

Bonus: Not "law" but teaching

The film, word for word, about 10 min. Hebrew words said aloud are given in Hebrew script, then as they sound.

0:00 The hook

Blessed is the man; says the first psalm. And then it says what he enjoys. In the King James Bible: his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate, day and night.

Read that as English; and you see a man who enjoys a law book. The way some people enjoy the tax code. It has puzzled many readers.

The puzzle is one English word. Law. The Hebrew word behind it, means something else first.

0:37 Welcome

שָׁלוֹם Shalom. I am Moreh Ezra; and this is a bonus. Shorter than a lesson. No new rules. One word.

And if you have come here without the lessons before it; you can still follow every step.

The word is **תּוֹרָה torah.** Say it with the weight at the end. It stands two hundred and nineteen times in the Hebrew Bible. And the King James writes, law, for it; two hundred and nineteen times. Every time.

Sometimes, that sounds right. **תּוֹרַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ Torat Eloheinu.** The law of our God.

Sometimes, it sounds a little odd. **זֹאת תּוֹרַת הָעֹלָה Zot torat ha-olah.** This is the law of the burnt offering. It is the heading of a few lines, that tell a priest what to do with one kind of sacrifice.

And once, it is plainly wrong. **תּוֹרַת אִמֶּךָ Torat immekha.** The law of thy mother. A mother has no laws. She has things she has told you, since you could walk.

One Hebrew word fits all of these. So it must mean something wider than law; and its root says what.

1:50 The verb: to point the way

The root has three letters. Yod. Resh. He. And its verb, in its plainest use, has nothing to do with school.

Jacob is travelling down to Egypt, with his whole family; and he does not know the road to the land of Goshen. So he sends Judah ahead. **לְהוֹרֹת לְפָנָיו גֹּשְׁנָה Lehorot lefanav Goshnah**. To point the way before him; to Goshen.

Somebody walks in front; and shows where to go. That is the verb.

The second use is not far from the first. In the wilderness, the people come to water that is too bitter to drink. Moses cries out. And then: **וַיּוֹרֵהוּ va-yorehu**. The LORD showed him; a piece of wood.

He did not know what to do; and he was shown.

From there, it is one step to what we call teaching. Isaiah sees the nations going up to Jerusalem; and this is what they want. **וְיֹרֵנוּ מִדְּרָכָיו וְנֵלְכָה בְּאֹרְחֹתָיו Ve-yorenu mi-derakhav ve-nelekhah be-orchotav**. That he may teach us of his ways; and that we may walk in his paths. Look at the company the verb keeps.

Ways. Walk. Paths. Teaching, in Hebrew, is still a matter of roads.

And the same verse ends: **כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה ki mi-Tsiyyon tetse torah**. For out of Zion shall go forth, **תּוֹרָה torah**. The verb, and its noun, in one verse. They ask to be shown the way; and what goes out, is **תּוֹרָה torah**. The noun is simply what the verb gives.

A pointing of the way. Direction. Instruction. Teaching. And the one who does the pointing?

מוֹרֶה Moreh. A teacher. From the same root. It is the first word of my own name. What a **מוֹרֶה moreh** gives; is **תּוֹרָה torah**.

3:42 A mother's teaching

Now go back to the verse that sounded wrong. **שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוּסַר אָבִיךָ וְאַל תִּטֹּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמֶּךָ Shema beni musar avikha ve-al tittosh torat immekha**. Hear, my son, the discipline of your father; and do not let go of the **תּוֹרָה torah** of your mother. With, teaching; the line is as plain as it could be. The book of Proverbs has the word thirteen times; and nearly always for what parents, and the wise, hand on.

The last chapter of the book praises a woman with it. **וְתוֹרַת חֶסֶד עַל לְשׁוֹנָהּ Ve-torat chesed al leshonah**. And a **תּוֹרָה torah** of **חֶסֶד chesed**, is on her tongue. If you have the fourth bonus; you know the second word. Steadfast love.

The King James has: the law of kindness. What she says, shows people a way; and the way is kind.

And one line sets our word beside a neighbour. **כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אוֹר Ki ner mitsvah ve-torah or**. For a commandment is a lamp; and **תּוֹרָה torah**, is light. A commandment is one thing you are told to do. A lamp: enough to see the next step.

תּוֹרָה **Torah**, is the daylight.

4:54 A priest's answer

The word has a narrower use too; and here, law, comes closer. In Israel, you went to a priest, when you did not know what was right, in some matter of worship. Is this food clean? May I touch that? The answer he gave, was a תּוֹרָה **torah**.

The prophet Haggai is sent to fetch one. שְׁאַל נָא אֶת הַכֹּהֲנִים תּוֹרָה **She'al na et ha-kohanim torah**. Ask the priests, please; for a תּוֹרָה **torah**. One question. One answer.

When such answers were gathered, and written down; each group got the word as its heading. That is our line from Leviticus: this is the תּוֹרָה **torah** of the burnt offering. The word stands sixteen times in Leviticus; nearly always so.

And Deuteronomy sets the noun and the verb side by side. עַל פִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר יוֹרוּךָ **Al pi ha-torah asher yorukha**. According to the תּוֹרָה **torah**; that they shall teach you. Instruction; that they instruct. The King James has: the sentence of the law, which they shall teach thee.

And the echo is gone.

6:01 The Teaching

In Deuteronomy, the word grows. Moses stands at the edge of the land, and speaks for thirty chapters; and the whole speech gets the name. וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר שָׂם מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל **Ve-zot ha-torah asher sam Mosheh lifnei benei Yisra'el**. And this is the תּוֹרָה **torah**; that Moses set before the sons of Israel. It has the article now.

The Teaching. To this day, that verse is said, or sung, in the synagogue; when the scroll is lifted up, for everybody to see.

From there, the name spread to all five books; from Genesis to Deuteronomy. They are the Torah.

Now think what is in those five books. There are commandments; hundreds of them. But the first book is story, almost from end to end. A garden. A flood.

A tower. Abraham. Jacob. Joseph. Call the five books, the Law; and Genesis hardly belongs in them.

Call them, the Teaching; and it belongs very well. Stories teach.

7:04 Where "law" came from

So where did, law, come from? By the road you know from the last two bonuses. More than two thousand years ago, the Torah was put into Greek; and for our word, the translators chose: nomos. A wide word in Greek. Custom; a whole way of life; as well as

statute.

The Latin Bible put: lex. And the first English Bibles put, law, for that. At each step, the word grew a little narrower; until English readers heard only the courtroom.

Law, is not a mistake. The Torah holds laws. But law is the smaller word. It keeps the commandments; and loses the road; the mother; and the story.

And some newer translations have gone back. One widely used Jewish translation now has: the teaching of the LORD, is his delight.

8:01 Day and night

So go back to the psalm; with the word in your ear. **כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חֶפְצוֹ Ki im be-torat Adonai cheftso.** But in the **תּוֹרָה torah** of the LORD, is his delight. **וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יֶהְגֶּה יוֹמָם וָלָיְלָה U-ve-torato yehgeh yomam va-laylah.** And his **תּוֹרָה torah**, he murmurs; day and night.

Murmurs? The King James says, meditate; and that sounds silent. The Hebrew verb is a sound. Isaiah uses it of a lion, over its prey. **כַּאֲשֶׁר יֶהְגֶּה הָאַרְיֵה Ka-asher yehgeh ha-aryeh.**

As the lion growls. And he uses it of a dove. **אֶהְגֶּה כַּיּוֹנָה Ehgeh ka-yonah.** I moan, like a dove. It is a low noise in the throat.

In the ancient world, reading was done aloud; even alone. A man with a text spoke it, half aloud, to himself; over and over. Joshua is told the same thing, in the same words; and the same verse says where the Torah is to be. It shall not depart, from your mouth.

So this is the man of the first psalm. He is no lawyer. He has been shown a way, by one he trusts. He is glad of it. And he says it over to himself, as he goes; like a dove under the roof.

9:19 What the word holds

One thing to do. Open Psalm one, in your own Bible; all six verses; and say, teaching, in verse two. Then look at Psalm one hundred and nineteen; the longest chapter in the Bible. Our word stands in it twenty-five times.

And when you next meet, the law, in your English Bible; try: the teaching; and see what changes. **שָׁלוֹם Shalom.**

Until next time: **לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם lekh leshalom.** Go in peace.