroll of Torah, when you return to Adonai your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

11 Surely this commandment⁵¹ which I command you this day is not extraordinary⁵² for you, and it is not too far away⁵³.

12 It is not in the heavens⁵⁴, that one would say, "Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us and cause us to hear it and do it⁵⁵?"

writers love and fear represented two distinct motives for serving God. The dominant view in rabbinic thought is that love of God is superior since it is a more durable attitude." (JPS Commentary, 77)

⁴⁷ "The noun invoked is 'alah,' the solemn oath mentioned at the ceremony of the blessings and the curses, which when violated becomes dire imprecation." (Alter, 1028)

⁴⁸ "Literally 'fruit of the belly', an expression that uses agricultural production as a metaphor for children...the phrase 'your pri beten' most likely designates his descendants." (TWC, 1092) "Human fertility is often thought of as a woman's domain, but here it is clearly part of the community's blessing and of major concern to the men as well." (TWC, 1200)

⁴⁹ That is, "be determined to grant you well-being"

⁵⁰ Some "Hak'tuvim - the writings" not "Hak'tuvah - the writing"

⁵¹ "The laws and teachings of Deut., the 'Teaching' (Torah)." (JPS Commentary, 286) "The Sages of the Talmud understand this as referring to the entire Torah...to later scholars (Ramban, Albo), this phrase referred [specifically] to the mitzvah of repentance, the subject of the previous 10 verses." (Etz Hayim, 1170)

⁵² "The force of the Hebrew root p-l-' is something hidden (as Abraham ibn Ezra says) or beyond human ken. The crucial theological point is that divine wisdom is in no way esoteric—it has been clearly set out in 'this book of teaching' and is accessible to every man and woman in Israel." (Alter, 1029) "Mysteries" (Saadia). Or, "Hidden" (Targum; Rashi); or, "difficult" (Ibn Ezra; Septuagint). (Kaplan, 581) "It is not beyond your ability to understand." (JPS Commentary, 286)

⁵³ "The commandments are not enigmatic, they do not reside in a distant realm, and they do not require an intermediary. They are already made known. And they are within a human's ability to do." (Friedman, 659)

⁵⁴ "Compare Proverbs 30:4: "Who has ascended heaven and come down?" and the Mesopotamian saying, "Who is tall enough to reach heaven, who is tall enough to encompass the earth?" ... "The pithy statement that God's Instruction is not in heaven is invoked in rabbinic literature to express fundamental concepts of Judaism. In the Talmud it is used to represent the idea that the authority for interpreting the Torah is not in God's hands. Once God gave the Torah to Israel, God gave the authority to decide how it is to be applied entirely to legal scholars, and retained none for God's self." (JPS Commentary, 286)

⁵⁵ Notice the flip here from Ex. 24:7, when, after Moses writes and reads aloud the words of the Torah, the Israelites respond "we will do and we will hear."

13 Nor is it beyond the sea⁵⁶, that one would say, “Who will pass through for us to beyond the sea and take it for us and cause us to hear it and do it?”

14 For the thing is very close to you⁵⁷, in your mouth⁵⁸ and in your heart⁵⁹, to do it.

15 See, I put before you this day⁶⁰ life and good, and death and bad⁶¹,

16 that⁶² I command you this day to love Adonai your God, to go in God’s paths and to keep God’s mitzvot, God’s laws, and God’s judgements so you will live and multiply⁶³ and Adonai your God will bless you in the land you are about to enter to possess.

17 But if your heart turns and you do not listen and you are driven away so you worship other gods and serve them,

18 I proclaim to you this day that you will surely perish!⁶⁴ Your days will not be long on the land that you are crossing the Yarden [river] to come to possess.

⁵⁶ “An especially daunting proposition for the Israelites, who were not coast dwellers.” (Fox, 992) “The difficulty of crossing the sea was also proverbial. Mesopotamian literature describes it as something so difficult that only gods and heroes can do it.” (JPS Commentary, 286)

⁵⁷ “Because it is known and understood, it can be put into practice by everyone in the community.” (Etz Hayim, 1171)

⁵⁸ “Compare “by mouth,” the equivalent of English “by heart,” “from memory.” This manner of speaking reflects a predominantly oral culture in which learning and review are accomplished primarily by oral recitation.” (JPS Commentary, 287) “Oral transmission was of supreme importance since not many people could read.” (RJ Torah, 1376)

⁵⁹ “In your mind, known internally and not merely by rote.” (JPS Commentary, 287)

⁶⁰ “This is not an invitation to accept the covenant - that Israeli will accept is a foregone conclusion; indeed, it had already done so earlier at Horev. Here Moses urges Israel to obey the covenant, for that is the only way, under its terms, to survive.” (JPS Commentary, 287)

⁶¹ “There is probably an echo here of ‘the tree of knowledge good and evil,’ (from Gen. 2-3) and the point is that good, which may lead to prosperity, is associated with life just as evil, which may lead to adversity, is associated with death. (Alter, 1030) “This translation of *tov* and *ra* fits the context better than the literal “good” and “evil.” Hebrew *tov*, like English ‘prosperity,’ means all types of success and well being, not merely economic (Ibn Ezra: ‘wealth, bodily health, and honor.’).” (JPS Commentary, 287)

⁶² Septuagint reads, “If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which...”

⁶³ “That first commandment of the Torah (“be fruitful and multiply,” Gen. 1:28) is thus presented not as a strict order, but as a blessing. And here at the end of the Torah as well, the text is: “so you’ll live and multiply and bless YHWH.” In the Torah, the creator blesses humans with the opportunity to grow, and humans will bless their creator for it once it is fulfilled. The Bible’s first commandment is now becoming humankind’s greatest challenge.” (Friedman, 659)

⁶⁴ This is an infinitive of emphasis. Others “you will certainly perish.”

19 I call as witness⁶⁵ this day the heavens and the earth: life and death I put before you, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose⁶⁶ life⁶⁷ so that you will live, you and your offspring,
 20 to love Adonai⁶⁸ your God, to obey God's voice, and to cling to God⁶⁹, for God is your lives⁷⁰ and the length of your days⁷¹ to settle on the land which Adonai swore to your fathers — To Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov — to give to them.

⁶⁵ The action is that God is beseeching heaven and earth to witness what is being offered in the covenant. While many translate this as "to witness," the Hebrew does not support this read. There is no preposition indicating "to." Instead, ככם could read that heaven and earth (i.e., things not under humanity's domain) are serving as witnesses, just as loved ones serve as witnesses when two lovers sign a ketubah, or a trusted companion serves as a witness when a business deal is signed.

⁶⁶ It is fascinating that while this is in 2nd person, it is not in a command form. Therefore, while this passage serves as a culmination moment of taking on the yoke of the covenant, it is something implored, but not directly commanded.

⁶⁷ Per BDB, the כ before חיים indicates that this is a person's choice, not a divine choice. "Except for prohibitions against murder, incest and adultery, and idolatry, any commandment must be set aside for pikuach nefesh, to save a human life (BT Sanh. 74a). Thus one may violate Shabbat to take someone to the hospital in an emergency, and doctors must not hesitate to violate the laws of Shabbat to save a life. Israel's armed forces rely on this principle to defend Israel from attack on Shabbat and holy days." (Etz Hayim, 689) "Using the knowledge of good and bad, and choosing to do good, is the path back to life— not necessarily eternal life (though who knows?), but meaningful life, fulfilling life. As the book of Proverbs says about knowledge and wisdom: "It is a tree of life." And Jews sing this verse from Proverbs each Sabbath after reading the Torah and returning it to the ark." (Friedman, 660)

⁶⁸ "By loving Adonai" "As is characteristic of Deuteronomy, love constitutes both the motive and the way to be in relation with God." (TWC, 1227)

⁶⁹ "Cling" is the same term that is used for man's attachment to woman at the beginning of the Torah (Gen 2: 24). This is part of a string of terms in this passage (vv. 15– 20) that call to mind the opening chapters of the Torah: life, death, good and bad, the skies and earth, the ground, the day (cf. "in the day" and "in the day you eat from it," Gen 2: 4,17), "your seed," be fruitful, to give, to tell, to command (cf. Gen 3: 11), to watch (or observe, Hebrew mr), and to listen to the voice (of God; cf. "You listened to your woman's voice," Gen 3: 17). And these are preceded by references to fruit (Deut 30: 9), and to the skies and the sea (30: 12– 13). This cluster of language here in the last sentences of Moses' address forms a great connection back to the start of Genesis and a reminder of the unity of the Torah" (Friedman, 660)

⁷⁰ It is curious that חיים refers to "lives" whereas the rest of this passage has used singular language. Perhaps it refers to the multiple lives of "you and your offspring." "He is your life." This can also be understood to mean "It is your life." Translators are split on this. The former means that Moses is saying that God is the people's life and the source of their being in their land a long time. The latter means that the people's choice to love, listen, and cling to God is their life and the source of lengthy time in the land. That is, the question is whether it is God or it is people's feeling about God that brings this about. I do not know which is correct." (Friedman, 660)

⁷¹ "In its literal form this phrase is adapted in the evening liturgy as "For they [God's commandments and the words of God's Torah] are our life and the length of our days." (JPS Commentary, 288)

Lev. 19:1-18, 32-37

1 Then Adonai spoke to Moses:⁷²

2 “Speak to the whole congregation⁷³, the children of Israel, and say to them⁷⁴, ‘You will be holy⁷⁵, for⁷⁶ I, Adonai your God, am holy.

3 ‘Each [of you] is to honor⁷⁷ their mother and their father⁷⁸ and observe my Sabbaths. I am Adonai your God⁷⁹.

4 ‘Do not turn toward idols⁸⁰ and you are not to make molten⁸¹ gods⁸² for yourselves. I am Adonai your God.

⁷² לֵאמֹר, “saying” is redundant. Its function is noted in the colon and quotation marks.

⁷³ Root of congregation is “witness”

⁷⁴ “The strange mixing of so many different kinds of commandments may convey that every commandment is important. Even if we are naturally inclined to regard some commandments as more important than others, and some commandments as most important of all, this tapestry presses us to see what is important and valuable in every commandment, even commandments that one may question.” (Friedman, 378) Each of the Ten Commandments are repeated in this section, though not in the order of Ex. 20. (RJ Torah, 798)

⁷⁵ Perhaps, “You shall be something special.” “The Hebrew is quite emphatic: ‘You must be holy!’...The capacity for holiness is not restricted to spiritually gifted people; anyone may attain holiness.” (Etz Hayim, 693) “For Heschel, ‘Judaism is an attempt to prove that in order to be a man, you have to be more than a man, that in order to be a people, you have to be more than a people. Israel was made to be a holy people.’” (Etz Hayim, 694)

⁷⁶ “This verse is distinctive in that it provides a rationale for a commandment: Israel must be holy because God is holy.” (JPS Commentary, 125)

⁷⁷ “Respect (cf. Kiddushin 31a). Literally, “fear” or “reverence.” (Kaplan, 349) “A person need not obey a parent’s direction to violate the Torah. However, if it is found necessary to disobey parents in this way, it must be done with respect and reverence. (Sifra)” (Etz Hayim, 694)

⁷⁸ lit. “his mother and his father.” “Mother comes before father (the reverse of the order in the Ten Commandments). Rashi says this is because one naturally fears the father more than the mother, so the text needs to emphasize fearing the mother. And he says that the Fifth Commandment has the reverse because it says to “honor your father and your mother,” and one naturally honors the mother more than the father, so the text needs to emphasize honoring the father. But this is not necessarily true. Whatever the reason for the word order here, though, at the very least it shows that the text sometimes puts father first and sometimes mother.” (Friedman, 379)

⁷⁹ “It has been recognized since Late Antiquity that this section of laws, beginning with this verse, constitutes a kind of paraphrase and elaboration of the Ten Commandments, following a different order, using somewhat different turns of phrase, and introducing additional legal imperatives. Abraham ibn Ezra, as usual with an eye to compositional links, notes that the previous section was focused on prohibited sexual relations that could lead to the expulsion of people from its land. The variegated laws of the present chapter, he contends, came to remind Israel that there is a whole spectrum of commands which must be observed if it is to remain rooted in its land.” (Alter, 625)

⁸⁰ “The Hebrew ‘elilim refers not to the carved likenesses of divinities but to the nonentity of the pagan gods. Its most plausible derivation is from ‘al, “not,” and hence would suggest falsity or lack of being, but the term probably also puns on ‘el, “god,” using a diminutive and pejorative form that could mean something like “god-let.” (Alter, 625)

⁸¹ “Hebrew *massechah* derives from the verb meaning, ‘to pour into a mold, cast.’” (JPS Commentary, 126)

⁸² Both terms for idols “refer specifically to tangible, human-made representations of gods.” (TWC, 704)

5 'And when you sacrifice a peace-offering⁸³ sacrifice to Adonai, sacrifice it that it may be accepted on your behalf⁸⁴.

6 '[Your sacrifice] should be eaten on the day and on the next day, and what remains until the third day will be burned by fire.

7 'And if it will certainly be eaten⁸⁵ on the third day, it is an offensive thing and is not acceptable⁸⁶.

8 'And the one who eats it bears his guilt, for [that person] has profaned the holiness of Adonai⁸⁷, and that soul⁸⁸ will be cut off from its people⁸⁹.

9 'When you reap the harvest of your land you shall not harvest the corner of your field⁹⁰, and do not gather your harvest's gleanings⁹¹.

10 'And do not glean your vineyard nor gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard⁹² — to the poor and the stranger⁹³, leave them⁹⁴. I am Adonai your God.

11 You are not to steal⁹⁵. And you are not to deceive. And you are not to lie, each with his fellow.

12 You are not to swear by My name⁹⁶, so as to deceive and profane the name of your God. I am Adonai.

⁸³ Vv. 5-8 refer to "sacrifices of well-being." "Perhaps these items were included because they apply to the lay worshiper rather than to the priest." (RJ Torah, 798)

⁸⁴ "be accepted on your behalf" "The writers of the Holiness Code added this phrase to the earlier formulation of the well-being offering, and they apparently did so for a specific theological purpose. By its form, the Hebrew word *lirtzonchem* is ambiguous; it means both "be sure that the offering is acceptable (to God) on your behalf) and "be sure that the sacrifice is offered by you willingly and with full heart." The usage of the plural emphasizes that the writer addresses all Israel, not just the priests. This seemingly minor addition actually demands that the entire population become invested in what had become the domain of the priests alone." (TWC, 704)

⁸⁵ Infinitive of emphasis

⁸⁶ i.e., "It will not be accepted." (JSB, 253)

⁸⁷ קדש here is a noun (holiness of Adonai) although it closely resembles an adjective (Adonai's holiness).

⁸⁸ Others "person," but נפש is rooted in the word "soul"

⁸⁹ "that person shall be cut off from kin." "This formulaic expression (which appears frequently in the Torah) probably indicates that the offender will suffer an untimely death, not excommunication." (TWC, 705)

⁹⁰ "Do not completely harvest..." "The portion left at the end of the field is known as *peah* (cf. Yad, Matnoth Aniyyin 1:1). It must be left at the last edge of the field to be harvested (*Peah* 1:3). (Kaplan, 349)

⁹¹ From the sickle or hand during harvest (*Peah* 4:10). this is known as *leket*. If only one or two stalks fall, they may not be picked up, but if three or more stalks fall, they may be taken (*Peah* 6:5; Rashi). (Kaplan, 349) These are social laws, not agricultural laws that deal with society's obligations on gathering and what is forgotten.

⁹² "Although the meaning of the Hebrew verb *t'olel* is not entirely clear, the sense is that some grapes were to be left on the vine, in parallel to leaving a furrow of the field for the poor to harvest. In both cases, the poor were to have the opportunity to pick what had been dropped or left by regular workers." (TWC, 705)

⁹³ "The Hebrew term refers to a resident alien, who in this tribal agrarian society would have been without real property." (Alter, 626) "An Israelite (*Sifra*). A proselyte (*Malbim*)." (Kaplan, 349)

⁹⁴ "leave them" "In the sense of relinquishing them" (Fox, 602)

⁹⁵ "A term that refers to kidnapping and only theft of property." (TWC, 705)

⁹⁶ "Oaths are sworn in God's name, and one who swears falsely treats God's name as if it were not holy...In later Jewish literature we encounter the notion of 'hillul haShem - the description of God's name,' which refers to acts that bring dishonor on God's people, Israel, or upon God's Torah." (JPS Commentary, 128)

13 You are not to wrong your fellow.⁹⁷ And you are not to rob. You are not to cause the wages of your laborer to stay overnight⁹⁸ until the morning.⁹⁹

14 You are not to curse¹⁰⁰ the deaf.¹⁰¹ And before the blind¹⁰² you are not to put an obstacle.¹⁰³ You will be afraid of¹⁰⁴ your God¹⁰⁵, I am Adonai.

15 You are not to make unfair judgements.¹⁰⁶ You are not to lift the face of the poor. And you are not to honor the face¹⁰⁷ of the great.¹⁰⁸ In righteousness¹⁰⁹ you will judge¹¹⁰ your fellow.

⁹⁷ Or "do not swindle" (based on Sefer HaMitzvot Negative 247) (Kaplan, 349) "Fellow [Israelite] - "rei-a" - The precise nuance of this term must be gleaned from the context. Early printings of JNPS had 'neighbor' here and in vv. 16 and 18. However, strictly speaking, rei-a refers to any fellow Israelite, rather than to a neighbor (who may or may not be an Israelite). (RJ Torah, 799)

⁹⁸ The term commonly has this meaning of spending the night (Gen. 24:54; 32:54; 32:14)

⁹⁹ Establishes legal principle to not take unfair advantage of another.

¹⁰⁰ "The Hebrew verb killel, 'to insult,' literally 'to treat lightly,' reflects the adjective kall, 'slight, of little importance.' It is often used to contrast kibbed, 'to honor, treat with respect,' and barekh, 'to bless.'" (JPS Commentary, 128)

¹⁰¹ Don't act out against and take advantage of the blind, deaf, or poor. "The Sages understand this as a prohibition against creating conditions that might tempt another person to transgress the Commandments, including those governing rituals (e.g., BT Pes. 22b), moral interactions (e.g., BT MK 17b), and commercial matters (e.g., BT BM 75a). It also forbids knowingly giving bad advice. (Sifra)" (Etz Hayim, 695) Two kinds of Biblical law: Casuistic (e.g., if this happens, then this will happen; case law) and Apodeidic (e.g., ten commandments type law; don't do this, do this) - There is a thought that Apodeidic is real law, Casuistic is adopted from other cultures.

¹⁰² "[Morally] blind" (Pesachim 22b; Rashi). This means that it is forbidden to cause another person to commit a sin. Also 'conceptually blind,' by giving bad advice (Sifra). Some say that it is also to be taken in its literal sense, that it is forbidden to place something on the ground where it will cause damage (Ralbag; Sforno). According to others, however, this commandment is not to be taken in its literal sense (Korban Aaron on Sifra: Mishneh LaMelekh, Malveh 4:6, s.v. Kathav; Minchath Chinch 232:4)." (Kaplan, 350)

¹⁰³ "A long exegetical tradition sees both these cases as figurative instances of a more general category of moral turpitude: placing a bottle of whiskey, for example, in front of a recovering alcoholic would fall under the rubric of putting a stumbling block before the blind." (Alter, 627)

¹⁰⁴ Per BDB, "with ׀ be afraid of"

¹⁰⁵ "As noted by the Rabbis, this phrase occurs when compliance is a matter of conscience rather than legal enforcement." (JSB, 254)

¹⁰⁶ "Render an unfair decision," lit. "commit distortion in judgement." (JSB, 254)

¹⁰⁷ "honor the face" - or "show respect" (Kaplan, 350)

¹⁰⁸ "You shall not favor the wretched and you shall not defer to the rich." "Both Hebrew verbs involve idioms that make "face" the object of the verb—literally "lift up the face," "glorify/honor the face." The term for "rich" more generally means "great," but in economic contexts (here as an antonym to "wretched" or "indigent") it regularly has the meaning of "wealthy." (Alter, 627)

¹⁰⁹ "Heb. tzedek, often translated 'righteousness,' but here, as often, it has the meaning of even-handedness in judgement." (Fox, 602)

¹¹⁰ "In the pursuit of justice there can be no bias, even toward those for whom we have innate sympathy and who otherwise deserve our aid. ... As in Ex. 23:3, the Torah emphasizes that the poor are better served by justice uncompromised by emotion." (Etz Hayim, 696)

16 You are not to go tale-bearing by your fellow.¹¹¹ You are not to stand on the blood¹¹² of your fellow. I am Adonai.

17 You are not to hate¹¹³ your brother in your heart. You will surely reprimand your fellow¹¹⁴, but¹¹⁵ not bear guilt because of them¹¹⁶.

¹¹¹ "Do not deal basely with members of your people." "This rendering is traditional. It takes rachil as related to rochel, 'peddler'. But we do not know what rachil really means. An older English rendering was 'go about as a talebearer,' but as Orlinsky aptly remarks, 'In such passages as Jer. 6:28 and Ezek. 22:9, the wickedness of the people is surely more grievous than talebearing.'" (RJ Torah, 800) The corresponding Hebrew word is also associated with gossip, the misuse of speech. In this particular context, the Torah teaches that unfair accusations and rumors may have dire consequences." (TWC, 706)

¹¹² "The meaning of this wording is uncertain. It has usually been understood to mean: to stand by when someone's life is in danger and one could do something to save it (also: to fail to come forward as a witness when one has knowledge concerning a taking of life). This is the opposite of the principle in American law that one does not have an "affirmative duty to rescue." The biblical principle is that one has to help a fellow human being if one is able." (Friedman, 381) "when your neighbor's life is in danger - (Sifra; Rashi; Sefer HaMitzvot, Negative 296). Expressed idiomatically as, 'Do not stand still over your neighbor's blood.'" (Kaplan, 350) "Do not profit by the blood of your fellow" "The rendering that best fits the context is: Do not pursue one's livelihood in a way that endangers another or at the expense of another's well-being." (Etz Hayim, 696) Other translations: "Do not profit by the blood of your fellow," "Do not stand by idly," and "Do not conspire against."

¹¹³ "This is one of the rare instances when the Torah seems to command feelings rather than behavior." (Etz Hayim, 696) "The Torah, unlike ordinary legal codes, is concerned not only with actions but also with attitudes. It recognizes how destructive bottled-up resentment can be and cautions us against wrong feelings as well as wrong acts." (RJ Torah, 800) "Hate" "The corresponding Hebrew term denotes both an emotion and a cognitive state of being. Our ancestors recognized that it is difficult to separate one's emotions from one's attitudes and actions." (TWC, 706)

¹¹⁴ "The emotions are to come into the open, not to lie festering." (Fox, 602) "If one does not admonish, then he is responsible for the other's sin (Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive 205; cf. Shabbath 54b). Or, 'do not sin through him' by embarrassing him publicly (Arkhin 16b; Sefer HaMitzvot, Negative 305). This is also a general commandment not to embarrass a person publicly (Ibid.)." (Kaplan, 350) "If you think you have a justified complaint, do not brood over it but state it forthrightly. Rashi, following a hint in Sifra, explains: Rebuke, but do not shame publicly." (RJ Torah, 800)

¹¹⁵ "Substituting "and" for "but," we may interpret: By giving vent to your feelings, you may save yourself from the guilt of a violent act. Or again: By pointing out another's misdeeds and thus affording the chance to make amends, you are discharging your moral obligation to that person." (RJ Torah, 800)

¹¹⁶ Gender neutral, meant in the singular meaning, not plural.

18 You are not to avenge¹¹⁷ nor keep a grudge¹¹⁸ [against one of] your people. Therefore, you will love¹¹⁹ your fellow¹²⁰ as yourself.¹²¹ I am Adonai.¹²²

32 Arise before the aged¹²³ and honor before the aged; you will be afraid of¹²⁴ your God. I am Adonai.

33 For when a stranger¹²⁵ sojourns with you in your land, wrong him¹²⁶? No.

¹¹⁷ "Revenge is such a threatening matter that it is understood in the Torah to belong to God alone, not to humans." (Friedman, 381) "Taking vengeance means a deed, and bearing a grudge reflects thought. Again, deed and thought -- act and intention -- are interwoven." (TWC, 707)

¹¹⁸ "You shall not keep on," "Meaning: to maintain hostility over time. One must not go on feeling anger, resentment, or a grudge against someone. Note that these commands against taking revenge or persisting in hostile feelings do not address the question of whether the revenge or the keeping on is justified or not. The issue here is that one believes oneself to have been wronged, and the instruction is: don't get even, don't harbor the feeling forever. It is destructive to one's energy and one's spirit." (Friedman, 381)

¹¹⁹ "Love your fellow" "The verb for love, ahav, is here followed by the preposition lamed. This form is found only in four cases in the Bible; Abraham Malamute notes that in all four cases, there is an implication of action, not just a feeling ("You Shall Love...", 1990). See, for example, Leviticus 19:34, where Israelites are commanded to love the foreigner in their midst, which implies merciful and kind action." (TWC, 707)

¹²⁰ "be-loving to your neighbor" "The meaning of this phrase, and the concept, have been widely debated throughout the ages. The translation follows B-R, which emphasizes the personhood of one's neighbor - and of the sojourner in v. 34." (Fox, 603)

¹²¹ "Also translated as 'companion' or 'fellow,' the word (Hebrew re'a) means a member of one's own group, a peer. In some contexts that will mean one's fellow human being. In others it will mean a friend or neighbor. (Thus, in Gen 38: 12,20 it refers to Judah's 'friend,' who is an Adullamite.) In others it will mean a fellow member of a particular community...The people of Israel are thus commanded to love all human beings, not just their own people, no matter how one understands the term. And this is extraordinary." (Friedman, 382) "The sage Hillel paraphrased this commandment in a negative formulation: 'What is hateful to you, do not do to your comrade.' Rabbi Akiba, quoted in the Sifra, once commented as follows on 'Love your fellow as yourself' that 'this is a central principle in the Torah.' (JPS Commentary, 130)

¹²² "In the Priestly worldview, ethical behavior is a religious act only when performed as an act of obedience to God." (JSB, 254)

¹²³ "defer to an elder. The idiom used is exactly the one that appears in verse 15 in the prohibition against deferring to the rich. Context is everything: in court proceedings, no special consideration can be given to anyone, regardless of status; in everyday interactions, an old person deserves deference." (Alter, 630) "According to later rabbinic law, one was required to show deference to the elderly by caring for them." (JPS Commentary, 134) "What we owe the old is reverence, but all they ask for is consideration, attention, not to be discarded and forgotten. What they deserve is preference, yet we do not even grant them equality. (Heschel)" (Etz Hayim, 700)

¹²⁴ See v. 14

¹²⁵ "The ger, foreigner who is resident in the land of Israel, must not only be protected against molestation but be shown positive love." (RJ Torah, 803)

¹²⁶ "The sense is 'cheat him in commerce...' "by taking advantage of their unfamiliarity with economic conditions and business practices, or even by unkind words." (JSB, 255; RJ Torah, 803) Some understand this as "unfair commerce."

34 The stranger will be like a native among you¹²⁷, and love [the native] as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Mitzrayim¹²⁸. I am Adonai your God.

35 Make an injustice¹²⁹ in judgement of measure, of weight, or of water measurements¹³⁰? No.

36 You will have fair¹³¹ balances, a fair weighing-stone¹³², a fair ephah, and a fair hin¹³³. I am Adonai¹³⁴ your God¹³⁵, who took you out of the land of Mitzrayim.

37 So you will observe¹³⁶ all of my laws and all of my judgements and do them. I am Adonai.

¹²⁷ While the terms ezech ha'aretz are of uncertain etymology, is it possible that there is a connection to the word ezech as it is used in Psalm 37:35: "well-rooted like a robust native tree." "If this derivation is correct, an ezech is one whose lineage has 'roots' in the land, one who belongs to the group that possesses the land." (JPS Commentary, 134)

¹²⁸ "Remembering our Egyptian experience, we might wish to be like the Egyptians when we have the opportunity, oppressing the powerless in our midst. Therefore, the Torah warns us to use the memory of slavery in Egypt to learn empathy for the oppressed." (Etz Hayim, 700)

¹²⁹ Similar to v. 15, lit., "You shall not commit an injustice."

¹³⁰ "The literal sequence of the Hebrew is: "in measure, in weight, in liquid measure." Though some contend that the first word, midah, refers to measures of length and breadth, it is a general term introducing the category of measurement, which is then followed by different kinds of measure (hence "whether...or")." (Alter, 630)

¹³¹ Lit. "righteous," others "honest" "Jewish law bans fraud and deception in both business and personal interactions." (Etz Hayim, 700)

¹³² Lit. "stones," others "weights." "Weighing-stones" combines both ideas. "Weights used in calculating amounts of goods." (Fox, 606)

¹³³ "Ephah, a dry measure, about 23 liters; hin, a liquid measure, a little less than 4 liters." (JSB, 256)

¹³⁴ "The formula "I am Adonai," which appears 15 times in Leviticus 19, is an abbreviation for the full text that is now provided as a conclusion. This clause encourages the reader to remember that one must emulate God and seek to become holy because God saved Israel in the past." (TWC, 711)

¹³⁵ "God's reality and redemptive works provide the authority for the exacting demands made in this chapter." (RJ Torah, 803)

¹³⁶ "You shall faithfully observe" "The two Hebrew verbs [here] do not refer to two separate acts but rather reinforce each other: 'You shall take care to perform.'" (JPS Commentary, 135)

TTT Translation of Yom Kippur Torah Readings

Deut. 29:9-14

9-12 All of you stand this day¹ before Adonai your God — your leaders, your head honchos², your old folks, and your higher-ups³, every man of Israel, your kids, your women, and the stranger in your camps, from your breadwinner⁴ to your every man jack among you⁵ — by clicking “yes” on the terms and conditions⁶ to a partnership with⁷ Adonai your God, and the promises Adonai your God is setting up with you, [(Have I mentioned this is happening “this day”)] so that God can set you up as a people for a divine [purpose]⁸, and God will be your God, just like God spoke to you and promised the family: Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

13-14 So I’m not just setting up this partnership and promise with you⁹, but [also] with the one who is standing here with us this day before Adonai our God, and [also] the human who isn’t here with us this day.

Deut. 30:1-20

1-3 So, here’s how the blessing and the curse which I put before you will happen: [When you and your family are] banished and out there among all the other nations, and you take some spiritual inventory¹⁰ and come back to Adonai your God and heed God’s voice with your whole heart and your whole soul according to everything that I am commanding you this day,¹¹ then Adonai your God will build you back up¹² and have compassion for you. [God] will come back and put you back together from all the places Adonai your God scattered you.

4-5 One of your outcasts is at the end of the earth? No problem, God will gather you and Adonai your God will bring you in to the land inherited. And it will be yours. [God] will take care of you¹³, and you [will] turn out well¹⁴, even better than your folks.

¹ More colloquially, this could be rendered “today.” However, this translation keeps “this day” for two reasons: 1) it is the leitmotif of this section; 2) the point of this narrative is that each person should see themselves as being a part of the community that stood before God. This is not just a moment that happened once and will never happen again - each Yom Kippur, the Jewish community stands, that day, before Adonai our God.

² “the most important person in an organization” (The Free Dictionary by Farlex)

³ “a person in a position of higher authority in an organization; superior.” (dictionary.com)

⁴ “a person who earns a livelihood” (dictionary.com)

⁵ Following Fox.

⁶ A modern way of making an agreement. “signing on” could also be another alternative.

⁷ As the story of Creation teaches us, we are God’s partners; our relationship with God is less contractual and more of a partnership.

⁸ Lit. “for Him”

⁹ Syntax shift for clarity.

¹⁰ A more familiar way of saying “reflect in your heart.” Syntax of the two previous clauses shifted for clarity

¹¹ Syntax shifted for clarity.

¹² This phrase integrates the commentaries, which take the Hebrew to mean a restoration from a state of captivity.

¹³ Idiomatic rendering of “deal well”

¹⁴ Idiomatic rendering of “prosper”

6 And Adonai your God will cut away at the thick walls in yours and your kids' heart¹⁵ so you can love [and be devoted to¹⁶] Adonai your God with your whole heart and your whole soul, for your life's sake!

7-8 Then Adonai your God will bring the pain¹⁷ on your enemies, your haters¹⁸ and [those who] really get to you. Meanwhile¹⁹, you will come back into the fold²⁰, take Adonai's voice to heart, and do all of God's mitzvot that I'm commanding you this day.

9-10 Then Adonai your God will make everything you do plentiful — your handiwork, your kids, your animals, and your crops - it'll be all good²¹ — because Adonai will come back and jump for joy over you and make your life awesome, just like [God] jumped for joy over your family. Of course you will take Adonai's voice to heart so you will keep [God's] mitzvot and standards²², what's written in this scroll of Torah, when you come back to God with your whole heart, your whole soul.

11-14 Look, this *mitzvah* which I am commanding you this day isn't too tough for you, and it's not too far away either. It's not all up in the sky! No one's going to be like²³, "Oh no, who's gonna go up to the heavens and grab it for us and make us hear it and do it?" And it's not all out at sea! No one's going to be like, "Oh no, who's gonna go sail the seas and grab it for us and make us hear it and do it?" Hey, this idea is super close to you; it's in your mouth and on your mind, so make it happen!

15-16 Look, I put [a choice²⁴] in front of you this day: life and good, and death and bad. And this is what I command you this day²⁵: love Adonai your God, follow the Torah's path²⁶ and keep God's mitzvot, God's laws²⁷ and God's judgements so you will live and have children²⁸. [And for the cherry on top,] Adonai your God will bless you in the land you are about to enter to possess.

¹⁵ Literally, "will circumcise your heart," but here the text means the emotional barriers and self-defenses which prevent love for, and in this case loyalty to, God. Syntax shifted for clarity.

¹⁶ Love in Deuteronomy expresses devotion, not just an emotional attachment.

¹⁷ "A form of encouragement to a person or entity (team, group, etc.) to bring the best they have to offer against an opponent." (UD)

¹⁸ "a person who has an intense dislike for another person or thing." (dictionary.com)

¹⁹ Verses 7 & 8 articulate

²⁰ "Absorb," "accept," "convert," "incorporate." (dictionary.com)

²¹ "Everything is sanguine. Generally a reassurance, rather than an independent statement." (UD)

²² One of the purposes of laws in Torah is to establish communal and societal standards.

²³ "Slang term...To act like, or to appear in a certain way, to say, or to offer up an excuse." (UD)

²⁴ Although not explicit, it is surely implied, even if the choices are restricted.

²⁵ See...it's not really a choice!

²⁶ Lit. "God's paths," but can also relate to "of moral action and character," per BDB.

²⁷ Here, "laws" is maintained as it is directly connected to the next phrase.

²⁸ Parallel to Gen. 1:28, "be fruitful and multiply."

17-18 But if you have a change of heart, you don't listen, and you are pressured into²⁹ put other gods on a pedestal and serve them, I'm telling you³⁰ this day, you will not be long for this world³¹! You won't last more than a few days after you get your hands³² on the land across the Yarden [river].³³

19-20 The heavens and the earth are all here watching³⁴: you've got life and death, blessing and curse in front of you³⁵. This is easy³⁶! Choose life so you and your children will live! [To live is] to love Adonai your God, to take God's voice to heart, and to embrace God, to put down roots³⁷ on the land that Adonai swore to give to the family — to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov — because God is your everything³⁸, your lives and the length of your days³⁹.

Lev. 19:1-18, 32-37

1 Then Adonai talked at⁴⁰ Moses:

2 "Speak to the whole crew⁴¹, the Israelites, and tell them: 'You best be⁴² holy⁴³, because I, Adonai your God, am holy.

3 'Each [of you] is to honor their mother and their father. [You are to] observe my Shabbats. I am Adonai your God.

4 'You should not hang with idols, and you definitely are not⁴⁴ to make gods of metal [(you know, like the golden calf)] for yourselves. I am Adonai your God.

²⁹ This does flip the image from driven away to bringing in, but the "pressure" aspect is meant to maintain the original sense.

³⁰ More colloquial rendering of "I proclaim to you"

³¹ "Unlikely to endure for much more time." (wiktionary)

³² Idiomatic rendering of "to come/enter to possess."

³³ Syntax shifted for clarity.

³⁴ Syntax shift for clarity.

³⁵ Syntax shift for clarity.

³⁶ Others, "therefore," etc. The sense from the beginning, though, is that these are false equivalence choices. Of course blessing and life are easier choices than curses and death!

³⁷ Idiomatic expression of "settle." As God's promise involves prosperous agriculture, this phrase has double meaning.

³⁸ "All things sacred; Anything that matters; e.x., 'Music is my everything...'" (UD)

³⁹ This phrase is kept because of the evening liturgical connection.

⁴⁰ "to have a one way conversation; allow no collaboration" (UD)

⁴¹ "a group of persons involved in a particular kind of work or working together" (dictionary.com)

⁴² "an exclamation of your point. a command." (UD)

⁴³ Following the teaching in Etz Hayim - this is an emphatic imperative, not an prophetic description.

⁴⁴ In this verse, לֹא means "do not" with a more imminent timeframe; whereas אֵין means "REALLY do not" with an everlasting timeframe. This section includes a set of commands which are meant to be in the same genre as the Ten Commandments. Therefore, although commands are usually translated as "you should" or "you should not" in this translation, they will retain the stronger, "you are to"/"you are not to" or "do"/"do not" structure.

5-8 ‘And when you get your peace-offering sacrifice to Adonai on⁴⁵, do it properly so God accepts it. Eat it on they day you make the sacrifice and on the next day. If you have leftovers⁴⁶ on the third day, [no more Tupperware,] burn it up⁴⁷. And if it’s eaten on the third day, God help you⁴⁸! It’s offensive and unacceptable. Whoever eats it will be held responsible. [That person] has sullied⁴⁹ Adonai’s holiness. That lost soul⁵⁰ is finished with us⁵¹.

9-10 ‘When you harvest your land, don’t harvest your fields all the way to the edges. And do not collect your field’s leftovers. And do not collect every single grape on the vine or on the ground⁵² - leave them for the poor and the stranger⁵³. I am Adonai your God.

11 ‘Do not steal. And do not pull a fast one⁵⁴ nor lie to anyone⁵⁵.

12 ‘Do not swear to God⁵⁶ in order to bamboozle. That profanes your God’s name. I am Adonai.

13 ‘Do not swindle your buddy. And do not rob⁵⁷. Do not hang on to your employee’s paycheck even a day late⁵⁸.

14 ‘Do not curse the deaf. And do not put an obstacle before the blind.⁵⁹ You are to be in awe of your God, I am Adonai.

15 ‘Do not be unfair in judgement. Do not show favoritism to the little guy⁶⁰ nor the big shot⁶¹. You are to judge⁶² by what is right.

16 ‘Do not be a gossip or a blabber mouth to your friend. Do not just stand there when your neighbor’s blood is being shed. I am Adonai.

⁴⁵ “Get your ___ on” is a colloquial expression of doing something.

⁴⁶ Idiomatic rendering of “remains”

⁴⁷ Idiomatic rendering

⁴⁸ Syntax of emphasis shifts from infinitive of emphasis (“will certainly be eaten”).

⁴⁹ Make unclean.

⁵⁰ “A sinner” (The Free Dictionary by Farlex) This rendering also maintains the “soul” connection to the Hebrew, נפש.

⁵¹ As in “cut off,” “done with.”

⁵² Syntax shifted for clarity. Follows the sense that grapes were to be left on the vine and not collected off the ground for the poor.

⁵³ Syntax shifted for clarity.

⁵⁴ “To deceive someone.” (UD)

⁵⁵ The Masoritic notes indicate the second & third prohibition are meant to be together.

⁵⁶ “A phrase that liars use as a last ditch attempt to instill belief in themselves to the person they’re trying to con. It’s always easy to spot a bullsh*tter when they pull out the infamous ‘I swear to god!’” (UD)

⁵⁷ The prohibitions before and after this are forms of robbery.

⁵⁸ Syntax shifted for clarity.

⁵⁹ Syntax shifted for clarity. Whereas in other instances this translation has rendered “before” as “in front of,” here, as it establishes a legal principle, “before the blind” is maintained.

⁶⁰ “Referring to a person at the bottom.” (UD)

⁶¹ “A person who holds a great deal of clout in whatever industry/culture that they are a part of.” (UD) “Big shot” also uses the imagery of “גדול - great/big”

⁶² “Your fellow” is implied. If one is making a judgement, it is implied that another party is involved.

17 ‘Do not harbor bottled up hate for your family⁶³. Yes, call your friend out⁶⁴, but don’t let your buddy get you into trouble⁶⁵.

18 ‘Do not plot revenge nor hold a grudge [against one of] your own. Put another way: love your fellow as yourself. I am Adonai.

32 ‘Stand up for⁶⁶ the oldster and show honor in the presence of the elderly. You are to be in awe of your God. I am Adonai.

33-34 ‘When an immigrant briefly stays over with you⁶⁷, do not be unfair⁶⁸ with him. Treat the immigrant like one of your own. And love [the local] as yourself. Don’t forget, you were immigrants in the land of Mitzrayim. I am Adonai your God.

35-37 Do not be unfair in judgement of measurements, weights, or volume. Keep fair balances, fair weights, fair dry measurements, and fair liquid measurements. I am Adonai your God, who took you out of Mitzrayim. [In return,] you are to respect the system⁶⁹ — my laws and my judgements — and do them. I am Adonai.

⁶³ Lit. “brother,” but indicates one of the clan.

⁶⁴ “To verbally hold someone accountable for their words or actions. Other usage: call you out, call them out, call him/her out” (UD)

⁶⁵ A rephrasing to convey meaning clearer.

⁶⁶ Another way of expressing showing honor and respect, but also maintains the imagery of the Hebrew (“arise before”)

⁶⁷ “In your land” is cut here. If someone is staying with you, it is implied that you’re putting them up in a way that uses some of your resources, be it land or money.

⁶⁸ This integrates the commentaries which teach that this is meant to be a protection against taking advantage of one’s unfamiliarity with the region.

⁶⁹ “the government, police and all authority and their laws and structure” (UD)

Simchat Torah Torah Readings (Deut. 34:1-12; Gen. 1:1-2:3)

Faithful Translation of Simchat Torah Torah Readings

Deut. 34:1-12

1 Moshe went up⁴²⁷ from the plains of Moav to Mount N'vo⁴²⁸, the top of Pisgah, which faces Y'recho. Then⁴²⁹ Adonai let him see⁴³⁰ all of the land: Gil'ad as far as Dan⁴³¹;
2 all of Naftali⁴³², and the land of Ephrayim⁴³³ and M'nasheh; all of the land of Y'hudah⁴³⁴ as far as the Western Sea⁴³⁵;
3 The Negev and the plain of the valley of Y'recho, the city of palm trees, as far as Tzoar.
4 Then Adonai said to him⁴³⁶, "This is the land which I had sworn⁴³⁷ to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov⁴³⁸: 'I will give it to your seed.' I have let you see with your eyes⁴³⁹, but you shall not cross there⁴⁴⁰."

⁴²⁷ "The action of ascent, however, also signals the trajectory of Moses's life: he is born in the Nile Valley, first encounters God in the burning bush on a mountain, returns from his mission in Egypt to that same mountain to receive the law there, and now dies on a mountaintop." (Alter, 1057)

⁴²⁸ "There is no vantage point from which the whole land can be seen, but one should note that the report flavors the natural with the supernatural. Similarly, it serves no purpose to attempt a reading of the text that would allow for a naturalistic interpretation." (RJ Torah, 1426) Moses following God's command to go up a mountain to view the land (Num., 27:12; Deut. 32:49).

⁴²⁹ Most translate this ו as "and," but it makes more sense that this is meant to build the drama of the moment. God is going to show Moses everything he's worked his whole life not to get.

⁴³⁰ "the LORD let him see. Elsewhere, this verb (the hiph'il or causative conjugation of the verb r-'-h, "to see") has been translated as "show," but here it is important to preserve the literal sense of allowing or causing to see because that is the pointed meaning of this verb when it occurs again in verse 4." (Alter, 1057)

⁴³¹ Samaritan version reads "From the Egyptian river to the great river Euphrates." "Dan: The northern border of Israel" (Fox, 1013)

⁴³² Some have "eretz naftali."

⁴³³ Some have "kol eretz ephrayim." (mirroring language from above)

⁴³⁴ Yehuda: The center of the country (Fox, 1013)

⁴³⁵ Literally, "the last sea;" i.e., The Mediterranean.

⁴³⁶ Septuagint: "to Moshe," not "to him"

⁴³⁷ Some add "to your fathers/ancestors"

⁴³⁸ לֵאמֹר, "saying" is redundant. Its function is noted in the colon and quotation marks. "This is the last mention of them in the Torah. The Torah returns to them and to the promises to them, but it does not end with those promises fulfilled. It ends with Moses looking out at the land, with the fulfillment lying in the future...It is a message to the reader that this is not meant to be just a story of the past. ... It always points beyond itself, to the destiny of Israel and humankind in the rest of the Tanach that follows, and, for millions of readers, in their continuing life beyond the conclusion of the Bible." (Friedman, 677)

⁴³⁹ "Deuteronomy repeatedly uses this phrase to emphasize the importance of knowledge gained from firsthand experience (e.g., 4:3, 9, 34)." (TWC, 1282) This idea has made its way into Jewish cultural practice as well. Consider the Haggadah's statement, "In every generation, each person should feel as though he himself had gone forth from Egypt."

⁴⁴⁰ "As God decreed in Deut. 1:37 and reminded Moses on several occasions (Deut. 3:27; 4:21-22; 32:52; Num. 20:12)" (JPS Commentary, 337)

5 Moshe died there⁴⁴¹, a servant of Adonai⁴⁴², in the land of Moav by Adonai's word⁴⁴³.
 6 He buried him⁴⁴⁴ in the valley in the land of Moav, opposite Beit P'or. And no one knows his grave to this day⁴⁴⁵.
 7 Moshe was 120 years⁴⁴⁶ when he died. His eye⁴⁴⁷ was not dimmed⁴⁴⁸, and his freshness had not fled⁴⁴⁹.
 8 Then the children of Israel⁴⁵⁰ wept for⁴⁵¹ Moshe, on the plains of Moav, thirty days⁴⁵². Then the days of weeping, mourning⁴⁵³ Moshe concluded.

⁴⁴¹ "Biblical tradition assumes that Moses died early in the twelfth month, the month later called Adar. Post biblical tradition fixes the date on the seventh day of the month." (JPS Commentary, 337)

⁴⁴² "Servant of the Lord" "As a title, 'eved YHWH' means 'the Lord's minister,' in Moses' case, His representative and agent in governing Israel. 'Minister' is a title of high government officials in the Bible and in inscriptions. It connotes high status and implies that its bearer is loyal, trusted, and intimate with his master." (JPS Commentary, 337)

⁴⁴³ lit. "mouth" "The literal sense of this idiom, repeatedly used elsewhere in the Torah, is "by the mouth of the LORD," i.e., by divine decree. But the use of "mouth" encouraged the Midrash to imagine here a "death by a kiss" (mitat neshiqah), the ultimate favor granted to the righteous leader." (Alter, 1058) This also suggests a "sudden, painless death in old age." (JPS Commentary, 338)

⁴⁴⁴ It is unclear who buried Moses. "Ibn Ezra, basing himself on a rabbinic saying, understood 'Moses buried himself,' that is, he went away to die." (RJ Torah, 1427) "The Hebrew says literally, "and he buried him," but the third-person singular verb without specified grammatical subject is not infrequently used in biblical Hebrew in place of a passive verb." (Alter, 1058) "This is usually understood to mean that God buries Moses. We should note that Qumran, Septuagint, and some manuscripts of the Samaritan tradition read 'they buried him.' This presumably means that the people bury him. That would imply a completely different picture of Moses' death." "If we understand the first part of this verse to read 'He buried him,' then it would suggest that God does not desire [ancestor veneration and prayers directed to Moses] to take place at Moses' tomb. If we read 'they buried him,' it is harder to interpret why the Israelites themselves would make his burial site unknown." (Friedman, 678)

⁴⁴⁵ "As many commentators have observed, the occultation of the grave of Moses serves to prevent any possibility of a cult of Moses, with pilgrimages to his gravesite. The phrase "to this day" is a giveaway of the temporal perspective from which this concluding chapter of the Torah was written. Both the rabbis of the Talmud and the medieval Hebrew commentators were perplexed about the authorship of the story of the death of Moses. One opinion was that Joshua wrote this chapter; another, more poignant one, was that God dictated it and Moses wrote it down, weeping (Baba Batra 14:B)." (Alter, 1058)

⁴⁴⁶ "Moses gets the maximum that anyone can live according to God's decree in Genesis: "My spirit won't stay in humankind forever, since they're also flesh; and their days shall be a hundred twenty years. (Gen. 6:3)" (Friedman, 678)

⁴⁴⁷ Others pluralize "eyes," but the Hebrew only suggests singular.

⁴⁴⁸ "Biblical and other ancient texts commonly describe the eyesight and other faculties of the aged to indicate whether they have remained healthy or become feeble." (JPS Commentary, 338)

⁴⁴⁹ Per BDB. Others "his vigor was unabated." "Rather, as recognized by Ibn Ezra, 'he had not become wrinkled' (lit., 'his moisture had not departed,' or 'dried up'). Moses' vigor had, in fact abated (31:2), but despite his years he did not look aged. The Talmud describes the rejuvenation of Sarah and Jochebed in similar terms: their flesh became smooth and their wrinkles straightened." (JPS Commentary, 338)

⁴⁵⁰ others "Israelites"

⁴⁵¹ There is no preposition that implies "for," but its implication is plain.

⁴⁵² Thirty days is a Jewish duration for mourning. "Israel mourns the loss of Moses for the full mourning period stipulated for a parent. (21:13)" (JSB, 449)

⁴⁵³ The word for weeping here, בָּכָה, is only used one other time in Torah (Gen. 45:2): when Joseph cries out so loudly before revealing himself to his brothers that the news reached Pharaoh's palace. אָבָה is used only two other

9 Then Joshua son of Nun was filled with spirit, wisdom, because Moshe placed his hands⁴⁵⁴ on him. And the children of Israel heard him and did just as Adonai commanded Moshe.

10 But another prophet⁴⁵⁵ did not arise within Israel like Moshe⁴⁵⁶, whom Adonai knew, face to face⁴⁵⁷,

11 for all of the signs and the wonders⁴⁵⁸ which Adonai sent him to do⁴⁵⁹ in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh and against all his servants⁴⁶⁰ and against all his land,

12 and for all the strong hand and for all of the great awe-inspiring spectacles⁴⁶¹, which Moshe did before the eyes of all Israel⁴⁶².

times in Torah, both in Genesis. In the first (Gen. 27:41), Esau notes that after the "mourning period" for his father is completed he will kill Jacob, although the length is not mentioned. In the second (Gen. 50:10-11), there is a similar mourning period following Jacob's death, but this time it is articulated as seven days. The period of mourning Moses is thirty days, the same as his brother Aaron.

⁴⁵⁴ Two manuscripts suggest "hand" not "hands," according to num. 27:18 and Num. 27:23 (in the former, God instructs Moses to "lay your hand upon him;" in the latter, Moses "laid his hands upon him.") "A rite of investiture, as in Num. 27:18, 23. The precise meaning of the rite is not certain. It may serve to identify Joshua as the subject of the investiture or to transfer some of Moses' spirit of wisdom to him. The same gesture became part of the ceremony of rabbinic ordination, which for that reason is known as semikhah, 'laying [of hands].'" (JPS Commentary, 339)

⁴⁵⁵ Samaritan version has the order in Hebrew flipped: "another prophet," instead of the literal syntax, "prophet another."

⁴⁵⁶ "This clause again reflects the temporal distance of the writer from the event reported. There will be other prophets in Israel, but none will enjoy the unique stature of Moses, whom God knew (or embraced—the same verb that is used in different contexts for sexual intimacy) face to face. Deuteronomy in this way concludes with an implicit claim for its own irrevocable authority, for no subsequent revelation of God's will to a prophet can equal the words conveyed to Israel by the one prophet whom God knew face to face." (Alter, 1059) "The point of the text is that Moses had the most direct contact with God of any prophet, and hence had the clearest knowledge of God and God's will." (JPS Commentary, 340)

⁴⁵⁷ "Face to face," "rather than through dreams or visions (13:2); similarly, Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:8-10." (JSB, 450)

⁴⁵⁸ "Moses was also incomparable in the wonders that God performed through him during the time of the Exodus. No other prophet so convincingly confirmed the credibility of his mission." (Etz Hayim, 1212)

⁴⁵⁹ "The Torah consistently reiterates that all the wonders Moses executed were by means of God's power and at His command, not by means of any personal power or occult skills possessed by Moses." (JPS Commentary, 340)

⁴⁶⁰ The word here could also mean "slaves." Perhaps the signs and wonders were not just meant for the Egyptians, but for the Israelite slaves as well.

⁴⁶¹ Per BDB

⁴⁶² "Literally, 'in the sight of all Israel.' Deuteronomy concludes with a theme that it has frequently stressed: Israel saw these wonders firsthand. The Israelites do not have to rely on secondhand reports. They witnessed the events and are certain of the truth they prove: the indisputable authenticity of Moses." (JPS Commentary, 340) It is a custom to invite everyone up for an aliyah on Simchat Torah, even the children, to "symbolize that the Torah is the legacy of the entire people of Israel." (Etz Hayim, 1212)

Gen. 1:1-2:3

1 At first¹, God² created³ the heavens⁴ and the earth⁵:

2 The earth was chaos and chasm⁶ and [there was] darkness on the face of the deep sea⁷. God's spirit⁸ hovered⁹ up against¹⁰ the water.

3 Then God said¹¹, "Let there be light!" And there was light.¹²

¹ Others "When God began to create heaven and earth" or "In the beginning..." Following Fox, this rendering does not imply creatio ex nihilo - creation out of nothing - but does imply that the beginning of this particular story of this particular people begins with God organizing the world, setting it in motion for the narrative that would follow.

"Gen. 1 describes God's bringing order out of chaos, not creation from nothingness." (Fox, 13)

² "Genesis exhibits no interest in the question of God's origins. God's existence prior to the world is taken as axiomatic and does not even require assertion, let alone proof. ... The term for God used here and throughout the present account of Creation is *elohim*. This is not a personal name but the general Hebrew word for deity. It can even refer to pagan gods. Although plural in form, only rarely is it not constructed with a singular verb or adjective. The plural form may signify majesty or serve to intensify the basic idea. The preference for the use of *elohim* in this chapter, rather than the sacred divine name YHWH, may well be conditioned by theological considerations; the term *elohim*, connoting universalism and abstraction, is most appropriate for the transcendent God of Creation." (JPS Commentary, 5)

³ "The Hebrew stem b-r-' is used in the Bible exclusively of divine creativity." (JPS Commentary, 5)

⁴ More likely means "skies," although "heavens" is more culturally familiar idiom. "Heavens" does carry a different connotation, often one of afterlife and the realm of God and the angels. Thinking of the two areas as simply "skies and earth" leaves room for the text afterward to tell us what is in each space.

⁵ Others "land." "Probably a merism - an inclusive idiom meaning 'everything' or 'everywhere.'" (Fox, 13) "In the Torah, the divine bond with Israel is ultimately tied to the divine relationship with all humankind." (Friedman, 5)

⁶ Others "void." By using "chasm," it maintains the meaning while also maintaining the alliteration in the Hebrew. "The hendiadys of 'tohu vavohu' plus the references to the deep and the water, yields a picture of an undifferentiated, shapeless fluid that had existed prior to creation." (Friedman, 6) "In the midrash, Bar Kappara upholds the troubling notion that the Torah shows that God created the world out of preexistent material. But other rabbis worry that acknowledging this would cause people to liken God to a king who had built his palace on a garbage dump, thus arrogantly impugning His majesty (Gen. Rab. 1.5). In the ancient Near East, however, to say that a deity had subdued chaos is to give the highest praise." (JSB, 13)

⁷ Lit. "deep," but in context and in other usage, means deep waters/sea/ocean

⁸ "Others, 'wind.' The Hebrew word *ruach* can mean both 'spirit' and 'wind.'" (Fox, 13)

⁹ "The verb attached to God's breath-wind-spirit (*rua*) elsewhere (Deut. 32:11) describes an eagle fluttering over its young and so might have a connotation of parturition or nurture as well as rapid back-and-forth movement." (Alter, 17)

¹⁰ על-פני can mean "up against," and given the imagery that there is darkness on the face of the deep, God's spirit (*רוח אלהים*) can, therefore, be presented as something against the darkness. Indeed, one of the themes of this section is God creating separations and categories. It is only appropriate, then, for God's presence to not just be "on the face of the waters," but to play a more pivotal and symbolic role in the story. "Throughout the Bible darkness is often a symbol of evil, misfortune, death, and oblivion. Here it seems to be not just the absence of light but a distinct entity, the origin of which is left unclear. Isaiah 45:7, however, explicitly ascribes its existence to divine creation." (JPS Commentary, 6)

¹¹ "God said" means "God thought" or "God willed." It signifies that the Creator is wholly independent of God's creation." (JPS Commentary, 7) To whom is God speaking? God speaks "as though addressing the universe." (RJ Torah, 19) "God creates the world with words. This is the first invocation of the Torah's belief in the reality of words, their power to create and to destroy." (Etz Hayim, 4)

¹² "God creates light simply by saying the words: "Let there be" (the Hebrew jussive). Only light is expressly created from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). All other elements of creation may possibly be formed out of preexisting matter, that is, from the initially undifferentiated chaos." ... "The Torah does not claim to report everything that has

4 Then God saw the light¹³, that it was good¹⁴, and God separated¹⁵ between the light and the darkness:¹⁶

5 God called the light, “Day,” and the darkness, [God] called, “Night.” And there was an evening, and there was a morning¹⁷: First day¹⁸.

6 God said, “Let there be a flat expanse¹⁹ in the midst of the water, and let it separate from sea to sea²⁰.”

7 So God made²¹ the flat expanse and it separated the water between which the water was under the flat expanse and between the water which was above the flat expanse. And so it was.²²

occurred since the beginning of space and time. It does not say, “In the beginning, God created the skies and the earth.” It rather says, “In the beginning of God’s creating the skies and the earth, when the earth had been shapeless and formless ...” That is, there is preexisting matter, which is in a state of watery chaos. Subsequent matter— dry land, heavenly bodies, plants, animals— may be formed out of this undifferentiated fluid. In Greece, the first philosopher, Thales, later proposed such a concept, that all things derive from water. Examples from other cultures could be cited as well. There appears to be an essential human feeling that everything derives originally from water, which is hardly surprising given that we— and all life on this planet— did in fact proceed from water.” (Friedman, 6) “The source of this supernal, consular light of creation became a subject of rabbinic and mystical speculation. Genesis Rabbah 3:4 expresses the view that this light is the effulgent splendor of the Divine Presence. Psalms 104:2, with its theme of creation, describes God as ‘wrapped in a robe of light.’” (JPS Commentary, 7)

¹³ “A midrash teaches that when God saw the corruption of the generations of the flood and of the tower of Babel, He hid that primordial light away for the benefit of the righteous in the world to-come (b. Hag. 12a).” (JSB, 13)

¹⁴ “The syntax is emphatic; other use ‘God saw how good it was.’ The phrase is reminiscent of ancient Near Eastern descriptions of a craftsman being pleased with his work.” (Fox, 13) “This phrase repeats in similar form six times in this passage, expressing the basic goodness of God’s creation.” (TWC, 5)

¹⁵ This translation takes a different approach to most, which usually break up the phrasing as, God observed good light and (in a separate course of action) separated light from dark. However, it can be read that God sees the light, notices that it is good, and then separates in one continuous string of actions. Therefore, this verse is treated as one sentence. Indeed, this is not about “visual examination but perception.” (JPS Commentary, 7) “In each case, creation is the act of separating a thing from the rest of matter and then giving it a name.” (Friedman, 7) “Separation, or rather differentiation, is the second modality of creation.” (JPS Commentary, 7)

¹⁶ What follows in v. 5 is how God separates the light and the darkness - God names the light “Day” and the darkness “Night.” Therefore, a colon, not a period, is most appropriate, as it is a continuation of this verse.

¹⁷ Although “the Hebrew terms *erev* and *boker* are rather more specific than the usual “evening” and “morning,” this translation maintains them for the sake of brevity & clarity. (Fox, 13)

¹⁸ “According to Jewish law, the 24-hour cycle begins at sunset. Shabbat and holy days, therefore, begin in the evening, with candles lit 18 minutes before sunset, and continue until the following night when three stars can be clearly seen or 25 minutes after sunset if no stars are visible. (Etz Hayim, 5)

¹⁹ Others “expanse,” “vault,” or “dome.” In other usages, it implies a flat expanse as if supporting the vault of heaven above. “Literally a beaten sheet of metal.” (Fox, 13) Friedman reads it as “the skies.” “The skies here refer simply to space, to the sky that we see, and not to some other, unseen place where God dwells or where people dwell after their death.” (Friedman, 8)

²⁰ More literally, “between water and water,” or “between the waters.”

²¹ “This verb, used again in vv. 16 and 25, simply means that the divine intention became a reality. It does not represent a tradition of creation by deed as opposed to word.” (JPS Commentary, 8)

²² In the Septuagint, this phrase is at the end of the previous verse, and this verse ends “And God saw that it was good.”

8 God called²³ the flat expanse, “Heavens.”²⁴ And there was evening, and there was morning: Second day.

9 God said, “Let the water from under the Heavens be gathered to one place and let the dry land²⁵ appear.” And so it was.

10 God called the dry land, “Earth,” and the gathered waters²⁶ [God] called, “Sea.” God saw that it was good.

11 God said, “Let the land sprout grass²⁷, seeded plants²⁸ [and] seeds, fruit trees [with] fruit of each kind, which has its seed in it, on the land.” And so it was²⁹:

12 The land brought out grass, seeded plants [and] seeds of each kind, and fruit-bearing trees, which has its seed in it of each kind. God saw that it was good.

13 And there was evening, and there was morning: Third day.

14 God said, “Let there be lights in the flat expanse of the Heavens to separate between the day and the night. Let them, therefore, be signs for the particular sacred seasons³⁰, the days, and the years.

15 Let them be lights³¹ in the flat expanse of the Heavens to light the land.” And so it was:

²³ Although included in the Septuagint, it is curious that God does not observe this creation.

²⁴ “The space (or ‘firmament’) and the sky are the same thing. This appears to be an explanation of what the sky is. It is a transparent shell or space that holds back the upper waters.” (Friedman, 9)

²⁵ In other usages, it does not imply dry desert lands but shore areas connecting land to the water.

²⁶ Lit., “gathering of waters.” “Gathered” was chosen for clarity of English. The Hebrew, “מקוה” is a term for a usable body of water, such as a reservoir or a ritual bath.

²⁷ JPS Genesis commentary identifies this as a “generic term, which is subdivided into plants and fruit trees.” (JPS Commentary, 9) However, the context implies that it could just mean “grass,” as grasslands can support whole ecosystems.

²⁸ I.e., plants that produce seeds.

²⁹ Unlike previous days of creation, “And so it was” precedes the action of creation. Hence, the colon instead of a period.

³⁰ Per BDB (4150, 1b). “Anticipating the creation of humanity, and especially of Israel, who will celebrate the seasons as divine gifts.” (RJ Torah, 20)

³¹ Lights? Plural? “Note that daylight is not understood here to derive from the sun. The text understands the light that surrounds us in the daytime to be an independent creation of God, which has already taken place on the first day. The sun, moon, and stars are understood here to be light sources— like a lamp or torch, only stronger. Their purpose is also to be markers of time: days, years, appointed occasions. This also implies an answer to an old question: People have questioned whether the first three days are twenty-four-hour days since the sun is not created until the fourth day. But light, day, and night are not understood here to depend on the existence of the sun, so there is no reason to think that the word “day” means anything different on the first two days than what it means everywhere else in the Torah. People’s reason for raising this is often to reconcile the biblical creation story with current evidence on the earth’s age. But it is better to recognize that the biblical story does not match the evidence than to stretch the story’s plain meaning in order to make it fit better with our current state of knowledge.” (Friedman, 10)

16 God made two great lights,³² the greater light to have dominion of the day, and the small light to have dominion of the night and the stars.³³

17 Then God put them in the flat expanse of the Heavens to illuminate the land

18 and to dominate the day and the night and to separate the light from the darkness.³⁴ God saw that it was good.

19 And there was evening, and there was morning: Fourth day.³⁵

20 God said, “Let the waters swarm, swarm with living souls³⁶, and birds that fly over the land up against the flat expanse of the Heavens.”³⁷

21 Then God created great sea monsters³⁸ and every living soul that crawls, which the waters swarmed of each kind, and every winged bird of every kind. God saw that it was good.

22 God blessed them by saying, “be fruitful and multiply and fill the water in the seas and let the birds multiply on land.”

23 And there was evening, and there was morning: Fifth day.

24 God said, “Let each kind of living soul of the land come forth: beasts and creeping things³⁹ and land animals of every kind.” And so it was.

25 Then God made land animals of every kind and beasts of every kind and every kind of that creeps on the land. God saw that it was good.

³² The Torah goes out of its way to avoid using the words “sun” and “moon.” Perhaps this is because those terms are more closely associated with pagan worship.

³³ Notice a theme emerging: In Judaism, we follow a lunar calendar, not a solar calendar. Yet, the smaller light (one way to translate קטן is “unimportant”) guides our calendar. Thus, the themes of Genesis, with the older/bigger/grander serving the younger/smaller/scrappy are set in motion, even in the description of symbols.

³⁴ The Torah does not seem concerned about who has greater dominion in instances when the moon is out during the day.

³⁵ A classic question of Torah study asks at this point of the story: if the sun and moon were not created until the fourth day, what was the light source during the first three days?

³⁶ A more literal translation, to be sure. “נפש חיה” means literally, ‘animate life,’ that which embodies the breath of life.” (JPS Commentary, 10)

³⁷ Septuagint adds, “And so it was.”

³⁸ “The rebellious primeval monster [Tiamat]...common in ancient Near Eastern myth is here depicted as merely another one of God’s many creations.” (Fox, 15)

³⁹ This differentiates the creeping things from the sea.

26 God said, “Let us⁴⁰ make humanity⁴¹ in our image, like our resemblance. They are to rule⁴² the fish in the sea and the birds of the skies and the beasts and of all the land⁴³ and of all the creeping things that creep on the land.”

27 Then⁴⁴ God created humanity⁴⁵ in God’s image. In the image of God⁴⁶, God created it. Male and female⁴⁷, God created them.

⁴⁰ “Tradition has understood the plural in various ways: as God speaking out loud to no one in particular (so Rashi), or as addressing the angelic host. (The idea of a heavenly court is found elsewhere in the Bible; see, for instance, Isa. 6:8; Job 38:7) Saadia treated the ‘us’ as a majestic plural, applied in the Bible to some distinguished personalities (ex., Num. 20:3; Judg. 13:15), while Nachmanides explained it as follows: The human was to be fashioned from physical matter (like all other creatures), but was also to have a soul (like no other creature). ‘Let us’ is therefore to be understood as if God were addressing the earth in this uniquely cooperative process of creation. ... A contemporary study of plural phrases attached to God sees them as expanding the divine singularity: it contains both one and many.” (RJ Torah, 21) “Why does God speak in the plural here? Some take the plural to be “the royal we” as used by royalty and the papacy among humans, but this alone does not account for the fact that it occurs only in the opening chapters of the Torah and nowhere else. Others take the plural to mean that God is addressing a heavenly court of angels, seraphim, or other heavenly creatures, although this, too, does not explain the limitation of the phenomenon to the opening chapters. More plausible, though by no means certain, is the suggestion that it is an Israelite, monotheistic reflection of the pagan language of the divine council. In pagan myth, the chief god, when formally speaking for the council of the gods, speaks in the plural. Such language might be appropriate for the opening chapters of the Torah, thus asserting that the God of Israel has taken over this role.” (Friedman, 12)

⁴¹ Others “man,” “mankind,” “human beings.” “Heb. אדם, a singular noun, stands here for a collective, like the English words ‘fish’ or ‘fowl.’ It refers to humankind as a whole, including both females and males. ... In fact, the noun אדם is almost always a generic term, employed when gender is not germane. Apart from the thirty references to the particular אדם of the Eden story and one to the progenitor of a lineage (Joshua 14:15), none of the Bible’s 530 other occurrences of אדם refers to a particular individual. ... The Hebrew text unambiguously presents female and male as co-created and equal.” (TWC, 7)

⁴² “The verb רדה is not the normal Hebrew verb for “rule” (the latter is reflected in “dominion” of verse 16), and in most of the contexts in which it occurs it seems to suggest an absolute or even fierce exercise of mastery.” (Alter, 19)

⁴³ Instead of “haaretz,” Peshita has the inscription, “chayat - beasts”

⁴⁴ The ו here functions similarly to the others in this narrative, following the pattern of God speaking, then God doing something (or minimally, something happening)

⁴⁵ “it seems to say that our humanity, as אדם, precedes our division into sexual categories. Our humanity comes first; our sexual identity next.” (TWC, 8)

⁴⁶ “We argue but truly do not know what is meant: whether a physical, spiritual, or intellectual image of God. (Some light may be shed on this by Gen 5:3.) Whatever it means, though, it implies that humans are understood here to share in the divine in a way that a lion or cow does not. That is crucial to all that will follow.” (Friedman, 12)

⁴⁷ “This passage explicitly proclaims the co-creation of female and male, both in God’s image. It establishes the goodness and gender balance as the foundation for all that follows. ... The word זכר evokes the Hebrew word for ‘remembering,’ and נקבה evokes the word for being pierced.” (TWC, 8) To resolve the problem in Genesis 2, where the female is described as having been formed from the male, tradition offers a variety of solutions: “by positing that God first created a hermaphrodite who was then divided into two separate genders; or that both genders were created on the first day, but the ‘how’ is described in the following chapter. Medieval mystics speculated that the ‘male and female’ aspect continued to adhere to every male. Many scholars ascribe chapter 1 to one tradition, and chapter 2 to another. As elsewhere in the Torah, both were preserved and placed side-by-side.” (RJ Torah, 21)

28 God blessed them by saying, “Be fruitful and multiply⁴⁸ and fill the earth and dominate⁴⁹ it. Have rule over the fish of the sea and of the birds of the skies and of all life that creeps on the land.”

29 God said, “Behold! I give you⁵⁰ all grass⁵¹, seeded plant which is in sight of all the land, and every fruit tree [with] seeded fruit will be yours for food.

30 And to all animals of the land and all birds of the skies and everything that creeps on the land, every living soul, [to] all greenery [and] grass for food⁵².” And so it was.

31 Then God saw all that God had made. And, behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning: Sixth day.

2:1 Thus⁵³, the heavens and the earth and the entire creation⁵⁴ were finished.

2 And on the seventh⁵⁵ day, God finished the work that God had done. [God] ceased⁵⁶ on the seventh day from all the work that God had done.

3 And God blessed the seventh day and designated it as sacred⁵⁷, for on it [God] ceased from all the work of creation which God had done.⁵⁸

⁴⁸ "Jewish tradition considers this to be the first of the Torah's 613 commandments." (RJ Torah, 21) "The difference between the formulation here and God's blessing to the fish and fowl in v. 22 is subtle and meaningful. Here God directly addresses man and woman. The transcendent God of Creation transforms God's self into the immanent God, the personal God, who enters into unmediated communion with human beings." (JPS Commentary, 13)

⁴⁹ In other uses, כָּבַשׁ implies dominate with strength, bring into bondage, subdue, or as in Esther 7:8, Haman is thought to have forced himself onto Esther. "Incredibly, some have interpreted this command to mean that humans have permission to abuse the earth and animal and plant life— as if a command from God to rule did not imply to be a good ruler!" (Friedman, 13)

⁵⁰ "I give you" "'You' in the plural." (Fox, 17)

⁵¹ The word for "grass" is עֵשֶׂב, which is a homonym for עֵשָׂו, the Hebrew name for Jacob's brother Esau. To someone who is just listening and not reading, this sentence takes on a different meaning: "I give/deliver to you every Esau, every opponent..."

⁵² "Human beings in their original state were not meat-eaters. For change, see 9:3ff." (Fox, 17) "According to the biblical scheme, humans and beasts became carnivorous only after the Flood (Gen. 9:3)." (RJ Torah, 21)

⁵³ "In the Jewish liturgy, this passage serves as an introduction to the kiddush, the prayer over wine to sanctify the Sabbath that is recited just before the first meal of the holy day, on Friday night. It also appears in the traditional Friday evening service. The passage is characterized by the type of repetition that suggests it might have served as a liturgy already in antiquity." (JSB, 14)

⁵⁴ Per BDB 6635 1d.

⁵⁵ Others read "hashishi - the sixth" not "the seventh." "Only the seventh day, not yet designated as Shabbat, is holy. Time, not space, is thus consecrated, which (as A. J. Heschel notes) becomes a hallmark of Judaism." (TWC, 9)

⁵⁶ "The word (ceased) means to 'stop,' not to 'rest' as it is often taken. The explicit association of the Sabbath with rest will come later, in the Ten Commandments." (Friedman, 15)

⁵⁷ "Holiness in the Torah seems indeed to be a singular, powerful quality that certain objects, places, and persons acquire. ... It means much more than just "separate." (Friedman, 15) "Here God is perceived as sovereign over time as well [as space]." (Etz Hayim, 12)

⁵⁸ "The Hebrew words read, literally, 'all His word that God created to do.' Ibn Ezra and Radak took the final verb (la'asot) as connoting '[for man] to [continue to] do [thenceforth].'" (Etz Hayim, 12)

TTT Translation of Simchat Torah Torah Readings

Deut. 34:1-12

1-3 Moshe climbed up from the plains of Moav to Mount N'vo, the peak of Pisgah, facing Y'recho. Then Adonai let him check out¹ all of the land — from Gil'ad to Dan, Naftali, Ephrayim and M'nasheh, the Negev and the plains of Y'recho, the city of palm trees, to Tzoar—all of Y'hudah all the way to the Western Sea.²

4 [After taking it all in,]³ Adonai explained to him, “This is the land I pledged to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov: ‘I will give it to your family.’ I have let you see it firsthand⁴, but you are not going to go there.”

5-7 Moshe, a servant of Adonai, died there in Moav, fulfilling God's word.⁵ He was buried⁶ in the valley in Moav, opposite Beit P'or.⁷ No one knows [the location of] his grave to this day. Moshe was 120 years old when he died. He had clear eyes and he was still full of vigor.

8 On the plains of Moav, the Israelites cried their eyes out for Moshe for thirty days.⁸ Then the period of mourning for Moshe ended.

9 Then Joshua, son of Nun, was filled with spirit and wisdom because Moshe had placed his hands on him. The Israelites obeyed him just like they did when Adonai commanded Moshe.⁹

10 Never again did another prophet emerge like Moshe in Israel. Adonai knew him face to face. Adonai sent him to show off those signs and wonders in Egypt to Pharaoh and to all of his servants and to all his land with a strong hand and with awe-inspiring spectacles. And Moshe did it all right before Israel's eyes.¹⁰

¹ Inspect, verify. Moses does not merely look out onto the land, the drama of the moment indicates that he examines all the land that he could have entered.

² Syntax shifted for clarity.

³ Lit., “then.” The text implies that God clearly gave Moses a moment to take in this entire sight.

⁴ Lit., “with your eyes.” This rendering integrates the Deuteronomistic notion of knowledge gained from firsthand experiences.

⁵ Syntax shifted for clarity. This rendering attempts to imbue a sense of parallelism - Moses was such a servant of God that when God said he would die, he did (he may not have had a hand in the matter, though).

⁶ Lit., “He buried him.” See faithful translation for full notes on this ambiguity. This rendering maintains the ambiguity of who buries Moses.

⁷ Syntax shifted for clarity.

⁸ Syntax shifted for clarity.

⁹ Syntax shifted for clarity. There is a funny irony here - the implication is that the Israelites will listen to Joshua obediently, but looking back at the Torah, the Israelites did not always listen to Moses!

¹⁰ Syntax shifted for clarity.

Gen. 1:1-2:3

1 Here's how it first went down¹¹ when God created the heavens and the earth:

2 The earth was chaos and chasm. The deep ocean was topped with utter darkness. God's spirit floated on the water's face.¹²

3-5 Then God was all,¹³ "Turn on the light!" And [boom!] there it was! God checked out¹⁴ how awesome the light was, and separated the light and the darkness by calling the light, "Day," and the darkness, "Night." And there was an evening, and there was a morning: First day.

6-8 God was all, "This needs a dome¹⁵ in the middle of the water that can separate between the waters." So God made a sky and it separated the water under it and the water above it. And [boom!] there it was! God named the sky, "Heavens." And there was an evening, and there was a morning: Second day.

9-13 God was all, "All the water from under the Heavens, come together to one place. And dry land, appear! And [boom!] there it was! God named the dry land, "Earth," and the gathered waters, "Sea." God saw that it was all good. God was all, "Land, sprout grass, plants, fruit trees [with] fruit of every kind, and lots of seeds.¹⁶ And [boom!] there it was! Grass, plants, fruit trees [with] fruit of every kind, and lots of seeds came up from the land.¹⁷ God saw that it was all good. And there was an evening, and there was a morning: Third day.

14-19 God was all, "There should be lights in the skies of the Heavens to separate between the day and the night. They will help mark the particular sacred seasons, the days, and the years. They will be lights in the skies of the Heavens to shine light on the land." And [boom!] there it was! God made two big lights, the bigger light to run the show¹⁸ during the day, and the smaller light to run the show at night and the stars. Then God placed them in the skies of the Heavens to shine light on the land, run the show during the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was all good. And there was an evening, and there was a morning: Fourth day.

20-23 God was all, "The waters should swarm with life, and birds should fly over the land in the skies of the Heavens." Then God made gigantic sea monsters and all kinds of crawling and swimming things in the water, and all kinds of birds. God saw that it was all good. God blessed

¹¹ "If something happened, it went down." (UD)

¹² This rendering maintains the imagery of God's spirit hovering like a bird, while also providing a more familiar water-based point of reference.

¹³ Colloquial expression of "God said."

¹⁴ Colloquial expression for "examine."

¹⁵ See note from faithful translation.

¹⁶ Syntax shifted for clarity.

¹⁷ Syntax shifted for clarity.

¹⁸ "Run the show" means "to govern/rule"

them: “Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the seas! Birds, multiply on land! And there was an evening, and there was a morning: Fifth day.

24-25 God was all, “There should be all kinds of life on the land, from big beasts to tiny creeping things and all kinds of animals.” And [boom!] there it was! Then God made all kinds of animals on the land, from big beasts to tiny creeping things.¹⁹ God saw that it was all good.

26-31 God said, “Let’s make humanity just like us, in our image.²⁰ They will be in charge of the fish, the birds, the animals, the land and everything on it.”²¹ Then God created humanity in God’s image. In the image of God, God created humanity. Male and female, God created them.²² God blessed them: “Be fruitful and multiply! Populate the earth and be in charge of it. Show leadership²³ over the fish of the sea and the birds in the skies and every living thing that moves on land.” God said, “Check it out! I give you all grass, every kind of plant and seed on earth, and every kind of fruit tree to be yours for food. To all of the land animals and birds of the skies, everything that moves on land, really, every living soul, [I give to you] all greenery [and] grass for food.” And [boom!] there it was! Then God checked out everything God had made. And, wowzers²⁴, it was all good. And there was an evening, and there was a morning: Sixth day.

2:1-3 Just like that, the heavens and the earth and everything in between were finished. On the seventh day, God was done working. [God] stopped working on the seventh day. And God blessed the seventh day and made it a holy day, because on that day, [God] stopped all God’s work of creation.

¹⁹ Syntax shifted for clarity.

²⁰ Syntax shifted for clarity.

²¹ Syntax shifted for clarity. Phrases adjusted for brevity and clarity.

²² Due to the importance of this particular verse, the syntax has been preserved.

²³ Leadership implies rule as well as partnership and responsibility.

²⁴ “Expression of wonderment.” (UD)

Sukkot Torah Readings (Lev. 23:33-44)

Faithful Translation of Sukkot Torah Readings

Lev. 23:33-44

33 Adonai spoke to Moses:¹

34 "Speak to the Israelites²: 'On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, [let there be a³] seven day festival-gathering⁴ [of] sukkahs⁵ for Adonai.⁶

35 Let the first day⁷ be a sacred gathering⁸, do not do any work tasks.

36 [For] seven days bring offerings by fire for God. Let the eighth day be for you a sacred gathering when offerings by fire will be brought for God. It is a sacred restraint⁹; do not do any laborious work.

¹ לאמר, "saying" is redundant. Its function is noted in the colon and quotation marks.

² Similarly, לאמר is redundant and its function is taken on by the colon and quotations marks.

³ There is no verb in this clause; therefore, this is a contextual estimate. Others translate "there shall be a..."

⁴ Per BDB. מועד in this instance means both a festival and something people would gather for. Post-centralization, מועד also included traveling to the Temple.

⁵ As a Jewish translation, this translation uses the culturally familiar term instead of the literal, "booth." However, as these booths are not the Sukkot that we know today, "sukkah" and "sukkahs" are presented in lower-case. "The Hebrew word sukkah, 'booth,' derives from the verb skk, 'to cover over,' as with branches. It designates a small, usually temporary, structure that is covered on top and only partially enclosed on its sides." (Etz Hayim, 729) "[Sukkot], serving as a makeshift, temporary shelters while laboring in the field or vineyard for several days at a time." (JSB, 265) "The autumn pilgrimage is so named because its long duration - seven full days - necessitates the erection of such shelters to accommodate the many pilgrims during their stay in the Temple city." (JSB, 265) "This term is used to describe the function of the parochet, the pavilion that covers over the ark (Ex. 40:3; Ps. 27:5; Lam. 2:6). It thus reflects simultaneously both the simple, makeshift dwellings that house the Israelites in the wilderness period and the beautiful, most sacred structure that houses the ark." (Friedman, 397)

⁶ While today we call this holiday "Sukkot," "Rabbinic tradition called it simply, 'Chag.'" (JSB, 266)

⁷ "Why is it called the 'first day' when it is actually the fifteenth of the month? After the slate has been wiped clean on Yom Kippur, we begin our relationship with God anew on Sukkot. (Lev. R. 30:7)" (Etz Hayim, 729)

⁸ In Leviticus, מועד refers to a specifically religious gathering with higher import.

⁹ "Precise meaning of atzeret uncertain. Ibn Ezra understands its root-meaning as 'restrain,' referring to restraint from work." (RJ Torah, 827) "According to Deut. 16:8, as well as the ritual legislation, the atzeret consistently comes at the conclusion of a prolonged celebration. This undoubtedly prompted the Septuagint to render it by Greek 'exodion - finale, recessional.' Etymologically, this term derives from the verb atsar, 'to detain, restrain, confine,' and may refer to the fact that the people are kept together for an additional day." (JPS Commentary, 162) "[Atzeret] apparently refers to local festive gatherings, as distinct from the pilgrimage to the Temple-city." (JSB, 266) "As distinct from the 'matzot' observance, the concluding holy day is added to the first seven. Apparently, the pilgrimage is to last seven days, while on the eighth day, not called a 'chag' but simply a 'sacred occasion,' a cessation from labor is to be observed by all - those who do not make the pilgrimage, those who do so but return home for the eighth day, and those who remain an additional day." (JSB, 266)

37 These are the appointed times of Adonai which you are¹⁰ to call sacred gatherings by offering fire offerings for God: burnt offerings and [generic] offerings, sacrifices and libations¹¹, what is proper on each day.¹²

38 [These are] in addition to¹³ Adonai's Shabbats¹⁴, and in addition to your gifts, and in addition to your vowed-gifts¹⁵, and in addition to your voluntary-gifts¹⁶ that you give to Adonai.

39 However¹⁷, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather the yield of the land, you are to celebrate Adonai's festival¹⁸ seven days. The first day is a Shabbat-like observance¹⁹ and the eighth day is a Shabbat-like observance.

40 Thereupon, on the first day, you are to take²⁰ the fruit of a symbolically important²¹ tree, palm fronds, and a branch²² of a leafy tree²³, and willows of the brook, and you are to rejoice²⁴ before Adonai your God seven days.

¹⁰ אֲזַמְּרֵם redundant here. It is implicit in what comes next, "sacred gatherings."

¹¹ Septuagint reads "their burnt offerings and their sacrifices and their libations" Perhaps the different actions assume that each sacrifice is appropriate for the particular holy day. (Fox, 623) Order of offering types switched for ease of English.

¹² "On each day what is proper" is an administrative formula, originally employed in delineating disbursements of food and other materials. It is also appropriate for listing offerings prescribed for particular occasions." (JPS Commentary, 162)

¹³ Lit. "apart from" or "besides" but in the context here and elsewhere in Torah, it implies that what follows is in addition to whatever has preceded.

¹⁴ As "Shabbat" is a culturally colloquial Hebrew term, the plural in Hebrew is maintained rather than "Sabbaths."

¹⁵ Others "votive offerings." This is an attempt to bridge the נָדָר and make the connection to a familiar touchpoint, כל נדר.

¹⁶ While מִתְּנָה "usually indicates a voluntary presentation," it is curious that the Torah also stipulates the vowed and volunteered gifts. (JPS Commentary, 163)

¹⁷ אך usually means "yet" or "but" meaning "in contrast to what precedes." (BDB, 389) In this context, it is meant to say that although the text just got off a bit on this tangent about offerings and gifts, the important part of the festival is what follows.

¹⁸ "lit., 'make a pilgrimage.'" (JSB, 266) "This is the basis of the older name of the festival, used in Ex. 23:16 and 34:22, chag ha'asif, 'the Pilgrimage Festival of Ingathering.'" (JPS Commentary, 163)

¹⁹ lit. "Sabbath" but in context implies a Shabbat-like observance. Others "rest."

²⁰ "This was understood as the 'Four Species' (etrog and three-bound lulav) that are used to this day in the Jewish festival of Sukkot." (Fox, 623)

²¹ Meaning of הָדָר uncertain. "Traditionally the 'product' is understood as 'citron.'" (RJ Torah, 827) But other usages imply "A stately tree...A general term referring to majesty, stateliness, or splendor, and it is probable that the original instruction was to take the fruit of any grand-looking tree, not necessarily the fruit of a specific genus of trees." (Alter, 647)

²² Others "branches," but עֵנָף is singular.

²³ Meaning of עֵבֶת uncertain. "It was understood by tradition as myrtle, the leaves of which have a 'plaited' appearance, completely covering the stems." (RJ Torah, 828)

²⁴ "That the festival was known as THE celebration is seen from the emphasis here on joy." (Fox, 624) "This is the only festival prescribed in chapter 23 on which rejoicing is explicitly commanded. In the festival calendar of Deut. 16, rejoicing is also mentioned in connection with Shavuot. Elsewhere we read that sacrificial worship in the Temple is an occasion for rejoicing. It is not clear just why the Sukkot festival is singled out here, although it may be because Sukkot was the most preeminent of the ancient pilgrimage festivals." (JPS Commentary, 163)

41 Thus, you are to celebrate²⁵ God's festival-gathering, seven days in a year as an everlasting law throughout your generations, [and] you will celebrate it in the seventh month.
42 You are to dwell in sukkahs seven days²⁶ - every native in Israel will live in sukkahs -
43 so that your generations will know I caused the Israelites to live in sukkahs²⁷ when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am Adonai your God.'"
44 Thus Moses proclaimed²⁸ Adonai's particular sacred seasons²⁹ to the Israelites.³⁰

²⁵ אתו here is redundant in an English rendering.

²⁶ "This was understood quite literally in Jewish tradition: one is to sleep in the sukkah for seven nights and take all regular meals there. In modern urban settings, some observant Jews limit themselves to eating meals in a communal or congregational booth." (RJ Torah, 828)

²⁷ "According to Ex. 12:37, Sukkot is the name of the first stop on the exodus route from Egypt. A double entendre may have been intended: God brought the Israelites to Sukkot when God led them out of Egypt, and God also made them dwell in sukkot, booths, at that time." (JPS Commentary, 163) Perhaps this explains why we read of the Sukkot place in the Pesach Torah reading. "According to Rashbam, the booth reminds us of our humble beginnings and so it protects us against arrogance." (RJ Torah, 828)

²⁸ Lit. "spoke" but this is more of a proclamation.

²⁹ Per BDB (4150, 1b)

³⁰ "In Jewish liturgy, this verse is sung during the evening worship service on the three major festivals, prior to the Amidah" (RJ Torah, 828)

TTT Translation of Sukkot Torah Readings

Lev. 23:33-44

33 Adonai talked at¹ Moses:

34 “Speak to the Israelites: ‘[Check it²], on the fifteenth day of this seventh month, throw a Sukkot holy festival-gathering for Adonai.

35 The first day is going to be your everything³ - call it a day⁴ [and don’t even talk shop⁵].

36 Bring offerings by fire for God [for] seven days.⁶ The eighth day is [also] going to be your everything when offerings by fire will be brought for God. It is a [day when you] hold back. Hard work? Pass⁷.

37 These are Adonai’s special times which call for holy festival-gatherings by gifting offerings by fire for God: burnt offerings and [generic] offerings, food and drink-offerings⁸, everything for its time.

38 [These are] in addition to Adonai’s Shabbatot, and in addition to your gifts, and in addition to what your pledged-gifts⁹, and in addition to your voluntold¹⁰-gifts that you give to Adonai.

39 However [and this is what’s important], on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you bring in the motherload¹¹ from the land, celebrate¹² Adonai’s festival-gathering for seven days. Do the first day and the eighth day like Shabbat.¹³

40 On the first day, take¹⁴ the fruit of a symbolically important tree [(Rabbis will tell us later what that means)¹⁵], palm fronts, and a branch of a leafy tree, and willows of the brook, and turn up¹⁶ seven days for Adonai your God.¹⁷

41 Yup, celebrate¹⁸ God’s festival-gathering seven days in a year, from now on. Celebrate¹⁹ it in the seventh month.

¹ “to have a one way conversation; allow no collaboration” (UD)

² “command: 1) listen to this, to me” (UD)

³ “-All things sacred; -Anything that matters; e.x., ‘Music is my everything...’” (UD)

⁴ “To stop working.” (UD)

⁵ “To discuss work, especially of a technical, jargon - filled nature.” (UD) Holy days during festivals are meant to be like Shabbat: time when we do not do nor even discuss business.

⁶ Syntax shift for clarity.

⁷ “To refrain from something” (UD)

⁸ Order of offering types switched for ease of English.

⁹ Using a term familiar to most from various non-profit fundraisers.

¹⁰ “The exact opposite of volunteering. Always used in reference to an unpleasant task to which you have been assigned by your boss.” (UD)

¹¹ “A large quantity of something such as money.” (UD)

¹² “You are to” is implicit in the command to celebrate.

¹³ Syntax and language abbreviated for clarity and simplicity.

¹⁴ Again, “you are to” is redundant in the command form.

¹⁵ Admittedly, this is more of transculturation rather than translation. However, due to the Torah’s vagueness on this topic, this commentary might be helpful.

¹⁶ “To let loose and have fun.” (UD)

¹⁷ Syntax shifted for clarity.

¹⁸ “You are to” is implicit in the command.

¹⁹ “You will” is implicit in the command.

42 Hang²⁰ in sukkot seven days - every local in Israel will live in sukkot -
43 so that your kids will know I enabled the Israelites to live in Sukkot when I brought them out
from Egypt²¹. I am Adonai, your God.’’
44 Moses dropped the mic²² announcing to the Israelites Adonai’s special times.

²⁰ Short for “hang out”

²¹ “the land of” is not necessary here.

²² A mic drop: “When a performer or speaker intentionally drops/throws the microphone on the floor after an awesome performance.” (UD) Moses will do this a lot in Torah.

Pesach Torah Readings (Ex. 12:37-42; 13:3-10)

Faithful Translation of Pesach Torah Readings

Ex. 12:37-42

12:37 The Israelites set out from Ramses towards Sukkot¹, about 600,000² troopers, besides the tiny-tots³.

38 Riffraff⁴ also went up with them, with flocks and herds, very heavy livestock⁵.

39 They baked the unleavened dough which they brought out from Mitzrayim: discs of matzah⁶, for it was not leavened because they had been driven out of Mitzrayim and were not able to wait, and neither did they make provisions for themselves.

40 The residency of Israelites⁷ which had resided in Mitzrayim⁸ was 430 years.

41 And it happened at the end of the 430 years⁹, and it happened on that very day, all of Adonai's army¹⁰ went out from the land of Mitzrayim.

¹ "[This location] is said to have been a day's journey from the royal palace at Raamses...The region is known to have served as pastureland for Semitic tribes and was the usual Egyptian gateway to and from Asia." (JPS Ex, 62)

² "600000 should be understood as 600 contingents, and not just 600000 men, 'a contingent being about nine or ten men. Altogether there were somewhat fewer than 6000 men.' (RJ Torah, 414) 'The number probably originated in hyperbole, perhaps as an expansion of the common 600-man military unit (14:7; Judg. 18:11; 1 Sam. 13:15; 23:13; etc.). Comparably, the Haggadah inflates the number of plagues from ten to fifty, and Arabian Bedouin often magnify numbers by factors of ten. Note also the thousand-fold population growth wished for by Moses (Deut. 1:11).'" (JSB, 129)

³ TWC understands this as "dependents." "As in Ex. 10:24, this term presumably includes the women, children, and infirm or disabled men." (TWC, 368) The roots of the words (תָּרִיחַ and הַנִּבְרִיחַ) are connected to feet: the former literally meaning "footmen" and the latter connected to the verb meaning "take quick little steps." This translation attempts to present those two images.

⁴ Following Fox. "Eirev rav, similar to asafsuf of Num. 11:4. These were people from the bottom of Egypt's social strata who took the opportunity to escape from their fate." (RJ Torah, 414) "Egyptian texts and art show the presence of such groups, including Semites and Nubians." (JSB, 129)

⁵ "'Heavy' is a word that shuttles back and forth throughout the themes of the story, from Pharaoh's heavy/hard heart to the sundry heavy plagues to the heaviness of the Israelite possessions." (Alter, 382) "It is as if this good is in proportion to the bad that they have experienced." (Friedman, 211)

⁶ "The significance of eating matzah is given here, even though the initial directive for eating it had been given in connection with the regulations for the Passover Festival in v. 8." (TWC, 368) "In their haste, the Israelites made unleavened bread because it can be made quickly (for that reason, it is made for unexpected guests [Gen. 19:3; Judg. 6:19; 1 Sam. 28:24], as Arab peasants still do). (JSB, 129)

⁷ Samaritan & Septuagint manuscripts add "va'avotam - and their fathers."

⁸ Samaritan, according to the Septuagint, "in the land of Canaan and in the land of Egypt."

⁹ "This historical summation does not exactly accord with the four hundred years of Egyptian oppression predicted in Genesis 15:13...It may be that the neatly balanced periods of time are intended to be rhetorical rather than literal; that is, they underline the biblical ideal of history as the fulfillment of God's deliberate design. In the world view of the Bible, history cannot be merely a series of disconnected and haphazard incidents." (JPS Commentary, 62-3)

¹⁰ "A term with clear military flavor; later in the Bible, Israel becomes the 'armed forces of Adonai' (same Hebrew term)." (Fox, 323)

42 It was a night on guard¹¹ for Adonai in order to take them out from the land of Mitzrayim. It, this night, belongs to Adonai, for all Israelites through their generations¹².

Ex. 13:3-10

13:3 And Moses said to the people, “Remember¹³ this day¹⁴ when you went out from Mitzrayim¹⁵, from the house of slavery¹⁶, for with a strong hand¹⁷ God brought you out from this: [therefore] you are not to eat leaven.¹⁸

4 Today, you go out, in the month of Aviv.¹⁹

¹¹ Others “night of vigil,” Fox uses “keeping-watch”, reflecting “the play on words in the Hebrew שמר, by including ideas of both ‘guarding’ and ‘observing.’” (Fox, 323) “For God as well as for the people of Israel. (RJ Torah, 414) “Although derivations of the root ‘sh-m-r’ (watch, guard, observe) are common (they occur five other times in this chapter [alone]), this form is unparalleled in the Bible. In rabbinic Hebrew it means ‘guarding, care.’ If that is the meaning here, this verse may represent an interpretation of the term ‘Pesach’. The sense would be that God guarded the Israelites from the Destroyer on the night of the exodus and will guard them against malevolent forces on the anniversaries of this night. Possibly, the term has different nuances and different subjects in each clause; e.g., it was a night of God’s protection of Israel at the exodus, so in the future it will be a night of Israel’s observance of the pesach sacrifice.” (JSP, 129-130)

¹² “The last phrase of the verse, ‘through their generations/eras’ serves as a transition from the preceding narration of the event of the Exodus to the passage of legislation that frames it, which will be followed by a second unit of legislative material.” (Alter, 383)

¹³ “Denying oneself all benefit from anything containing leaven during Passover is one way of fulfilling the commandment to ‘remember.’” (Etz Hayim, 391) “Israel’s liberation from Egypt is to be an event that is indelibly imprinted upon its memory, individually and collectively. A set of symbols is created to actualize the experiences.” (JPS passage of legislation that frames, 65)

¹⁴ “This day” “The 15th of the first month.” (Etz Hayim, 391)

¹⁵ Some “from the land of Egypt”

¹⁶ “Literally, ‘house of slaves.’ This designation for Egypt, frequent in Deuteronomy, may derive from the Egyptian practice of settling the labor gangs in walled workmen’s villages close to the site of the project for which they were conscripted. To the Israelites, such a village may have appeared to be a gigantic ‘slave house.’” (Etz Hayim, 391)

¹⁷ “This is the Torah’s first instance of this famous phrase, a depiction of Egypt that foreshadows the Decalogue (20:2).” (TWC, 370)

¹⁸ This section is a similar repetition of Ex. 12:14-20 focusing on the festival of “Unleavened Bread.” “‘unleavened stuff’ This rendering of חמץ is preferable to ‘unleavened bread’ used by some translations because the term probably includes grain-based foods other than bread, as later Jewish tradition would extravagantly stipulate in its Passover regulations.” (Alter, 383)

¹⁹ “Aviv was the spring month later called Nisan.” (RJ Torah, 415) “‘Aviv’ means ‘new ears of grain;’ this month begins when immature ears of grain have begun to grow on the stalks.” (JSB, 132) “The alternative translation ‘on the new moon of Abib’ is based on the preceding phrase ‘on this day,’ which seems to refer to a specific date (see also Deut. 16:1). If that is the meaning, this may be a variant tradition that the exodus occurred, and was celebrated, on the first day of the month rather than the fourteenth and fifteenth.” (JSB, 132)

5 So when Adonai²⁰ brings you in to the land — of the Canaanites²¹, the Hitites, the Emorites, the Hivites, the Yebusites²² — which [God] swore to your fathers²³ to give to you, a land flowing with milk and honey, serve God²⁴ [with] this service²⁵ in this month.
 6 For seven days²⁶, eat matzah²⁷; and, on the seventh day²⁸, [there will be] a festival-gathering²⁹ for Adonai.
 7 Matzah should be eaten throughout the seven days, and no leavened-thing should be seen belonging to you³⁰, and no leavening³¹ of yours should be seen in your borders³².
 8 And you should tell your children³³ on this day: ‘For the sake of what Adonai did for me when I went out from Mitzrayim.’³⁴

²⁰ Some add "אלהך"

²¹ Although a bit more awkward, this style of names fits in with the philosophy of this translation (transliteration of names and places). Others “Canaanites.” While cleaner, it takes something away from the Hebrew nature of their names.

²² Samaritan adds, according to Septuagint, "and the Perezites and the Girgashites"

²³ Adonai swore the land to the fathers. Elsewhere, “ancestors” is more appropriate.

²⁴ Others “observe.” The attempt in this translation is to maintain the consistent root עבדה-העבדה.

²⁵ i.e., the Passover ritual. "Hebrew 'עבדה' is a word play on 'bondage' in verse 3. Service of God in freedom in Israel's own land is contrasted with the service to the Pharaoh in Egyptian slavery." (JPS Commentary, 66)

²⁶ Samaritan and Septuagint say, "Six."

²⁷ "Another aid to memory, this one a positive action: the eating of matzah." (Etz Hayim, 392)

²⁸ It is curious that unlike the previous chapter which refers to a festival on the first day, there is only a reference to a festival on the seventh day. "By tradition it was on the seventh day of the Exodus that the pursuing Egyptians drowned in the Sea of Reeds. The emphasis here - before the Exodus - on the special character of the seventh day disengages it from any celebration of Egypt's defeat." (JPS Commentary, 66)

²⁹ Per BDB. חג in this instance means both a festival and something people would gather for. Post-centralization, חג also included traveling to the Temple.

³⁰ Septuagint says "it will be" and not "it will see."

³¹ Following Alter. Although שמר and שר mean basically the same thing, this translation attempts to minimally differentiate the two through “leaven” and “leavening.”

³² Others “in your territories,” however גבול can more precisely means “border.”

³³ "The word translated 'you shall explain' (והגדת, literally, 'you shall tell') is the source of the Haggadah, the name of the service containing rituals and readings for the Passover night ceremonials."..."If no children are present, adults are obligated to ask the questions and recount the Exodus from Egypt each seder night. It is especially praiseworthy to expound at length on the Exodus through discussion, debate, and additional readings." (Etz Hayim, 392)

³⁴ This should sound familiar. It is how we answer the child who is too young to ask a question in the Passover Haggadah.

9 It will be³⁵ a sign for you on your hand³⁶ and a reminder³⁷ between your eyes³⁸, in order that Adonai's teaching³⁹ will be in your mouth, for with a strong hand, Adonai took you out from Mitzrayim.

10 Thus you should keep this statute⁴⁰ at its established time⁴¹ year⁴² after year.

³⁵ Samaritan says "and they will be," not "and it will be"

³⁶ "Rashi draws attention to the parallel idea of the Song of Songs: 'Set me as a seal upon your heart...upon your arm.' (Song of Songs 8:6)" (Fox, 325)

³⁷ Others "memorial," or "remembrance." Although also accurate, those descriptions tend to carry sad connotations (e.g., the memorial for those killed in the Shoah, a remembrance of those who gave their lives to this country, etc.). A reminder is more neutral. Ideally, this should be a word that carries positive connotations; after all, this is the hallmark of our deliverance which we should remember each day!

³⁸ "Explained by tradition to mean the wearing of t'fillin on arm and hand." (RJ Torah, 416)

³⁹ "This phrase first appears here. It cannot possibly refer to the canonized Torah, but it does presuppose a text that can be memorized and recited." (Etz Hayim, 392)

⁴⁰ Others "This institution," "the eating of unleavened bread." (JSB, 132)

⁴¹ "Because Passover must be celebrated in the spring, the lunar cycle that governs the Jewish calendar had to be adapted to the solar seasons. Therefore, the Jewish calendar adds an extra month before Passover during 7 designated years of a 19-year cycle to ensure that Passover remains a spring holiday, as required in Ex. 13:4 and Deut. 16:1." (Etz Hayim, 392)

⁴² Lit. "year-day" "The rendering follows B-R, which took the expression to denote both 'year to year,' and specifically the holiday." (Fox, 325)

TTT Translation of Pesach Torah Readings

Ex. 12:37-42

12:37-38¹ The family hoofed it² from Ramses towards Sukkot. [There were] about 600,000 troopers— not to mention the tiny-tots, and also the riffraff that tagged along — with flocks and herds, [their] very heavy livestock.

39 They baked discs of matzah [from]³ the unleavened dough which they brought out from Mitzrayim. It wasn't leavened because when they got out of dodge⁴, they couldn't wait, and they didn't have time to get their food together.⁵

40 The Israelites lived in Mitzrayim for 430 years.⁶

41 At the end of the 430 years, on that very day, all of Adonai's army left Mitzrayim.⁷

42 It was a night of being on it⁸ for Adonai so [God] would take them out of Mitzrayim. This night will belong to Adonai, for all Israelites, forever and always.⁹

Ex. 13:3-10

13:3 Moses spoke to the peeps¹⁰: “Remember this day, [this one] when you left Mitzrayim, from the house of slavery. God brought you out from this with a strong hand, so do not eat leaven.”¹¹

4 Today, you head out¹², in the month of Aviv.

5 So when Adonai brings you into the land — of the Canaanites, the Hitites, the Emorites, the Hivites, the Yebusites; [the land] which [God] promised your fathers to give to you, a land flowing with milk and honey — do your duty to God [with] this ritual during this month:

6 Eat matzah for seven days¹³; and throw a holy festival-gathering for Adonai on the seventh day.¹⁴

7 Matzah should be eaten throughout the seven days. Don't have any leavening.¹⁵ Just get rid of it.¹⁶

¹ As these two verses comprise one idea, they are combined here.

² “To travel by foot, to walk.” (UD)

³ Syntax shift for clarity.

⁴ “Leave a bad or dangerous (or both!) situation.” (UD)

⁵ A riff on “get your sh*t together,” meaning “to get everything ready for an event of any magnitude” (UD)

⁶ The syntax of the original used passive voice to indicate distancing. While the rationale for that distancing language is understandable, this rendering states the message more clearly.

⁷ Words cut in this verse for the sake of clarity of English.

⁸ “On top of it; got it under control.” (UD)

⁹ “Lasting eternity” (UD)

¹⁰ “short for people” (UD)

¹¹ Punctuation and syntax shift for clarity.

¹² “to leave; take off; especially when details of departure or destination are suggested more by circumstance than a schedule or itinerary.” (UD)

¹³ Although the word in Hebrew is מצה, the Rabbis tell us that the duty to eat proper matzah is only obligated on the first day. The other days, we are to refrain from unleavened bread, but we are not required to eat matzah. However, for this translation, because it is a familiar term, “unleavened bread” is rendered here more as a transliteration: matzah.”

¹⁴ Syntax shift for clarity.

¹⁵ A more colloquial way of rendering the message.

¹⁶ i.e., “do not own it.”

8 And you should break it down¹⁷ for your children on this day: ‘This is because of what Adonai did for me when I left Mitzrayim.’¹⁸

9 Let it be a sign on your hand and a reminder between your eyes, so that Adonai’s teaching will be in your mouth, because, with a strong hand, Adonai took you out from Mitzrayim.

10 This is how you should keep these instructions at the same time, year after year.

¹⁷ “To explain at length, clearly, and indisputably.” (UD)

¹⁸ Notice how our tradition places this in the Haggadah, something we read on the first and second days of Pesach, yet, the Torah tells us to teach this to our children on the seventh day. It seems odd that we should not tell our children why we are engaging in this prohibition of leavening until the festival day at the end of the holiday.

Shavuot Torah Readings (Ex. 19:1-8; 20:1-14)

Faithful Translation of Shavuot Torah Readings

Ex. 19:1-8

19:1 On the third month after the Israelites went out from the land of Mitzrayim¹, on that day², they entered the Sinai wilderness³.

2 Having set out from Refidim, they entered the Sinai wilderness⁴ and encamped⁵ in the wilderness. There, Israel encamped in front of the mountain.

3 Then Moshe went up to God⁶. Adonai called to him from the mountain:⁷ “Here is how⁸ you should speak to the House of Ya’akov⁹ and declare to the Israelites¹⁰:

4 ‘You have seen what I did against the Egyptians¹¹; I lifted you on eagle’s¹² wings and brought you to Me.

¹ I.e., the month of Sivan.

² "The Hebrew here literally means 'on this day,' as if to suggest that on any day when a Jew accepts the obligations of the Torah, it is as if he or she were there that day, standing at Sinai and hearing the voice of God. Rashi takes the words to mean the every time a Jew reads the Torah, it should be as if for the first time. Heschel distinguishes between the giving of the Torah, which was a one-time event in the Sinai wilderness, and the acceptance of the Torah as an authoritative voice in our lives, which can take place at any time. When a person of non-Jewish origin joins the Jewish people and accepts the Torah, it is as if he or she personally had been standing at Sinai." (Etz Hayim, 436)

³ Notice where this is happening. This is the same wilderness of Sinai where "Moses' mission had begun (in Ex. 3:1). The arrival there heralds the fulfillment of God's promise to Moses (Ex. 3:12)." (JSB, 145)

⁴ Wilderness is a liminal space - it is place for change

⁵ "Until now, all the verbs referring to Israel have been plural. Here, for the first time, the Hebrew verb for 'encamped' is singular, suggesting that only when they transcended their differences and quarrels to become one people were they fit to receive the Torah (Rashi)." (Etz Hayim, 437)

⁶ "The image conveyed is that God has descended to or dwells in the lofty, inaccessible heights of this 'mountain of God.' (3:1)" (RJ Torah, 473) "While 'going up to God' is an intriguing image, the Septuagint text is more probably correct. It reads, 'up to the mountain of God,' which fits better with the words that follow." (Friedman, 231)

⁷ לֵאמֹר, "saying" is redundant. Its function is noted in the colon and quotation marks.

⁸ Others, "thus."

⁹ "The first time this poetic synonym for Israel is used in the Bible. The Rabbis identified 'house of Jacob' with the women and 'children of Israel' with the men." (RJ Torah, 473)

¹⁰ "The covenant proposed here goes beyond the one established with Israel's ancestors (Gen. 15 and 17). Here, God imposes specific, detailed obligations and, in return, promises Israel an especially close relationship with God. This covenant, along with the earlier one, became the basis on which Judaism defined its relationship with God." (JSB, 145)

¹¹ Seen as historical prologue - "The premise of the covenant is Israel's national experience. From biblical times on, Jewish belief has been based primarily on Jewish historical experience rather than speculative thought." (JSB, 145-6)

¹² נֶשֶׁךְ is king of all birds, can fly for long distances, fast, carries its young on its back. "Most commonly in Western culture, be it ancient Rome, Imperial Europe, the United States, or even Nazi Germany, the eagle is the symbol of strength, independence, and loftiness. Yet here in the Bible it functions primarily as a symbol of God's loving protection -- see the nurturing eagle image in Deut. 32:11." (Fox, 365)

5 So now, if you surely heed¹³ my voice and keep My covenant¹⁴, then you will be, to Me, a valued, particular treasure¹⁵ among all the peoples. Just as all the land is Mine,¹⁶
 6 so too you will be, to Me, a kingdom of priests¹⁷, [that is to say] a holy nation¹⁸. These are the words which you should speak to the Israelites.”
 7 Then Moses came and called to the elders of the people¹⁹ and placed before them all of these words²⁰ which Adonai commanded him²¹.
 8 Then all the people responded together and said, “Everything that Adonai has spoken we will do²².” So Moses brought back the people’s words to Adonai²³.

Ex. 20:1-14

20:1 God said all of these words²⁴:

¹³ Infinitive of emphasis. Friedman suggests using exclamation marks or italics.

¹⁴ “This is the first mention of the covenant in the Exodus narrative. A new dimension is now introduced into the relationship between God and Israel.” (JPS Commentary, 103) Perhaps we can think of the Israelites as having a Jewish identity before leaving Egypt, but now that they are about to receive revelation, and responsibilities, they are exposed to the Covenant.

¹⁵ Per BDB. Although this translation adds words, they are necessary to convey the added meaning beyond merely a “possession,” or “treasure.” “Their treasured status is based on behavior, not necessarily family lineage. The reason they are chosen was stated “to their ancestor Abraham: to be a blessing to all the families of the earth.” (Friedman, 232) “Normally refers to a private accumulation of valuable property (Ecc. 2:8). While this universal deity could potentially claim possession of any nation on earth, God chooses Israel as a personal treasure. The notion of Israel’s exclusive relationship with God, found here and in the subsequent verse, is problematic for many modern readers. However, in the polytheistic world of the ancient Near East, it was assumed that a deity would have a special connection to a single people.” (TWC, 413)

¹⁶ This is a curious shift, as the Creation story says quite clearly that humans have dominion over the land.

¹⁷ “Ministering to the rest of humanity. This represented a unique idea: all the people and not merely a selected segment would have a special religious task.” (RJ Torah, 474)

¹⁸ “Holiness requires a degree of separation, apartness. The word *goy* is a generic term here, and not referring to Gentiles, as in later parlance.” (RJ Torah, 474) “Striving for holiness as a people is to be the hallmark of Israel’s existence.” (Etz Hayim, 437)

¹⁹ A fragment from the Cairo Geniza says “Yisrael” instead of “the people”

²⁰ “Words (*devarim*) are imagined in biblical Hebrew to be virtually palpable entities, which can be put before people, which have powerful consequences from the moment they are spoken.” (Alter, 424)

²¹ “So far there has been no direct communication between God and Israel. Moses prepares the people for the theophany.” (RJ Torah, 474)

²² “The first of three affirmations of Israel’s acceptance of the Covenant. (again in Ex. 24:3 and 24:7)” (Etz Hayim, 438) “Although they have not yet heard the terms of the covenant, the people willingly and unanimously accept God’s proposal and promise to obey God, as they reconfirm twice in Ex. 24:3, 7.” (JSB, 146)

²³ “Presumably, God would have had no trouble hearing what the people said without Moses’s help. This formulation, however, stresses Moses’s crucial role as intermediary in this episode: God is up on the mountain, the people are down below, and Moses shuttles up and down between the two. Herein lies a principal justification for the recurrence of “go up” and “come down” as thematic keywords, a feature of the chapter noted by Everett Fox.” (Alter, 424)

²⁴ It is customary to stand when the Ten Commandments are read in public. “An expression that is broader than ‘commandments’ (e.g., *mishpatim*, *mitzvot*, or *chukim*). The number ten is applied to these words in Ex. 34:28, Deut. 4:13 and 10:4...the current Hebrew expression for Ten Commandments is first found in the Talmud (Ber. 12a).” (RJ Torah, 477)

2 “I²⁵ am Adonai, your²⁶ God²⁷, that brought you out of the land of Mitzrayim, from the house of slavery²⁸.

3 Do not²⁹ have other gods³⁰ in My presence³¹.

4 Do not make for yourself a statue, or any other likeness of what is in the heavens above or what is on the land below or what is in the waters under the earth.³²

²⁵ The word for "I" here, anochi, is different than the more frequent, ani. "The Rabbis intuitively took it to be of possible Egyptian derivation, speculating that God addressed them, to begin with, in a language they knew well." (RJ Torah, 477) Indeed, shouldn't Torah be addressed to its learners in a language they know well?!

²⁶ Singular, individual language. "Even though the whole people are addressed, the syntactical focus appears to be on each individual." (RJ Torah, 477)

²⁷ Seifer HaMitzvot 1 teaches "the first mitzvah is that [we] believe in God's existence, that there is a cause and motive force behind all that exists." (Etz Hayim, 442) In some ways, this echoes the Twelve Step program, where the second step acknowledges a belief in "a Power greater than ourselves." It does not identify the characteristics of that Power, just merely that there is something bigger than the self. Similarly, Jewish ideas of God are extremely varied, yet there is a consistent belief in one God, however we understand God. As Rabbi Mark Borovitz of Beit T'shuvah, a residential treatment center and Jewish congregation in Los Angeles, teaches the first commandment: "There is a God. It's not me, thank God!"

²⁸ "Literally, 'house of slaves.' This designation for Egypt, frequent in Deuteronomy, may derive from the Egyptian practice of settling the labor gangs in walled workmen's villages close to the site of the project for which they were conscripted. To the Israelites, such a village may have appeared to be a gigantic 'slave house.'" (Etz Hayim, 391) Notice here that God's claim to Israel's allegiance is based on the role of liberator, and not creator, of Israel.

²⁹ This formulation follows Fox. Note that these commands are in the second-person singular, meaning that the commandments are addressed to each person individually.

³⁰ "This is not a theological statement denying the existence of other gods (such as Deut. 4:35-39) but a behavioral injunction ruling out worship of both beings and objects known as gods." (JSB, 148) "In Genesis, other gods are not prohibited, leading to the supposition that monotheism's beginnings are to be connected with Moses. Ibn Ezra warns that this commandment must not be transgressed even in one's thought." (RJ Torah, 477) "The Midrash avoids the problem by interpreting 'You shall have none of those [whom others call] gods before Me.'" (RJ Torah, 490)

³¹ "The point is that everywhere is before God's face, so the commandment means that one simply cannot have any other gods." (Friedman, 236)

³² This does not imply that one cannot create art of things that exist; it merely prohibits those depictions as being embodiments of divinity. "With the intent to adore it as a real or surrogate god. There is no prohibition here of the plastic arts as such...However, the strict attention given to the commandment by Jews preclude the type of religious art developed by the Christian church and for a long time restricted other forms of sculpture." (RJ Torah, 477)

5 Do not bow³³ to them and you are not to serve them, for I am Adonai, your God, a jealous³⁴ God, paying attention³⁵ to the iniquity of fathers upon sons, upon the third [generation] and upon the fourth³⁶ of those³⁷ that hate Me³⁸,
 6 But showing kindness³⁹ to the thousandth generation for those that love Me⁴⁰ and keep My mitzvot.
 7 Do not take up⁴¹ the name of Adonai, your God, for naught⁴², for Adonai will not let go unpunished⁴³ the one who takes up God's name for naught.
 8 Remember⁴⁴ the Shabbat day⁴⁵ to set it apart as sacred⁴⁶.
 9 Six days, you will serve and do all your work⁴⁷,

³³ "A biblical idiom for religious practice." (RJ Torah, 477)

³⁴ "An English parallel would be 'seeing red.'" (RJ Torah, 478) or "livid." "God's reaction reflects His emotional tie with Israel, described metaphorically by the prophets as a marital bond. Hence, worship of other gods is as repugnant as adultery and God's response, like that of an aggrieved husband, is jealousy (see k-n-' in Prov. 6:34). In the biblical view, this is an aspect of His passionate involvement with human beings and no more a character flaw than is human jealousy over marital infidelity." (JSB, 149)

³⁵ "Punishing the offense. פקד also means 'remembering' - the necessary basis for ethical consequences." (RJ Torah, 478)

³⁶ "Idiomatic for 'a long time.'" (RJ Torah, 478)

³⁷ "Society is collectively responsible for its actions, and the individual is accountable for behavior that affects the life of the community." (Etz Hayim, 444) "While God may practice trans-generational reward and punishment, Israelite courts are forbidden to do so (per Deut. 24:16)." (TWC, 417)

³⁸ "A polytheistic Israelite would not literally reject the Lord but would worship Him together with other gods or, at worst, ignore Him, but since He demands total fidelity, worshiping another god alongside Him is tantamount to rejection." (JSB, 149) The translation here sets up a parallel in the next verse, those that "love Me."

³⁹ "Depending on the context, [חסד] can express conduct conditioned by intimate relationship, covenantal obligation, or even undeserved magnanimity. The Decalogue and other texts specify חסד as one of God's supreme attributes." (JPS Commentary, 80)

⁴⁰ "The only time in the first four books of the Torah where the love of God is stressed. In Deuteronomy, love of God is an important aspect of Israel's duties." (RJ Torah, 478) "In biblical Hebrew, 'love' includes the loyalty of allies." (JSB, 149)

⁴¹ "Literally, 'to take up,' is here an ellipsis for 'to take upon the lips,' that is 'to utter' the divine name." (JPS Commentary, 111)

⁴² Others, "vanity," "emptiness." "Use for a false purpose. The traditional translation, 'take in vain,' limits its scope unnecessarily." (Fox, 371)

⁴³ Per Prov. 6:29.

⁴⁴ Septuagint text, "שמו" "The Sages deduce from this verse the requirement to say Kiddish both Friday evening and during the day on Saturday as a way of marking and thus remembering the Shabbat (BT Pes. 108a)." (Etz Hayim, 445)

⁴⁵ "The Sabbath is understood to be already known to and practiced by the people. Tradition dates the institution of its observance from the first appearance of the manna (Ex. 16:30) but emphasizes that the idea of the Sabbath was built into creation itself (Gen. 2:1-3)." (RJ Torah, 478)

⁴⁶ "To set it apart. In Jewish tradition the expression לקדש implies the duty to sanctify it with a benediction." (RJ Torah, 478)

⁴⁷ "The Rabbis interpreted this as a positive command: by its labor, humankind would emulate God's creative process in both work and rest." (RJ Torah, 478) "Certain activity is as much a religious duty as resting on Shabbat. We are enjoined to labor over this world, to change it and to improve it. Idleness is a waste of the talents with which

10 But the seventh day⁴⁸ is Shabbat for Adonai, your God: You⁴⁹ are not to do any work⁵⁰ — [not] you, nor your son nor your daughter, your slave nor your handmaid⁵¹ nor your beast nor your stranger⁵² that is in your gates —

11 for in six days Adonai made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything within them⁵³, and [God] rested on the seventh day. Therefore, Adonai blessed the Shabbat day and set it apart as sacred.

12 Honor your father and your mother⁵⁴ in order that your days may be prolonged on the soil that Adonai, your God, is giving you⁵⁵.

13 Do not murder⁵⁶. Do not commit adultery⁵⁷. Do not steal⁵⁸. Do not respond⁵⁹ as a false witness against your fellow⁶⁰.

God has blessed us. Work, however, too often leads to economic competitiveness in which we see other people as rivals, obstacles to our success." (Etz Hayim, 445)

⁴⁸ In pieces of some manuscripts, "and on the day"

⁴⁹ I.e., everyone.

⁵⁰ "Jewish tradition defined this in detail, developing a catalog of thirty-nine main types of prohibited labor. They include the main agricultural and domestic activities that qualify as work, and from these categories later halachic rules were developed." (RJ Torah, 478) "The definition of prohibited labor, which limits the commandment explicitly to Creation (Gen. 2:2), is not given here." (Etz Hayim, 446) "Of course, all Sabbath prohibitions are suspended when human life is deemed to be in danger." (JPS Commentary, 112)

⁵¹ The Hebrew comes from length of hand/arm, as the person is the extension of the hand.

⁵² "The Torah is particularly sensitive to their feelings and solicitous of their needs and welfare." (JPS Commentary, 113)

⁵³ Some suggest "in it," implying that God only created what was in the sea. As the Creation narrative tells us, this is not the case. Unlike the version here, which justifies Shabbat as a way to emulate God's resting from the work of creation, in Deut. 5:15, Shabbat is fulfilling a command because God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

⁵⁴ "The command, directed equally to son and daughter irrespective of age, holds for both parents." (Etz Hayim, 446)

⁵⁵ The syntax of this sentence could also be flipped for clarity (i.e., "in order that your days on the land that Adonai, your God, has given you may be prolonged.") This is the sole positive commandment (i.e., no "no" or "do not"). It also is the only commandment that offers a reward.

⁵⁶ The word is "murder," not merely "kill." "[This] generally refers to unauthorized homicide, perhaps one that called forth blood vengeance." (RJ Torah, 479)

⁵⁷ Fox attempts to "tailor [the English] to fit the Hebrew rhythm of the last five 'commandments,' all of which begin with אֶל and a two-syllable command." He renders this phrase as, "adulter." "Intercourse of a man with a married or betrothed woman, not with an unmarried or unbetrothed woman or a harlot (see Deut. 22:23-28). The prohibition was later widened by both rabbinic and Christian traditions. Adultery is only twice more noted in the Torah (Lev. 20:10 and Deut. 5:17), but often in the rest of the Bible." (RJ Torah, 479)

⁵⁸ "Steal" "People or things." (RJ Torah, 479)

⁵⁹ Per BDB 6030 3a. "The prohibition here refers to judicial proceedings." (Etz Hayim, 448)

⁶⁰ "Idiomatic for 'anyone.' In the Torah, rein sometimes means an Israelite and sometimes any person who dwells nearby. Clearly, the context of the Decalogue demands that the word be understood in its wider sense." (RJ Torah, 479)

14 Do not abscond with⁶¹ your fellow's house, do not improperly desire your fellow's wife⁶² nor his slave nor his handmaid nor his ox nor his donkey nor anything which is your fellow's⁶³.

⁶¹ "Desire improperly, with the hope to dispossess one's neighbor...a different term is used in Deut. 5:18." (RJ Torah, 479) "This seems like an extra burden, but it comes as a help. It is saying: Do you want some help to avoid breaking the other commandments? Very well, don't covet!" (Friedman, 239) "The Hebrew verb sometimes refers to having designs on a desired object, perhaps even to scheming or maneuvering to acquire it. Hence, the sense could be 'do not scheme to acquire...'" (JSB, 151) "The meaning of this commandment has been a matter of dispute. Does it refer to a private mental state or only to acts directed toward acquiring the coveted object?" (Etz Hayim, 448)

⁶² "In a society in which polygamy but not polyandry is socially acceptable, the definition of adultery is sexual intercourse by mutual consent between a married woman and a man who is not her lawful husband. Such was the case throughout the ancient Near East." (JPS Commentary, 114)

⁶³ "This verse prohibits longing only for anything we cannot obtain honestly and legally (BT BM 5b)." (Etz Hayim, 448)

TTT Translation of Shavuot Torah Readings

Ex. 19:1-8

19:1-2 The Israelites entered the Sinai wilderness three months to the day after they left Mitzrayim.¹ From Refidim, they rolled up² to the Sinai wilderness and set up camp. Israel camped out there in front of the mountain.

3-6 Then Moshe went up to God. Adonai called to him from the mountain: “Here’s how you should speak to the House of Ya’akov and shout from the rooftops³ to the Israelites: ‘You saw⁴ what I did to the Egyptians; I lifted you on eagle’s wings and brought you to Me. So now, if you will really listen to my voice and click “yes” to My partnership⁵ agreement⁶, you will be My valued, particular treasure among all the basic⁷ peoples. Just like the land is Mine, so too will you be: A kingdom of priests, [that is to say] a holy nation.’ This is what you should say to the Israelites.”

7-8 Moses came back, gave the elders of Israel⁸ the scoop, and presented for them all these words which Adonai commanded him. Then everyone hollered back⁹, “Everything God says we will do!” Then Moses brought back the people’s answer¹⁰ to Adonai.

Ex. 20:1-14

20:1 God said all these words:

2 “I am Adonai, your God, who brought you out of Mitzrayim, from the house of slavery.¹¹

3 Do not have other gods.¹²

4-6 Do not make a statue [representing divinity¹³], nor any other artistic representation of [divinity] in the heavens above, [divinity] on land, or [divinity] in the waters below. Do not bow to them and don’t serve them because I am Adonai, your God, and I’m a jealous God. I punish the children for their parent’s sins, even to the third and fourth generations of those who are my

¹ Syntax shifted for clarity.

² “to arrive” (UD)

³ To announce publicly.

⁴ Lit. “have seen”

⁵ As the story of Creation teaches us, we are God’s partners; our relationship with God is less contractual and more of a partnership.

⁶ A modern way of making an agreement. “signing on” could also be another alternative.

⁷ “Used to describe someone devoid of defining characteristics that might make a person interesting, extraordinary, or just simply worth devoting time or attention to.” (UD) The Israelites are special because they are a holy nation, something above and beyond the other nations.

⁸ Following the Cairo Geniza fragment. Traditional text says “the people.”

⁹ “To respond to a person” (UD)

¹⁰ Lit. “words”

¹¹ Although this expression is not particularly modern, it does resonate as a Jewish expression.

¹² Lit., the text adds “in My Presence.” However, as Friedman notes, God’s presence is everywhere. Therefore, this is somewhat redundant.

¹³ Implied, but not stated outright. See notes in faithful translations for a fuller explanation.

haters. But for a thousand generations I show kindness for those that love Me and keep my mitzvot.¹⁴

7 Do not misuse the name of Adonai, your God. Adonai will not put up with someone who misuses God's name.

8-11 Remember Shabbat to set it apart as holy. Six days, serve and get your work done, but the seventh day is Shabbat for Adonai, your God. Do not do any work — [not] you, nor your son nor your daughter, your slave nor your handmaid nor your animals nor your stranger in your gates — because Adonai made the heavens and the land and the sea and everything in them in six days, and [God] rested on the seventh day. For that reason, Adonai blessed Shabbat and set it apart as holy.

12 Honor your parents¹⁵ so that you will live a long time on the land that Adonai, your God, is giving you.

13 Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not lie about anyone in court.¹⁶

14 Do not even think about making off with your fellow's house, your fellow's wife or his slave or his handmaid or his ox or his donkey or anything else that's his.¹⁷

¹⁴ Syntax shifted for clarity.

¹⁵ This rendering allows for the meaning while also recognizing non-binary parental systems.

¹⁶ Although this could mean something more general (i.e., "don't lie"), the language refers to judicial proceedings.

¹⁷ Lit., "your fellow's" but the implication is "not yours."