

THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

COMMENTARY AND READINGS IN HEBREW
AND ENGLISH. READ BY PROF. THEODOR H. GASTER

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THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

Commentary and Readings by

THEODOR GASTER

HEBREW is one of the oldest languages in the world. But it is in no sense a dead language.

Hebrew is the language of the Old Testament -- one of the primary sources of Western civilization and the bedrock upon which the United States were founded.

Moreover, after the close of the Bible age, Jews continued to use Hebrew in the writing of philosophical, scientific and religious works and of poetry and belles lettres. Hebrew is therefore also the key to a rich treasury of literature and thought, most of which has never been translated.

Lastly, Hebrew is the national tongue of the nascent and exciting State of Israel.

Although much of the Hebraic heritage has already entered our daily lives, there is much else that has not yet done so. An acquaintance with Hebrew therefore serves not only to deepen understanding of our cultural tradition but also to open up a whole world of new concepts and insights.

THIS RECORDING tells the story of Hebrew in simple, non-technical terms.

1. It describes how the language developed from the speech of nomadic tribes some four thousand years ago into the vernacular of modern Tel Aviv.
2. It sketches the various influences that have gone to the making of the Hebrew vocabulary and sets forth clearly the basic structure of the language and the nature of the special "mentality" which underlies it.
3. It illustrates, by selected recitations, the different ways in which Hebrew is pronounced throughout the world.
4. It suggests an ingenious "short-cut" to a mastery of the language.

KADDISH

יְתַגְדָּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא. בְּעַלְמָא דְרַבְרָא
כְּרַעוּתָהּ. וְיִמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתָהּ. בְּחַיִּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן
וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל. בְּעַגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב.
וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

Sephardic Pronunciation:

Yitggāddāl v^eyitkaddāsh shēmēh rābbāh, b^e 'ālmāh dee-b^erā
chir'ootēh, v^eyāmleech mālchootēh, b^ehāyyêchôn ū-b^ecyômêchôn
ū-b^ehāyyê d^echōl bêt Yisra'el, bā-āgālāh ū-bizmān kāreeb,
v^e-imroo Āmēn.

Ashkenazic Pronunciation:

Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'meh rabbo, b'olmo
deevro chiruseh, v'yamlich malchuseh, b'chaye-
chon uvyomechon, uv'chayey d'chol beys yis-
roel, ba-agolo uvizman koreev, v'imru omen.

(Throughout these transliterations, a suspended letter is to be pronounced
as a half-vowel, somewhat slurred. ch is to be pronounced as in Scottish
loch, and h indicates a slightly more guttural sound.)

Translation:

MAGNIFIED and hallowed be God's great name

in the world which He created according to His will.

May He establish His kingdom

in your lifetime and in your days,

and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel,

speedily and soon,

And say ye, AMEN.

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- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. e'lôheem nitsab bâ-' ^a dāth El
b ^c qer ^{cb} e'lôheem yishpôt | 1. אֱלֹהִים נִצַּב בְּעֵדֹתֶיךָ
בְּקִרְבֵי אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט: |
| 2. 'ād māthai tishp e'tū āv ^c l
ū-r ^c nê r ^c shā' eem tiss ^c ū | 2. אֲדַמַּתִּי תִשְׁפֹּטוּ-אֶיךָ
וּפְנֵי רִשְׁעִים תִּשְׁאַוּ: [כז] |
| 3. shiftū jāl v ^c yāthôm
'ônee vā-rāsh hātsdeeqū | 3. שִׁפְטוּ-יְדֹל וְיָתוּם
אֲנִי וְרֵשׁ הַצְּדִיקוּ: |
| 4. pālletū dāl v ^c -ēbyôn
miyyā! r ^c shā' eem hātseelū | 4. פִּלְטוּ-יְדֹל וְאֶבְיֹן
מִיַּד רִשְׁעִים הַצְּלִינִי: |
| 5. lô yād' eū v ^c -lô' yābeenū
bā-h ^a shēchāh yithī'allā' hū
yimmotū kōl mōsūc ārēts | 5. לֹא יָדְעוּ וְלֹא יָבִינוּ
בְּחִשְׁכָּה יִתְהַלְּכוּ
יָמוּטוּ כָּל-מוֹסְדֵי אֶרֶץ: |
| 6. 'anee āmartee e'lôheem ättēm
u-b ^c nê'elyôn küll ^c chēm | 6. אֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי אֱלֹהִים אַתֶּם
וּבְנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן כְּלִכְּמִ: |

7. āchēn k^e -ādām t^e mūthūn אָכְנָן כְּאָדָם תְּמִתְחִנּוּן
u-ch^e āhād hāsāreem tippōlū וְכִּי אֶחָד הַשָּׂרִים תִּפְלוּ:
8. Qūmāh e^lōheem shōftāh hāārets קוּמָה אֱלֹהִים שְׂפֹטָה תִּפְטֹחַן
kee āttah tinhāl b^echōl hāggōyeem כִּי-אַתָּה תִּנְחַל בְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם:

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7. Min^arām yānhēnee Bāīāq מִן-אַרְם יִנְחֵנִי בַלַּק
mēl^ech Mōāb mēhār^e rē Qēd^em מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב מִקְרַר־קָדָם
L^echāh ārāh^lee Yā^aqōb לְכָה אֶרְחֶלְיִי יַעֲקֹב
ū-l^echāh zō^amāh Yisrāēl. וְלָכָה יִזְעַמָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל:
8. māh ēqqōb lōⁱ qābbōh Eī מָה אֶקְבֹּל לֹא-קִבֹּל אֵל
ū-māh ēz^om lōⁱ zā^am YHWH. מָה אֶזְעַם לֹא יִזְעַם יְהוָה:
9. kee mērō^{sh} tsūreem ēr^e ennū כִּי-מֵרֹאשׁ צָרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ
ū-migg^ebā^oth āshūrēnnū וּמִגְּבֻצֹת אַשּׁוּרֵנּוּ
hēn^am l^ebādād yishkōn הֵן-עַם לְבַדָּד יִשְׁכֹּן
ū-bāggōyeem lōⁱ vithhāshāb. וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב:
10. mee mānāh^afar Yā^aqōb מִי מְנַה עֲפָר יַעֲקֹב
ū-mee sāfar ēth rōba^a Yisrāēl וּמִי סָפַר אֶת-רֹבַע יִשְׂרָאֵל
tāmōth nāfshee mōth y^eshāreem תָּמֹת נַפְשֵׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָיִם
ū-th^ehee āh^areethee kāmōhū וְתָתִי אֶחְרִיתִי בְּמֹהוּ:

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Samaritan Pronunciation

7. wyísh sha mashálu yyāu mé r
miyyāram yānāni Bāīaq
mālek Máuwab miyyārāri Qēdem
líka ára lí Yáqob
líka zāma Yishráel

8. mā áqqab lā qábbu Él
 mā ēzám lā zámu Shéma
9. ki mirré'osh tsúrem ēré'innu
 umiggābāót áshūrinnu
 en-'am albādad yishkan
 ubēgúwwem lā yetéshshab
10. mī māna 'áfar Yáqob
 umī sáfar mirré' bāt Yisráel
 tēmöt nefshimöt yāshīrem
 utá i' á'ērítí kāmē'u

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Translation:

Balaam, a Syrian seer, is commissioned by Balak, king of Moab, to pronounce a curse upon Israel. But when he sets eyes upon the latter, he finds it impossible to do other than bless it.
 (The translation reproduces the meter of the original.)

7. THOUGH Balak fétch me from Síria,
 Moab's k^{ing} from the Eástland hills,
 Sáying, "Go, curse for me Jácob,
 And go, upon Ísrael cry doom!"
8. Hów can I utter a cúrse
 On what Góð Himsélf has not cúrsed?
 Hów can I ever cry doom
 On what the Lórd has not doomed?
9. For lo, from the péaks I behold him,
 and from the hills espy him --
 A peóple that stánds apárt
 And cannot be clássed 'mid the nátions!
10. Cóuntless as dúst is Jácob,
 Past n^{umber}, like dúst-clouds, is Ísrael!
 Be it míne, when I díe, to díe nóibly,
 But to léave súch íssue as thát!