THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

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

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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

יִנְּצָהּ לְהוֹרָבָה שְׁמְהַ רָבָּה בְַּיְמָה דָּוֵה-בָּרָא

כְּרֵנַתָה. לָוֹדַר הַפְּעַלָּתָה בְּהֵמִיְּבָאָבָא

בְּבֵרוֹ יְדֵמִיְּבָא הַפְּעַלָּתָה בְּהֵמִיְּבָא לָוֹדַר

טְבֵּרָא אֱלֹה.

Sefardic Pronunciation:

Yiiggâddâl vêyitkâddâsh shêmêh rabbâh, bê 'almêh dec-'bêrâ

chit'ootêh, vêyânneeh małch'ootêh, bêhâyyêhchôn û-bâyômechôn

û-b'châyêr a'årêh bêt Yisraël, bê-'ûgalah û-bizmûn kâreex,

vê-imroo Âmôn.
Ashkenazic Pronunciation:

Yisgadal v'lyiskadaš sh'meh rabbo, b'olmo
deevro chirsehe, v'yamlich malchuseh, b'chaye-
chon uyvomeh-hon, uv'chaye y 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.

PSALM 82

1. ešō'èm nītsāb bā-lālah š'èl
hā-šō'èm yishpōt

2. lā-māthul tishp cītū ūvō
tū-rē'ām tēšušām tisā'ū

3. shāfū lāl vō-yāhèm
lōnee vā-rāš hōtsēdēqū

4. pālālētū lāl vō-rēbyōn
miyēsām tēšušēm hōtsēlū

5. lō yābū vō-šō'èm ūyōbenū
bā-hāshēnēh yīthālātāmū
yīmātōtū kōl mōnēl ārēdā

6. sīnee āmärteē ešō'èm ūtēm
u-bō'nērōyōn kātīlēcēm
7. מִן- frags yָחָנְנֵיכם חַיֵּךְ
מַמְּכַּת מֹאָב מֵחַּר פְּרֹה קַּעִדֶּה
לִהָֽעַז אַתְּחַי יָֽעָֽקֹב
עַּיִּ-וֹיֵא מַמְּךָ נַעְּטַי יָֽשָּׂרָאֵל.
8. מָּחַי יָוָֽקֹב לִיֶּ-רָבְּנֵיכֶּה אָי
עַּיּ-מַחֵי כֹּלֵי לִיֶּ-סֵּאֲמֵי יִהוֹוֹ.
9. קַקֶּה מִרְדֹּֽשֶׁה הֵֽעֲרֶנֶם וּרְבִּי
עַי-מַגְּגְבַּֽעֲה יָֽשָׂרְהַהֲנֵמֵי
הַנְּ-זִמַּי בַּעֲבַדֵּי יִשְׁחֵקָן
עַי-בַּגְּגֵי-יֵיֵדֵי וְיָֽתְּחַֽנֵּנֵו
10. מֵּאֶ- מָּנֹךְ לָֽרַבְּנֵי יָֽעָֽקֹב
עַי-מֵּאֶ- סַּֽעַרְּנַֽה יֵֽשָּׂרְאֵל
tֶּמְּטַֽפְּתֵּה תֶּמְּטַֽפְּתֵּה יָשָּׂרְהַהֲנֵמ
עַי-תֵּֽהָֽעַֽ-קְּשֵּֽשַּֽעֲהַֽנֵּה קְּשֵּֽשַּֽעֲהַֽנֵּה

Samaritan Pronunciation

7. w yayınlan-א-שא-חיו מ-יָ-ם מ-ר
miyyāram yānāni Bālaq
mālek Māwab miyyārārī Qēdem
līka šara lī Yaqob
līka zāma Yishrā'el
8. mā ʾqqāb lā qābbu El
mā ʾzām lū zāmu Shīma

9. ki mīrēʾosh tsūrem ērēʾinnu
ūmigūt ʾāshūrīnnu
en-ʾām albādād yishkan
ubēgūwwem lā yēṣāshāb

10. mī mānaʾšaf Yāqob
ūmī sāfār mīrēʾ bāt Yisrāʾēl
tēmōt nefshīmōt yāshērām
utā lʾēʾrīlī kāmēʾu

NUMBERS 23: 7-10
Translation:
Balaam, a Syrian seer, is commissioned by Balaal, 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 Balaal fetched me from Syria,
Moab's king from the Eastland hills,
Saying, "Go, curse for me Jacob,
And go, upon Israel cry doom!"

8. How can I utter a curse
On what God Himself has not cursed?
How can I ever cry doom
On what the Lord has not doomed?

9. For lo, from the peaks I behold him,
And from the hills esp'y him.
A people that stands apart
And cannot be classed 'mid the nations!

10. Countless as dust is Jacob,
Past number, like dust-clouds, is Israel!
Be it mine, when I die, to die nobly,
But to leave such issue as that!