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Language and Identity: Do American Jews Need Hebrew?

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1. Mystical/Theological

a. Joseph Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain*, pp. 10-11

ing from the completely different experiences of language in the cultures based on these two religions. The following paragraphs are an attempt to explain this, yet my experience has taught me that the chances of succeeding in it are very remote. The Jewish concept of language is so far from the intuitive attitudes of European culture (now shared also by that of modern Hebrew, which adopted completely the European concept of language), that no amount of explanations can bridge it.

Judaism differs from Christianity in that it believes that it has recorded, in its scriptures, the actual word of God in its original language. Christianity, on the other hand, is based on the word of God in translation. The Hebrew bible included tens of thousands of words, believed to be the actual syllables uttered by God or inspired by him. The New Testament includes thousands of words said by Jesus Christ or inspired by him, not in their original form but in their translation to Greek. Only six words uttered by Jesus are recorded as they were actually pronounced—"Talita kumi," and, "Eli eli lama shavaktani." As we all know, translation is interpretation, and a selective one at that; the words of Jesus as preserved in the Christian scriptures contain, at best, one of the possible interpretations of the meaning of the original. The rest is lost.

The language of Christ as preserved in the New Testament is the one put in his mouth by his human translators-interpreters. The Hebrew bible, according to Jewish and Christian faiths, includes the word of God as actually uttered by him even before humanity was created. When God said, "Yehi or," he did not only convey the message "Let there be light," he actually uttered these syllables, and as a result there was light. God's utterance was not a semantic one: There were no people, nobody could be listening, it could not be an order because there was no one to carry out the order. The very utterance was the deed, the cause of the emergence of light. Its semantic interpretation came later. It is the human conclusion that if the sound *yehi or* makes light, then it must carry the meaning "Let there be light." It is as if we interpreted the click of the light switch as an order for the lamp to light up. But in the case of the lamp we know that the switch releases an electric current that heats a wire and causes it to glow. How did the sound *yehi or* switch on the universe? This is divine wisdom, forever

hidden from us. The syllables *yehi or* include not only a sound, but also a picture of six letters of the Hebrew alphabet. They include vocalization marks (*nekudot*) and musical signs (*teamim*). The letters are decorated by little crowns (*tagin*). The letters also include a numerical value, because writing words and numbers was done in Hebrew (as in Arabic, Greek, and Latin) by the letters of the alphabet. It could also be an acronym, possibly of the names of the letters—*yod he yod aleph vav resh*—which are also derived from divine wisdom, because they pre-existed in God before the creation. Each of these components could be the decisive one in the creation of light. We can never know their hierarchy of importance and meaningfulness because we cannot introduce such a hierarchy into divine, infinite wisdom. All we can know is that the totality of the linguistic phenomenon—the sound, the picture, the music, the “decorations” (the term indicates that this is a secondary element, which of course cannot be within divine infinity), and all the other elements combine into the essence of language as a creative—rather than communicative—instrument.

When *yehi or* is translated into any language carrying the semantic message “Let there be light,” all these elements are lost. There are no vocalization marks, crowns, or musical signs. The sound is now different, and the shape of the letters is different. The numerical value is changed. The only component that remains is the assumption—an arbitrary one—of a semantic message. The concept of language as essentially a communicative device for semantic messages in Western culture is the result of the historical accident that Christianity was based on the word of God in translation into existing languages that had a vast pre-Christian literature that was essentially semantic. Hebrew and Arabic viewed themselves as languages identical with their religions. Christianity could not do that, because it integrated itself into existing languages—Greek and Latin—that sustained great civilizations that were not dependent on Christianity.

Once language is recognized as an aspect of infinite divine wisdom, it cannot have finite meanings. In the same way that no one can ever know the “real” meaning of *yehi or* from the divine point of view—one can only view the earthly result of the utterance—so one cannot glean the real, finite semantic message of any word of God. It is impossible therefore to present the “true” meaning of any biblical verse. One

Would the Congregation of Israel be ready at last to heed such a call? Could it see its way clear to distinguishing between the whole and the part, the sacred and the secular, the theological and the political? Could modern activism on the historical plane coexist with persistent metahistorical claims, and not by its very nature deny the basic concepts of Jewish faith?

"THE APOCALYPTIC STING"

Parallel to these questions that confronted Orthodox religious thought, some non-Orthodox Zionists urgently adduced the question of "the price of messianism." Gershom Scholem, who coined this phrase, repeatedly posed to his listeners and readers the following question: "Can Jewish history manage to re-enter concrete reality without being destroyed by the messianic claim which [that reentry is bound to] bring up from its depths."² Scholem set down these words rather late in his career, but as early as 1926, in a letter written to Franz Rosenzweig and only recently published, he raises a similarly penetrating question regarding the renewal and "secularization" of the Hebrew language: "The Land is a volcano. It provides lodging for the language . . . [But] what will be the result of the updating of Hebrew? Will the abyss of the holy tongue which we have implanted in our children not yawn wide? People here do not realize what they are doing. They think they have made Hebrew into a secular language, that they have removed its apocalyptic sting. But that is not so . . . Every word which is not simply made up but rather taken from the treasurehouse of well-worn terms is laden with explosives . . . God will not remain dumb in the language in which He has been adjured so many thousands of times to come back into our lives."³ The "explosives" and "apocalyptic sting" are to be found in such classical expressions as *memshalah u-mamlakbah* (rulership and kingdom), *kibbutz galuyot* (the ingathering of the exiles), *yeshuah* (salvation), *shalom* (peace), *tzur yisrael* (Rock of Israel), and *ge'ulah la-aretz* (redemption of the land)—expressions that have found their way into the modern Hebrew vernacular. Similarly, a "volcano" lies dormant in many terms whose original religious meaning has been radically altered or altogether lost in modern Hebrew. For example, *bittahon*, which now denotes military security, originally referred to trust in God; *ha'apalah*, which is used to refer to the prestate "illegal" immigration, originally denoted a forbidden and catastrophic breakthrough (Num. 14:44);⁴ *keren kayemet*, the name of the modern-day Jewish National Fund, is taken from a Talmudic reference to "credit" for good deeds accumulated for the after-life (M Pe'ah 1:1; BT Shabbat 127a); and one often hears in a secular con-

3. Knowledge and Authenticity: Leon Wieseltier, "The Spoiled Brats of Jewish History" and "Jews Without a Language" from "Language, Identity and the Scandal of American Jewry"

"The Spoiled Brats of Jewish History"

One of the great challenges to the formulation of an indigenous Judaism in America, an American Judaism, is the magnitude of our good fortune. We are the luckiest Jews who ever lived--indeed, for a reason that I will presently suggest, we are the spoiled brats of Jewish history. To a degree unprecedented in the history of our people, our own experience is discontinuous with the experience of our ancestors: not only our ancient ancestors, but also our recent ones. Their experience, particularly their experience of persecution, is increasingly unrecognizable to us.

We do not possess a natural knowledge of their pains and their pressures. In order to acquire such a knowledge, we rely more and more upon commemorations--so much that we are in danger of transforming American Jewish culture into an essentially commemorative culture. Owing to the magnitude of our good fortune, the third person plural in our prayers gets stretched thinner and thinner, and the leap of imagination that is required for our identification with our ancestors grows harder and harder, until we are left to wonder just how the old resources may fit the new circumstances.

This is not the only obstacle to the creation of a Jewish tradition of our own that could match, in the rigor of its thinking and the richness of its learning, the Jewish traditions that preceded us. History may have saved the Jews of America, but it also distracted them. There were the great savage mid-century dramas of Jewish destruction and Jewish rebirth, which generations of American Jews kept far away from themselves--the Holocaust and Israel: the near-apocalypse and the pseudo-redemption of the 1940s.

Confronted with events of such enormity, it was inevitable--indeed, it was also ethical--that the Jews of America came to formulate their Jewish feelings in the terms of Jewish existences utterly unlike their own. But that, too, is a reason for the sour conclusion that the comparative diasporologist draws about American Jewry. Until very recently, we lived off of the spiritual and historical resources of other Jews. This is changing, for reasons that are too complicated to go into here. Suffice it to say that, for American Judaism, the moment of truth has finally arrived.

II.

There is still another cause for the relative thinness of Jewish culture in America. This impediment to our taking our rightful place in the chain of our tradition has everything to do with Jewish languages and Jewish books, and with the changing relationship of Jews to Jewish languages and to Jewish books.

Obviously, there are Jewish writers and Jewish writings wherever we look. Jewish culture in America is in some ways thicker than it has ever been. There is no denying it. But thicker compared to what? Surely the standard by which we must judge ourselves as Jews, and by

which our children and our historians will judge us, is not an American standard, even if we are also Americans; and it is not even an American Jewish standard. It is a Jewish standard, *the* Jewish standard, the classical Jewish standard, the standard of our tradition.

I take it to be a fundamental principle of Jewish life that it is by our tradition that we must measure ourselves. So the questions that we must ask ourselves are these: How does what we have created compare to what we inherited? Did we add to our tradition or did we subtract from it? Did we transmit it or did we let it fall away? Did we enrich it or deplete it? Among the great Jewries, what is our distinction?

Measuring ourselves by the standard of our tradition, we should note immediately one distinction of the American Jewish community; and it is with this distinction that I have come here to trouble you. The distinction that I have in mind is the illiteracy of American Jewry. I mean, its Jewish illiteracy.

"Jews Without a Language"

The American Jewish community is the first great community in the history of our people that believes that it can receive, develop, and perpetuate the Jewish tradition *not* in a Jewish language. By an overwhelming majority, American Jews cannot read or speak or write Hebrew, or Yiddish. This is genuinely shocking. American Jewry is quite literally unlettered.

The assumption of American Jewry that it can do without a Jewish language is an arrogance without precedent in Jewish history. And this illiteracy, I suggest, will leave American Judaism and American Jewishness forever crippled and scandalously thin.

There are two ways in which we can educate our children, two instruments of identity with which we may equip them. One is conviction, the other is competence. I have no doubt that the future of Jewish culture in America will be determined more by Jewish competence than by Jewish conviction.

We cannot teach our children what to believe; or rather, we can try to teach them what to believe, but we can never be certain of the success of our effort. They will believe what they wish to believe. We cannot control their belief. Indeed, we must be grateful for their freedom of mind. But it is not an illusion of control to think that we can permanently arrange matters so that our children will never be shut out of their own tradition, out of their own books.

If we cannot make sure that we will be followed by believing Jews, we certainly can be sure that we will be followed by competent Jews. Indeed, competence leaves a Jew favorably disposed to conviction. A competent Jew is not destroyed by his questions, because he can look for the answers himself. He, or she, has the tools. Ignorance, I think, is much more damaging than heresy.

It seems to me indisputable, moreover, when we reflect upon the development of Jewish culture, that the primary tools of Jewish competence are *linguistic*. Without Hebrew, the Jewish tradition will not disappear entirely in America; but most of it will certainly disappear.

This gloomy premonition is owed not least to a proper understanding of the relationship of language to life. Our language is our incommensurable inflection of our humanity; our unique way of presenting, not least to ourselves, what our unique way is through the world. Our language is our element; our beginning; our air; the air peculiar to us. Even our universalism comes to us (like everybody else's universalism) in a particular language.

Now, I understand that the linguistic history of the Jews is a complicated story. A great and complicating work remains to be written about the history of the literacy of the People of the Book.

4. Cultural Separateness: Leviticus Rabbah 32:5

רב הונא אמר בשם בר קפרא בשביל ד' דברים נגאלו ישראל ממצרים שלא שנו את שמם ואת לשונם ולא אמרו לשון הרע ולא נמצא ביניהן אחד מהן פרוץ בערוה לא שנו את שמן

Rabbi Huna said in the name of Bar Kappara: Because of four things were the Israelites redeemed from Egypt: Because they did not change their names; and they did not change their language; and because they did not speak ill of each other; and because none of them was sexually promiscuous. (And some say, because they did not change their clothing.)

cause the Jews in all lands wanted to be a nation in their own land, they really had a far stronger bond of unity and cooperation to serve as a basis of a common life and civilization than any people living unmolested on its own native soil. As a result, the Jews managed to maintain enough of a civilization during the many centuries of dispersion to feel that their identity as Jews had grown dependent upon their perpetuating that civilization.

2. LANGUAGE

A language is pre-eminently the distinctive mark of a civilization. That a common language gives a people individuality seems to have been recognized at a very early date. It is assumed in the biblical legend that YHWH broke up the unity of mankind into nations by confusing men's tongues. A language enables the individuals of a nation to enter into communication with one another and, at the same time, develops in each a consciousness of his people as distinct from other peoples—or of his people's otherness. Whereas a common land is an indispensable condition to a civilization, a common language is an indispensable vehicle of a civilization, and the most conspicuous element in it. A human group, at however primitive a stage of development, possesses a mode of speech. When that mode of speech begins to serve as a medium for communicating not alone the immediate wants and reactions of the group, but also its conscious approvals and disapprovals, it becomes the vehicle of a civilization. Every language is a storehouse of a particular cluster of ideas and experiences which are common to the members of the group and distinguish the group from other groups.

A language is not a series of disconnected symbols, corresponding to certain "areas of experience" which in a different language might be denoted by other symbols. The "areas of experience" of one people are never exactly co-extensive with those of another. This is why the most sacred and intimate experiences of a people cannot be faithfully reproduced in a foreign tongue. "It is impossible that the quality of one language should be preserved in another," states Roger Bacon, in his *Opus Majus*,²² to prove that Hebrew is a prerequisite to the understanding of the Bible. Each language has not only its idioms but also its specific and haunting overtones which give it individual timbre. It is in that psychic

timbre that we can discern the mental and spiritual characteristics of a people.⁶

A language thus helps to keep alive the collective consciousness of a people. In the words of Zangwill: "Language is the chief index of life. As no man is dead so long as the mirror put to his lips reveals a breath, so no race is extinct so long as there comes from its lips the breath of speech. A people that speaks is not dead; a people that is not dead speaks."⁷

English civilization dates from the time that the Anglo-Saxon fused with the Norman French to form the English language. French civilization did not exist before the Latin was so modified through the mingling of the Germanic Franks with the Latinized Gauls as to give rise to a new language called French. The fate of a civilization is usually reflected in the fate of the language which serves as its medium. The last century has witnessed the renaissance of a host of languages in Europe and Asia. The modern Greek, the Polish, the Irish, the Norwegian, the Lithuanian and the Catalanian are a few of the languages which have more or less succeeded in establishing themselves as literary media. These languages represent the rise of new civilizations, or the revival of old civilizations that had long been repressed by tyrannous conquerors. In modern times, imperialist nations have generally reckoned with the power exercised by the language of the conquered people in keeping its spirit alive. Accordingly, among the first measures adopted to stamp out the national spirit of a conquered race or nation has been the prohibition of its language in the public schools. France, Germany, Russia, Poland, have all had their turn in being oppressor and oppressed in the matter of language. If world-peace is to be secured not through the suppression of national groups but rather by directing their individual energies into useful channels, any people whose civilization is of consequence to it is entitled to insist upon the survival of its own language.

Judaism probably represents the first instance of a language conflict. Spengler is mistaken when he says, "Piety towards the mother tongue—the very term testifies to deep ethical forces, and accounts for the bitterness of our ever-recurring language battles— is a trait of the *Late Western* soul, almost unknowable for men of other Cultures and entirely so for the primitive."⁸ During the

first seven hundred years of its existence, Judaism was engaged in acquiring the Hebrew language and building up a rich literature. During that time, Hebrew developed into the medium in which the other elements of the civilization, the codes and the mores, the folkways and the folk values, were given permanent form. Then came the destruction of the two kingdoms, the Northern and the Southern. The land was settled by neighboring tribes and by those brought from distant regions by the Assyrian and Babylonian conquerors. Before long Hebrew fell into disuse, and its place was taken by the languages of the neighboring peoples. This irritated Nehemiah, for he apprehended that it would prove a menace to the spiritual life of the community. In the disuse of Hebrew he saw the consequence of mixed marriages. "In those days saw I also Jews that had married women of Ashdod, of Ammon and of Moab; and their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people." * About the same time that Nehemiah deplored the decadence of Hebrew in Palestine, an unknown visionary foretold the time when Jews would be settled in Egypt, and not only maintain their religious rites there, but also their Hebrew tongue.¹⁰

Despite the wishes of the Jewish zealots, Hebrew was unable to hold its own against Aramaic which, prior to the Greek conquest, seems to have become the official language of the entire western half of the Persian empire. At that time there began a unique procedure which has characterized Judaism ever since, that of retaining Hebrew as the language of worship, of the elementary school and the *bet ha-midrash*, while developing the foreign vernacular into a Jewish dialect for use in the home and in the street. When the competition of other languages was too strong to be withstood, Hebrew did not succumb, but retired to the inner sanctuaries of Jewish life, where it continued not as the esoteric language of a few pedants, but as the medium in which the most vital interests of the people found expression. The Rabbis of the Talmudic period considered the use of the Hebrew language so essential that they accounted it as one of the chief merits for which the Israelites were redeemed from Egyptian bondage.¹¹

It has been correctly observed that after the Hebrew language ceased to be the language of communication among the Jewish

masses, it did not pass into the category of dead languages because it retained the power of individual expression and style. In contrast with medieval Latin which maintained a uniform style, though it was the international language of Europe for a number of centuries, Hebrew has seen the rise of one style after another. The vernacular, which was usually some Jewish dialect of an alien tongue, came also to contribute to an individualization of the Jewish people, and helped to differentiate it from other peoples no less effectively than did the Hebrew language.

To understand the part that language played in the history of Judaism, we must bear in mind that since the fifth century B.C.E. Judaism has not been monolingual, as is the case with most civilizations, but bi-lingual.¹² Instead of having one language to give it individuality, it has always had two. Thus, later, there developed alongside the Hebrew, Jewish dialects of the Aramaic, the Persian, the Arabic, the Ethiopic, the Spanish, and the German language.¹³ These dialects not only included a large number of Hebrew words and idioms, but they were also written in Hebrew script.¹⁴ Each of these dialects was so colored by the rest of the Jewish social heritage that parting with it was an occasion for vehement protest, and it seemed as though with its relinquishment an essential element of Judaism were being sacrificed. Jews from eastern Europe, who have not come under the influence of occidental civilization, can scarcely think it possible for anyone who is not able to understand the Yiddish language to be a "real" Jew. There are Jewish pulpits where preaching in any language but Yiddish is forbidden. Among the ultra-orthodox Jews in Jerusalem, the substitution of Hebrew for Yiddish is resented not only because of the secular use of Hebrew thus involved, but also because the disuse of Yiddish is regarded as an alienation from the true spirit of Judaism.¹⁵

Of the two languages which Judaism as a civilization has had to cultivate by reason of the exigencies of history, Hebrew has been by far the more indispensable one. In the first place, it has supplied the elements of historic continuity and present solidarity. More than a million Jews lived in Egypt during the time of Philo. In spite of persecution, massacre and forced conversion to Christianity and later to Mohammedanism, a remnant would probably have survived had these Jews not dispensed with Hebrew altogether, nor

contented themselves with translations of their literary heritage. Their zeal for the teachings and institutions of Judaism is attested by the numerous writings they left behind, and by their efforts to convert the heathen population about them. Yet they disappeared completely because they lacked one of the fundamental elements of the Jewish civilization—the Hebrew language. The rebirth of the Hebrew language is a modern miracle of the spirit. It is almost incredible that a language which had ceased to function as a vernacular for thousands of years should spring into life at the deliberate fiat of a handful of enthusiasts.¹⁰

3. MORES, LAWS AND FOLKWAYS

In a civilization it is scarcely possible to distinguish form or mode of expression from content. That distinction is usually made in the interests of priority in importance. But for purposes of discussion, we find it necessary to treat the content of a civilization as, in a sense, different from its form, and to reckon with the fact that it is chiefly through its content that a civilization comes to possess individual character.

The main content of a civilization consists of folk habits and folk sanctions which have the twofold effect of producing like-mindedness among those who belong to the same people, and a consciousness of difference from other peoples. Social habits include the actions and inhibitions which are habitual to any folk or people. They are social in the sense that the causes leading to their adoption are to be found in the collective life of the group as a whole, and not merely in the lives of the individuals who practice them. The impulse to perform those actions, or to yield to those inhibitions, partakes of the nature of both an inward and outward pressure. The outward pressure may come directly from one's immediate circle, but indirectly it is felt to come from the entire people. Social habits cover the entire range of human conduct, insofar as one is expected to conform to certain prescribed rules. They, therefore, include folkways, social etiquette, moral standards, civil and criminal laws, and religious practices.

We find represented in the Torah, both in the written and in the oral, every one of these types of social habits. Even a superficial examination discloses wherein these social habits differ from those

known. When the family moves into a new home and celebrates a housewarming, the reading of the *mezuzah*, the explanation of its contents, and the ceremonial attachment of it to the doorpost, might help to make the housewarming impressive.

B

CULTURAL FOLKWAYS

Traditional Judaism abounds in customs which were a means of fostering the Jewish consciousness. Those customs were not recognized as constituting a class by themselves but were treated as *mišwot*, or divinely ordained institutions. Many of those customs are in the nature of prohibitions designed to discourage the tendency to imitate non-Jewish ways and practices. They all fall under the category of the commandment, "Ye shall not walk in their statutes."¹⁶ *All such prohibitions, however, are out of place in the Judaism of the future, which will tend to assimilate whatever practices are congenial to its spirit.* On the other hand, there exist in Judaism many affirmative practices which, though not related to any ordinance in the Torah, have the effect of deepening the Jewish consciousness and promoting a sense of unity with the rest of Jewry. All such practices may be regarded as cultural folkways. Only those which deserve special consideration will here be discussed.

1. *The Hebrew language.* Chief among the cultural folkways, the cultivation of which has become imperative, is the use of the Hebrew language. The renascence of Hebrew as a vernacular in Palestine would not have been possible without the clear recognition on the part of a few enthusiasts of the indispensability of Hebrew to the fostering of the Jewish consciousness. In America and western Europe, however, the havoc wrought by the assimilationist tendencies which have dominated Jewish life is most evident in the practical elimination of Hebrew from the Jewish consciousness. *Once Hebrew becomes a foreign or an ancient tongue to the Jew, he ceases to experience any intimacy with Jewish life, and he begins to look for rational justification for being a Jew, with the consequent self-delusions and ultimate frustration.*

The first practical step in any effort to live Judaism as a civil-

ization should be to learn Hebrew. It should be included among the languages that Jewish children are taught in the high schools and colleges, and it should be given the same academic credit as Latin and Greek. The impression received during the first years of infancy and childhood are strongest and most enduring. During the first years, the child should breathe and live in a Hebrew atmosphere. It would be far more appropriate if in the Jewish homes which can afford a governess, the children learn to laugh and play in Hebrew, rather than in French or German. The use of Hebrew in the religious services is natural and logical, as well as in the spirit of centuries of tradition.

In spite, however, of the urgent need of Hebrew as a means to a satisfying Jewish life, it is not likely that in the western countries the majority of Jews will possess a fair reading knowledge of it. Yet with the improvement in the technique of teaching the language, it is possible to reintroduce it as an important cultural factor in Jewish life.

The Sages intuitively grasped the value of folkways which could not be comprised within the category of divine precepts. They knew nothing of the anthropology and psychology of folkways, yet they said that the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt by virtue of four meritorious practices,¹⁶ three of which were the use of their Hebrew language, the retention of their Hebrew names and the wearing of their national garb.¹⁷ None of these practices is commanded, yet they were deemed so important as to have led to national redemption.

2. *Jewish names.* The matter of names is rarely included in a discussion of Judaism, yet if our aim is to enlarge the scope of Jewish folkways we cannot overlook the importance of names as a means of fostering Jewish consciousness. Except for the rabbinic statement quoted above, the sentiment of the past was not opposed to the adoption of non-Jewish names; Gentile names are known to have been used rather freely. It is easy to trace the changes in the cultural environment of the Jews by noting their names. Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome, and later the various European nations, left their stamp upon Jewish names.¹⁸ In former times, Jews could permit themselves this laxity because it could not possibly jeopardize their Jewishness.¹⁹ But circumstances have altered. Every possible meas-

III. Jewishness and Greekness

7. Babylonian Talmud Sotah 49b

ת"ר: כשצרו מלכי בית חשמונאי זה על זה, היה הורקנוס מבחוץ ואריסטובלוס מבפנים. בכל יום ויום היו משלשלין דינרים בקופה ומעלין להן תמידים. היה שם זקן אחד שהיה מכיר בחכמת יונית, לעז להם בחכמת יונית, אמר להן: כל זמן שעוסקים בעבודה אין נמסרין בידכם. למחר שלשלו להם דינרים בקופה והעלו להם חזיר, כיון שהגיע לחצי חומה, נעץ צפרניו נדעזעה א"י ארבע מאות פרסה. אותה שעה אמרו: ארור אדם שיגדל חזירים, וארור אדם שילמד לבנו חכמת יונית

The Rabbis taught: When the kings of the Hasmonean house besieged one another, Hyrcanus was outside the city and Aristobulus was inside. Every day they would send down coins in a bank-box and they would send up daily offerings. There was a certain sage there who was conversant in Greek wisdom; he spoke to them in that vernacular of Greek wisdom and said to them: "All the while that they are immersed in the Temple service, they will not be delivered into your hands." The next day they sent down coins in a bank-box and they sent up to them a pig. When it reached the mid-point of the wall, it stuck its nails in the wall and the land of Israel trembled for 400 *parsa'ot*. At that time they declared - Cursed be a man who rears pigs and cursed be a man who teaches his son Greek wisdom! [2]

8. Genesis Rabbah 36:8

ח ויאמר ברוך ה' אלהי שם אמר ריש לקיש אף מיפת עמדו באהלי שם ויאמר ברוך ה' אלהי שם, ויהי כנען, יפת אלהים ליפת זה כורש שהוא גוזר שיבנה בית המקדש אעפ"כ וישכן באהלי שם אין שכינה שורה אלא באהלי שם, בר קפרא אמר יהיו דברי תורה נאמרים בלשוננו של יפת בתוך אהלי שם, רבי יודן אמר מכאן לתרגום מן התורה, הה"ד (נחמיה ח) ויקראו בספר תורת האלהים זה המקרא, מפורש, זה תרגום, ושום שכל אלו הטעמים, ויבינו במקרא, אלו ראשי הפסוקים, רבי הונא בן לוליאני אומר אלו ההכרעות והראיות, רבנן דקסרין אמרי מיכן למסורת, רבי זעירא ורבי חננאל בשם רבי אפי' אדם רגיל בתורה כעזרא, לא יהא קורא מפיו וכותב, והא תני מעשה שהיה ר"מ באסייא ולא היה שם מגילת אסתר וקרא לו מפיו וכתבה, תמן אמרין שתי מגילות כתב, גנו את הראשונה וקיים את השנייה

AND HE SAID: BLESSED BE THE LORD, THE GOD OF SHEM... GOD ENLARGE JAPHETH (IX 26 f.). This alludes to Cyrus who ordered the Temple to be rebuilt; yet even so, AND HE SHALL DWELL IN THE TENTS OF SHEM: the Shechinah dwells only in the tents of Shem. Bar Kappara explained it: Let the words of the Torah be uttered in the language of Japheth [sc. Greek] in the tents of Shem. R. Judan said: From this we learn that a translation [of the Bible is permitted]. Thus it is written, And they read in the book, in the Law of God (Neh. VIII, 8): this refers to Scripture; distinctly (ib.): to a translation; And they gave the sense (ib.)-i.e. the punctuation accents; And caused them to understand the reading (ib.)-this refers to the beginnings of the verses. R. Hiyya b. Lulianus said: It refers to the grammatical sequence [of words]. The Rabbis of Caesarea said: Here we have an allusion to the traditional text. R. Zera and R. Hananel said: Even if a man is as well-versed in the Torah as Ezra, he must not read it from memory and write it. But it was

taughts: It once happened that R. Meir visited Asia Minor, and finding there no Scroll of Esther, he read it from memory and wrote it? There [in Babylonia] they say: He wrote two Scrolls, suppressed the first and kept the second as valid [for use].

9. Tractate Sefer Torah 1:8

Seventy elders wrote the Torah in Greek for King Ptolemy, and that day was as ominous for Israel as the day whereon the Israelites made the Golden Calf, for the Torah could not be adequately translated.

10. Letter of Aristeas (excerpt)

Three days later Demetrius took the men and passing along the sea-wall, seven stadia long, to the island, crossed the bridge and made for the northern districts of Pharos. There he assembled them in a house, which had been built upon the sea-shore, of great beauty and in a secluded situation, and invited them to carry out the work of translation, since everything that they needed for the purpose was placed at their disposal. So they set to work comparing their several results and making them agree, and whatever they agreed upon was suitably copied out under the direction of Demetrius. And the session lasted until the ninth hour; after this they were set free to minister to their physical needs. Everything they wanted was furnished for them on a lavish scale. In addition to this Dorotheus made the same preparations for them daily as were made for the king himself - for thus he had been commanded by the king. In the early morning they appeared daily at the Court, and after saluting the king went back to their own place. And as is the custom of all the Jews, they washed their hands in the sea and prayed to God and then devoted themselves to reading and translating the particular passage upon which they were engaged, and I put the question to them, Why it was that they washed their hands before they prayed? And they explained that it was a token that they had done no evil (for every form of activity is wrought by means of the hands) since in their noble and holy way they regard everything as a symbol of righteousness and truth.

As I have already said, they met together daily in the place which was delightful for its quiet and its brightness and applied themselves to their task. And it so chanced that the work of translation was completed in seventy-two days, just as if this had been arranged of set purpose.

When the work was completed, Demetrius collected together the Jewish population in the place where the translation had been made, and read it over to all, in the presence of the translators, who met with a great reception also from the people, because of the great benefits which they had conferred upon them. They bestowed warm praise upon Demetrius, too, and urged him to have the whole law transcribed and present a copy to their leaders. After the books had been read, the priests and the elders of the translators and the Jewish community and the leaders of the people stood up and said, that since so excellent and sacred and accurate a translation had been made, it was only right that it should remain as it was and no alteration should be made in it. And when the whole company expressed their approval, they

bade them pronounce a curse in accordance with their custom upon any one who should make any alteration either by adding anything or changing in any way whatever any of the words which had been written or making any omission. This was a very wise precaution to ensure that the book might be preserved for all the future time unchanged. When the matter was reported to the king, he rejoiced greatly, for he felt that the design which he had formed had been safely carried out. The whole book was read over to him and he was greatly astonished at the spirit of the lawgiver. And he said to Demetrius, 'How is it that none of the historians or the poets have ever thought it worth their while to allude to such a wonderful achievement?' And he replied, 'Because the law is sacred and of divine origin. And some of those who formed the intention of dealing with it have been smitten by God and therefore desisted from their purpose.'