

PORTION OF THE WEEK

NEHEMIA POLEN

Miketz, Genesis, 41:1-44:17

Translating the messages of an open heart and soul

"They did not know that Joseph understood, for the interpreter was between them" (Genesis 42:23).

We harbor a profound ambivalence about translators and interpreters. "The translator is a traitor," so the old proverb has it.

Reading poetry in translation is like attempting to embrace a loved one through a glass wall. Voltaire claimed that poetry could not be translated at all: Can you translate music? Historians tell us that more than one war began as a result of the mistranslation of a diplomatic message.

Jews share this ambivalence. We revere the Aramaic Bible translation, Targum Onkelos, as sacred writ, yet the rabbis had little sympathy for the Greek translation known as the Septuagint, despite the divine inspiration that, the Talmud states, assisted in its composition.

Massekhet Soferim (1:7) states that the day the Torah was translated into Greek was as tragic for Jews as the day the Golden Calf was made.

According to Rabbi Judah bar Ilai (Kiddushin 49a), "He who translates a biblical verse literally is a liar, while he who adds thereto is a blasphemer and a libeler."

At first glance, our Torah reading tends to reinforce our mistrust of translators. For the interpreter here (who, according to the Midrash, was none other than Joseph's own son Manasseh) was in collusion with Joseph, helping to perpetrate a rather cruel ruse upon the brothers, making them believe that a tyrannical and capricious despot was about to deprive them of liberty.

Yet a deeper appreciation of the dynamics of our narrative suggests a far more benign role for the translator. For it is just this moment of regret and remorse that is the turning point of the story:

"They said to one another, 'Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us'" (Genesis 42:41).

This moment of deep inner scrutiny and turning is facilitated precisely by the brothers' belief that they are alone with their thoughts: The viceroy is a stranger, a foreigner who does not know their language, so they feel free to disclose their innermost feelings to each other. The interpreter stood between them, serving overtly as a barrier to communication but covertly as its catalyst.

And it is not only the brothers who reveal their regrets and their essential capacity for healing and love. Joseph, too, "turned away from them and wept."

Two more times would Joseph weep — once when he sees Benjamin, and once at the climactic resolution, when Judah offers to substitute his own life for that of Benjamin, effectively reversing his initial role in Joseph's sale.

Judah would then expose himself in complete vulnerability, eliciting a corresponding self-exposure on the part of Joseph, enabling the brothers to reunite.

At the reconciliation, Joseph says to them, "You can see for yourselves . . . that I am speaking to you directly" (45:12). The goal of all human relationship is direct, unmediated communication, a clear opening up of the heart and soul. But the truth is that such moments of redemptive clarity are rare indeed.

In the messianic era, we will all be granted "a pure language . . . to serve Him with one consent" (Zephaniah 3:9). But until that time, we will always need translators and interpreters, to help disclose our inner selves to others — indeed, to explain the various and conflicting parts of ourselves to ourselves.

One day, we will all begin to weep, as did Joseph and his brothers, for what was left unsaid, for what was misunderstood, for what we dared not reveal, even in the chambers of our own hearts.

And that day of directness, clarity, and truth will be brought about in part because, in this as-yet-unredeemed world, the translator stands between us.

Nehemia Polen is the religious leader of Congregation Tiferet Israel in Everett, Mass., and assistant professor of Jewish thought at Boston's Hebrew College. He is translating the works of the Chasidic master Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapiro. ©National Havurah Committee, 270 W. 89th St., New York, N.Y. 10024; (212) 496-0055.

Timetable for Taba accord is reached

JERUSALEM (JPFS) — Israel and Egypt have agreed on a timetable for implementing the Taba arbitration award, sources in Jerusalem said recently. The agreement, proposed by the United States and reached 24 hours before the expiration of an Egyptian deadline, postpones for the second time the deadline for setting a date for the implementation of the Taba award.

According to the agreement, Israel and Egypt will mark within 60 days the 14 border pillars located by the arbitration panel. The two countries also agreed to negotiate within 60 days the delineation of the border between the southernmost pillar and the sea, and the arrangements that will be in force in Taba after the expected Israeli withdrawal.

NCCJ to honor Gray with annual award

The National Conference of Christians and Jews will present its annual Brotherhood Award to U.S.

Rep. William H. Gray III, D-Phila., at a dinner Tuesday at the Wyndham Franklin Plaza Hotel. Frederick H. Helderling, chairman of Philadelphia National Bank and chairman of the

event, will present the award to Gray.

The Brotherhood Award is given to an outstanding member of the community for setting an example of leadership and promoting intergroup harmony. Gray was recently elected chairman of the House Democratic Caucus.

NOTES

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scheduled for Sunday.

Oxford Circle Jewish Community Centre: The Women's Council will sponsor a Shabbat dinner tonight, at 6. December birthdays and anniversaries will be celebrated during Women's Council Shabbat services after the dinner. Cantor Katchen will entertain at a Men's Club breakfast meeting Sunday, 9:15 a.m. The PTA will sponsor a Chanukah party for religious-school students Sunday, 10 a.m. Billy Wilson of the Peter Scott Ruben Orchestras will provide music for the Women's Council's New Year's Eve dance Saturday, Dec. 31, at 9 p.m.

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Congregation: Lawyer Daniel Cohen, former president of Congregation Mikveh Israel, will discuss "The Sephardim" at an adult-education breakfast program Sunday, 10 a.m.

Rodeph Shalom: Students from the Metropolitan and Suburban religious schools will participate in family Chanukah and Shabbat services tonight, at 6:30, at Suburban. A family dinner and party are slated after services, during which December birthdays and anniversaries will be celebrated. Shabbat services at Metropolitan are set for tonight, at 8:30, and tomorrow, 10:45 a.m. Norman L. Kleblatt, curator of collections at the Jewish Museum in New York, will be the guest speaker at an exhibit of Jewish folk art, "Naive Visions, Jewish American Artists," Sunday, 4 p.m., at the Museum of Judaica, at Metropolitan. The Mature Adults Group will meet Wednesday, 11 a.m., at Metropolitan.

Shaare Shamayim: Students in the religious school's *alef* class will be consecrated during Shabbat services tonight, at 8:30. The Sisterhood will sponsor a bus trip Thursday to see "Les Miserables" at the Forrest Theatre.

Shaare Tzedek at the Philadelphia Geriatric Center: Chanukah candlelighting and Shabbat services are scheduled for tonight, at 4:15. Sandra Greenspan will sponsor an Oneg Shabbat after services in honor of the birthday of her mother, Betty Saltzman. Chanukah candlelighting is slated Sunday, 4:15 p.m. Carol Kasser, a rabbinic intern at PGC, will teach a Jewish studies course, "Bible and Myth," Thursday, 2 p.m., at the York House North.

Temple Emanu-El, Willingboro: New members will be welcomed during Shabbat services tonight, at 8:30.

Temple Israel of Upper Darby: Cantor Friedrich will conduct a Shabbat seminar, "Ritual of Shabbat and Holiday Services," at Shabbat services tomorrow, 9:30 a.m. Officers will be elected at the congregation's annual meeting Sunday, 9:30 a.m.

Temple Shalom: The congregation will host the youth of the Johnson Memorial United Methodist Church at Shabbat services tonight, at 8:30. The congregation's annual Chanukah celebration is set for tomorrow, 7 p.m. Rabbi Chazin will emcee a "Jewish Jeopardy" contest between members of the Men's Club and Sisterhood, and there will be a puppet show for the children.

Temple Sinai: New members will be welcomed at a Shabbat dinner tonight, at 6, before Shabbat services in their honor. Jim Barniak, sports director for PRISM television, will be the guest speaker at a Men's Club meeting Sunday, 10 a.m. The Senior Adults Group will meet Tuesday, 11 a.m.

Temple Zion: Students in the religious school will participate in family Chanukah and Shabbat services tonight, at 8. The evening will include a presentation of Chanukah music and an Oneg Shabbat featuring *sufganiyot*, the jelly doughnuts that have become a Chanukah custom in Israel.

Tifereth Israel of Lower Bucks County: Students in the religious school's *bet* class will host a Shabbat dinner tonight, before 8 p.m. Shabbat services. Shabbat services will continue tomorrow, 9:30 a.m., with a Kindershtet program for children, aged 3 to 6, planned for 10:30 a.m. The USY chapter will sponsor a "Movie Night" tomorrow, 7 p.m. The Young Couples Group will host a Chanukah party tomorrow, 8 p.m. The religious school is planning a Chanukah program Sunday, 10 a.m. A meeting of the Chevra Kadisha is scheduled Monday, 8 p.m. The Sisterhood will sponsor bingo Wednesday, 8 p.m.

Yardley Synagogue: Chanukah will

be the theme of the congregation's fifth annual fall Shabbat dinner tonight, at 7:30, after Shabbat services, which will begin at 6:45.

Zionist Federation to meet in Baltimore

NEW YORK — A debate between members of the Knesset representing the "young guard" of the major blocs will open the American Zionist Federation's 10th Biennial Convention, scheduled for Sunday, Dec. 18, to Tuesday, Dec. 20, in Baltimore. The group is the umbrella agency for 16 national Zionist organizations.

Other speakers will include Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the Jewish Agency, and Meir Sheerit, treasurer of the World Zionist Organization, who will make presentations, and Dr. David Sidorsky, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg and Dr. Yosef Olmert, who will discuss Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization and prospects for peace. For information, call (212) 371-7750.

"The parchment burned — but the letters float in the air." (Talmud)

PHILADELPHIA — WE NEED YOUR URGENT HELP!

On November 30, the High School building of the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia — an internationally respected institution of Jewish learning — went up in flames.

The dining hall, classrooms and residence hall were consumed, but the sound of Torah would not be stifled. Though the students were sent home, their clothing and belongings destroyed, they immediately gathered to study in local synagogues, joined by members of our faculty.

Meanwhile, amid the ruins, we brought in trailers to serve as temporary classrooms so that we could resume full sessions within ten days of the disaster. We could not allow the study of Torah to be interrupted even for a day!

Now, together — the Talmudical Yeshiva and the Greater Philadelphia Jewish Community — we must rebuild.

These are the steps:

1. We will continue to use the temporary mobile classrooms only as long as we must.
2. The cleanup and renovation of the unaffected 30% of the building must be accomplished immediately at a cost of \$300,000.00
3. We must build a new facility. Ironically, this was already in the planning stages due to the increase in our enrollment in recent years and the age of our present facility. This time, our students must have a modern fire proof building of 70,000 sq. ft. at an estimated cost of \$5 million.

Our Friends in the Philadelphia Jewish Community:

Though the Jewish world today is wracked by dissension and disunity, this is a chance for us to show how tragedy brings out the very best in us all. Because throughout Jewish history, whenever our Jewish brethren have been in trouble, we forgot our differences and helped.

The Philadelphia Yeshiva is in deep trouble. The ashes are still smouldering. We are ready to build on them. But we need your help. Desperately.

Please send as generous a contribution as you can today!

☐ I am responding to your urgent appeal. enclosed is my donation of \$ _____
☐ I wish to pledge \$ _____ to be paid on _____ (please fill in date)

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip code _____

Telephone No. (____) _____

Please make checks payable to TYP Fire Emergency Fund.

Mail to: Talmudical Yeshiva of Phila.
 6063 Drexel Road
 Philadelphia, Pa. 19131

