

Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

My main purpose in creating these English readings is to help me master the Hebrew text itself. I work by comparing four or five English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. By the time I have done this, I feel that I have mastered that Hebrew *pasuk*, and made it my own.

I create English readings that can be sung to the tropes used for the Hebrew, and which follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope.

My ideal listener is the person who knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting (either in Hebrew or in English), and who wants to hear a translation that helps bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this reason I often use verbal tricks to make the English word order match the Hebrew, but only if it makes the English easy to follow. (More specifically, I wish to make it sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken*).

I also want to give the person who knows little or no Hebrew an experience of what the text chanted to the trope melodies sounds like. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

If one examines the authoritative translations, it becomes clear that there are many passages in the text of whose meaning the experts are unsure. In those situations I attempt to choose a reading which scans well with the melody, and which agrees with some (or at least one) of the authoritative renderings.

The trope melodies I used were taken from the book CHANTING THE HEBREW BIBLE by Joshua R. Jacobson. In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh *or* yetiv kadma *or* pashta geresh
gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana “lean toward” the words they “conjoin” to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, geresh, gershayim, and telisha gedola “lean away” from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed at the *end* of the word).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations: [clings to her skirts] The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* “rivi’i” melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of this device, I indicate the following pairs of tropes by “wrapping them around” the phrase which will have the combined melody:

mercha/tipcha	kadma/geresh	mercha siluk
(Renew our days)	(She weeps bitterly).	(a fire-offering to God)

Again, the *leyner* should find the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.