

The Living Torah

The following is a written summary of our [full-length video review](#) featuring excerpts, discussions of key issues and texts, and lots of pictures, and is part of our [Bible Review series](#).

Do you recommend it? Why?

Two thumbs up! The Living Torah is our favourite Jewish translation of the Bible into modern English. Read on to learn why.

Who's this Bible best for?

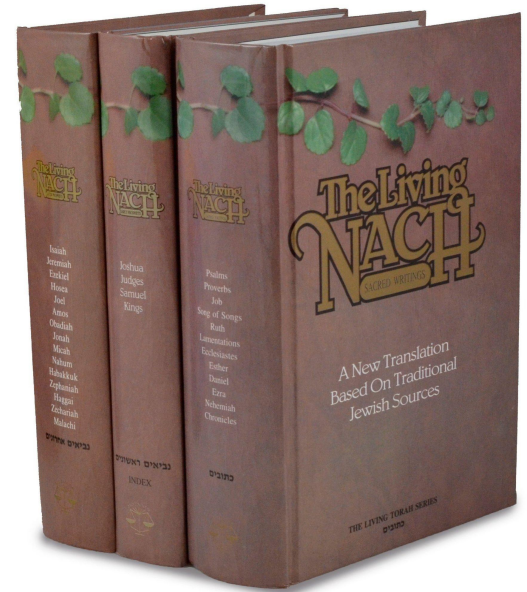
The Living Torah is your best choice if you're looking for a Torah or Tanach that reads easily, is faithful to traditional Jewish interpretation, and has lots of informative notes and pictures. We especially recommend this Bible if you're young, from a non-religious background, or are reading through the Bible for the first time.

Would you suggest this as a primary or a secondary Bible? Why?

First some details. The complete name for this version is the "Living Torah and Nach". It's actually published as a four-volume set, with each book sold separately. The "Living Torah" is the five books of Moses in English. There's also a "Chumash" edition of the Living Torah for synagogue use which has both Hebrew and English

and also includes the Haftarah readings from the Prophets. In addition to the Living Torah there are also the three books of the Living Nach. In this context "Nach" is taken from "Tanach", the acronym for the three sections of Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim (Law, Prophets, and Writings) in the Jewish Bible. The first volume of the Living Nach contains the "Earlier Prophets" from Joshua to Kings, the second volume the "Later Prophets" from Isaiah to Malachi, and the third volume the "Sacred Writings" from Psalms to Chronicles.

So having said that, if you're just wanting a copy of the Torah to carry around and read from this is an excellent choice, although it isn't a small book. If you're wanting an easy-reading Tanach with short informative notes from traditional sources this is also an excellent choice but because of its bulk as a four-volume set it's not very portable and will also be more expensive. See purchase links at bottom for prices.



How's this version's relationship with Judaism?

The Living Torah is a thoroughly Jewish version of the Bible, translated and published by religious Jews. Translator Aryeh Kaplan points out in the Introduction that most "traditional" Jewish translations of the Bible are "for the most part, based on the King James translation. Although a superb scholarly work, this translation is not rooted in Jewish sources, and often goes against traditional Jewish teachings." The surprise here is that, while the Living Torah uses modern language, it's actually more traditional than the older "traditional" translations. Kaplan goes on to criticize other "modern translations" as being "even more divorced from Judaic sources" because "while archaeological and linguistic discoveries may be extremely interesting, they are not part of an unbroken tradition. Many Jewish traditions regarding how to translate the Torah date no more than a thousand years after its writing. Since change was slow to come in ancient times, one would expect these traditions to have a high degree of reliability." The conclusion: "These traditions form a fundamental area of Jewish faith. No less than the Torah itself, the Talmud and its cognate works are part of Jewish tradition. A translation that disregards the teachings of the ancient sages will appear strange, almost alien, to the modern Jewish reader."

This attention to traditional interpretation doesn't just come through in the actual translation - it also comes through in the notes. The Introduction explains, "The major alternative interpretations are presented in the notes. Where some highly ambiguous verses are concerned, this might mean preserving as many as a dozen different opinions. Rather than discuss each opinion, we have translated the verse according to each authority in the notes."

The name of God is handled in a creatively Jewish way too: "The convention, following the Septuagint, is to

translate the Tetragrammaton as "the Lord" and *Elohim* as "God." This, however often produces strained results, and somehow, referring to God as "the Lord" has a distinctly un-Jewish flavor. We have therefore consistently used "God" as the favored name, since it is the most often used."

And finally, it probably goes without saying that the books of the Tanach, as well as individual chapters and verses, are all organized according to the traditional Jewish order. Notably, the Living Torah was also one of the first translations structured around the *parshiyot* (the traditional division of the Torah text).

Who's the publisher and when did it come out?



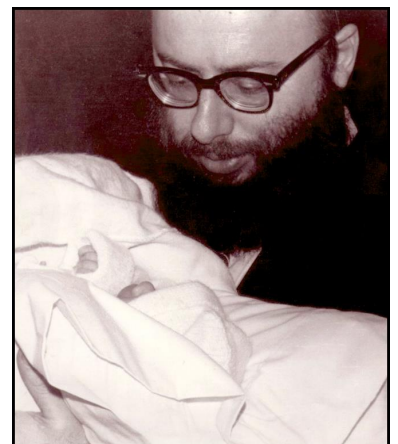
The Living Torah and Nach is published by Moznaim Publishing which was founded in 1977 by Rabbi Hanoah Vagshal and is located in Brooklyn, but the actual books are printed in Jerusalem by the Israeli division Vagshal Ltd. Strangely, the publisher is written as "Maznaim" in Volume 1 but this appears to be anomalous. In addition to the Living Torah, Moznaim publishes several other books written by chief translator Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan.

The Living Torah first came out in 1981. It wasn't until 14 years later at the initiation of Rabbi Vagshal that this "holy task" was continued and finally completed with Volumes 2, 3, and 4 coming out in 1994, 1995, and 1998 respectively.

Who translated it and what's their story?

The Living Torah was so close to Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan's heart that he called it his "tenth child". Kaplan's backstory doesn't just explain why he cared so much about making the Torah relatable - it also lends force to his encouragement that "if you are willing to devote your life to continued growth, there are virtually no limits to the levels you can reach."

Rabbi Aryeh Moshe Eliyahu Kaplan started out as Leonard Martin Kaplan, born in the Bronx in 1934 to non-religious Sephardic parents Samuel and Fannie who nicknamed him "Len". When he was only 13 tragedy struck - his mother died and his two younger sisters Sandy and Barbara were sent away to a foster home. Teenaged Len took the breakup of his family so hard that before long he was expelled from school and ended up on the streets. Even though he'd hit rock bottom and wasn't from an observant family Leonard went to synagogue to say the Kaddish prayer for his mother. There a 14-year-old Chasidic boy named Henoah noticed he looked lost, befriended him, and brought him home. Little did Len's new siblings know when they started teaching him Hebrew that it would be the beginning of his meteoric rise through yeshivas in New York, Los Angeles, and Jerusalem that would culminate in his Rabbinic ordination at the age of 22 at the hands of two of



the greatest Rabbis of his generation - Yithak Herzog (Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel) and Eliezer Yehuda Finkel (son of the legendary Nossan Tzvi Finkel, the Alter of Slobodka himself.)

Now a Rabbi, Kaplan moved back to America in the late 1950s and began a second brilliant career which included four years as a Nuclear Physicist in Washington DC. 1961 turned out to be a pivotal year - he met and married Tobie Goldstein, with whom he had nine children over the next two decades. He also completed his Bachelor's degree in Physics before moving on to his Master's two years later in 1963. 29-year-old Kaplan was a sensation. A scientific "Who's Who" described him as the most promising young physicist in America. His personal connections included notable physicists such as Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Los Alamos Project and father of the Atom Bomb. Rabbi Kaplan's experiences as a physicist helped prepare him for his later career as a prolific author - not only did they give him a unique perspective on Torah and the spiritual teachings of Judaism, they also enabled him to process enormous amounts of information from ancient Jewish writings and then summarize them in easy-to-understand ways. In his own words, "I use my physics background to analyze and systemize data, very much as a physicist would deal with physical reality."

In 1965 Kaplan's life took a new direction. He and Tobie, along with their first two children, moved to Iowa to serve as Rabbi. For the next six years he worked in a total of four mostly Conservative congregations in Iowa, Tennessee, New Jersey, and upstate New York. These experiences representing the Jewish community in the "Bible Belt" and caring for the spiritual needs of less-than-Orthodox Jews further equipped the brilliant spiritual leader to engage his generation where they were at, and he embraced it head-on. Rabbi Kaplan joined local Ministerial Associations shoulder-to-shoulder with his wife, participated in Interfaith dialogues, and hosted as many as twenty church groups per month - showing them around the synagogue, fielding questions, and evoking a mixture of laughter and mystified looks with an offhand remark that the shofar he was showing the group wasn't the one that would be blown at the Second Coming.



While maintaining traditional Jewish disagreements with Christianity, Aryeh Kaplan was also an original thinker. He proposed that "We can even regard the miracles ascribed to Jesus to be true without undermining our own faith, since his message was not to the Jews at all." He came across as generous and openminded: "In a sense, every religion is an open eye upon God, giving us its own flat, one-dimensional view. It is only the totality of them all that can give us a multidimensional view of the Divine and a panorama of infinite depth." He cut through the clutter and brought the conversation back to God: "We often spend much effort in making a god out of our particular religion. Shouldn't we spend just as much effort in

making our religion a religion of God?" And he was frank and secure, not only including ancient Jewish interpretations of the Bible that supported later Christian beliefs in his notes to the Living Torah, but freely discussing the Jewishness of Jesus: "Christianity began with a Jew. Jesus lived as a Jew, around the same time as many of our greatest Talmudic sages. The great Hillel lived just a generation earlier, and Rabbi Akiba, a generation after. Our own sources, however, record very little about Jesus' life. Everything that we know about him is found in the Gospels of the New Testament." For more on this topic please watch the [video review](#).

In 1971 37-year-old Kaplan moved to Brooklyn and commenced his prolific career as an author. Over the next 10 years he produced a staggering 50+ books explaining Judaism like no one else could - as a traditional Rabbi with a background as street kid and physicist, synthesizing massive quantities of data from divergent streams into easy-to-read and understandable conversations geared to teenagers. His subjects ranged from handbooks on Jewish thought to meditation and mysticism, from Hasidic parables and teachings to a Jewish wedding guide. He also wrote about Jewish rituals such as Shabbat, mikveh, tzitzit, and tefillin in a way that made them meaningful and attractive. Kaplan's books were a wildfire and did much to spark the "teshuvah phenomenon", a movement of secular Jews returning to Judaism. Kaplan's humble response to being one of the prime factors behind this movement was to remark, "Throughout history Jews have always been observant - the teshuvah movement is just a normalization. The Jewish people are sort of getting their act together. We're just doing what we're supposed to do." It was at the height of this creative streak, and in the midst of the teshuvah movement, that Rabbi Kaplan wrote "The Living Torah". (See his other books on [Amazon here](#) and watch the [video review here](#) for some of the things Kaplan said that lit up his generation.)

On July 7, 1980 Rabbi Kaplan wrote this heartfelt conclusion: "As if by divine providence, this translation took me exactly nine months to complete, and in a sense, it is my tenth child. If anything, one's love for the Torah can transcend that of any mere human being. It is my prayer that this translation bring the word of God to the millions of Jews to whom the Hebrew original is still a closed book. May they see not only the text itself, but the infinitude of depth that lies beneath it. And for those familiar with the original sources, may it also open new vistas and provide new insights. May it be a small step in bringing our people back to their heritage, and may it be a small contribution in bringing about the final redemption."

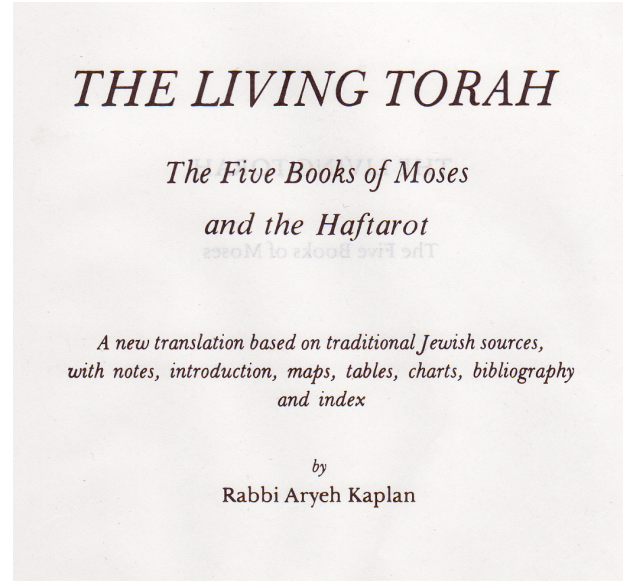
Not even two years after the Living Torah came out, Rabbi Kaplan died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack on January 28, 1983 at the age of 48 and was buried on the Mount of Olives. Prior to his death Aryeh Kaplan had written, possibly presciently, "Many of us think of death as a most frightening experience. Tzaddikim, on the other hand, have looked forward to it. Shortly before his death, Rabbi Nachman of Breslav said, 'I very much want to divest myself of this garment that is my body.' If we truly believe and trust in a merciful God, then death has no terror for us."



As previously mentioned, it wasn't until 14 years later that the work of the Living Torah was carried on and the three volumes of the Living Nach were completed. The Early Prophets were translated by Yaakov Elman, professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University. The Later Prophets were a team effort, Elman translating the three 'Major Prophets' assisted by Leib Moscovitz (Professor of Talmud at Bar-Ilan University) and Shalom Kaplan while the twelve 'Minor Prophets' were translated by Rabbi Moshe Schapiro, assisted by Moshe Mykoff. The final volume, Sacred Writings, were again a joint production, this time between Schapiro and Mykoff who were joined by Gavriel Rubin.

Is it more word-for-word or thought-for-thought?

The Living Torah walks the fine line between traditional and readable. As more of a thought-for-thought "dynamic equivalent" it's understandable, while the footnotes listing alternative interpretations communicate as much as possible of the original meaning of the text. This balance is one of the greatest strengths of this translation and was a new phenomenon in the world of Jewish Bibles. The closest thing to it was the Jewish Publication Society's new translation of the Torah which had come out almost twenty years earlier in 1962 and used modern language but lacked the extensive notes and bibliography of the Living Torah. The same can be said for the three volumes of the Living Nach which came out between 1994 and 1998 - while the Jewish Publication Society had published their modern translation ten years earlier in 1985 and Artscroll came out with theirs in 1996, the Living Nach's notes and visuals still made it the best choice for readers looking for a Jewish Bible that gave the fullest sense of the original text in an understandable way.



The contrast between the Living Torah's approach to translation and that of older English versions such as the 1967 [Koren Jerusalem Bible](#) can be seen in the Introduction: "The philosophy of this translation has been to treat the Torah as a living document. Our sages teach that "every day the Torah should be as new." This indicates that even a translator may not treat the Torah as an archaic document. It also implies that archaic or obsolete language must not be used when translating the Torah, because this language gives the impression of the Torah being old, not new. Thus, for example, many purists still insist on translating the second person singular as "thee," because Hebrew distinguishes between the second person singular and plural. It is obvious that this would, indeed, make the translation more "accurate." But, on the other hand, it would also give the text an archaic flavor, no matter how modern the rest of the language. For this reason, expressions such as this one were not used."

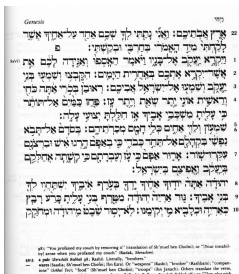
The Introduction continues, describing the problem with hyper-literal translations and the place of interpretation and tradition in the philosophy behind the Living Torah: "When one translates literally, word for word, ambiguities in the original may be preserved, if not aggravated. But if the translator must understand the text, he also has the responsibility to interpret it. To do so correctly, he must not only analyze the text very carefully, but he must also study all the works that interpret it. A good example is the Torah's description of the Tabernacle and Priestly vestments. Many passages are highly ambiguous, and without help from the tradition, it is very difficult to picture these items. If the translator does not begin with a picture, the translation will be even more difficult to understand than the original. The reader will complete the text having little idea as to what is actually meant. On the other hand, if the translator has a good mental image of the Tabernacle, it will come across in his translation. The ambiguities (which most probably stem from our lack of knowledge of

Biblical idiom) vanish, and a clear picture emerges. If actual illustrations and diagrams can be added to the text, clarity is enhanced all the more."

The Introduction goes on to also explain how this philosophy works with idioms: "The greatest mistake any translator could make would be to translate an idiom literally. Imagine an expression such as, "I have a frog in my throat," translated into another language, in which its idiomatic meaning is not known. It is obvious that the Torah contains much idiomatic usage, and translating it literally (as do most translations) distorts the meaning of the text. To a large degree, the "Oral Torah" consists of a tradition as to how to render the idiomatic language of the Torah. Thus, the Oral Tradition teaches that the expression literally translated, "between the eyes" (Exodus 13:9), is actually an idiom denoting the center of the head just above the hairline. To translate it literally would not only go against tradition, but would be incorrect. The Talmud itself warns of this. In one of the most important teachings regarding translation, the Talmud states, "One who translates a verse literally is misrepresenting the text. But one who adds anything of his own is a blasphemer." The Talmud realizes that one who translates literally will often find himself translating idiomatic language, and to do so literally is the cardinal sin of translation. One must clearly understand what is to be taken literally and what is to be taken idiomatically. However, one may not add anything of his own. Any such judgment must be based firmly on tradition."

And finally, the Introduction talks about Torah as story: "The narratives of the Torah were meant to read like a story, and this too must be preserved in translation. In telling a story, there is no room for heavy language or complex sentence structure. The final goal is always clarity and readability. An example of idiom is the manner in which the Torah handles dialogue. In English, this is handled by setting each statement in quotation marks and beginning it as a new paragraph. There is then no need to repeat the name of the person speaking. In Hebrew, the same goal is attained by repeating the expression, "And he said" before each statement. Translating this literally can be very awkward and repetitive. What we have done in a number of places is simply to translate "And he said" with a set of quotation marks." If this last note especially resonates with you check out [Yeshua Groups](#), a network of groups getting together 'campfire style' to tell the stories of Scripture and talk about them.

Does it also have the Hebrew text?



As mentioned above, there is a "Chumash" edition for synagogue use which includes the Haftarah readings from the Prophets, has both the original Hebrew and the English "Living Torah" translation, and opens from right to left like a classic Jewish *sefer*. (This is the version pictured at the beginning of this review.) Beyond this, the standard edition Living Torah and Nach don't have the original text and open from left to right like regular English books. See purchase links at the bottom of this review for each of these editions.

How are Hebrew personal names written?

Most personal names are written in their traditional English form, especially if they're well-known or have a book of the Bible named after them. For instance Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses and Joshua; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc. The slight exception is Rebekah which is spelled Rebecca.

In the case of lesser-known names the letter ב /vet is written as "v" rather than the older more traditional "b", for instance in the names Aminadav, Eliav, and Avidan in Numbers 1. Likewise the letter צ /tzadi is written as "tz" instead of the more traditional "z", for instance in the names Tzuri-shaddai and Padah-tzur which are also in Numbers 1.

As seen in the two foregoing examples some names are also written with a hyphen, presumably to reflect the fact that in Hebrew they're contractions of multiple words. Other names are written with a colon to represent the letter א /ayin as seen in Gid'oni, Pag'iel, and D'euel which are also to be found in Numbers 1.

How are Hebrew place names written?

Similar to personal names, most well-known geographical names are written in their traditional English form (Jerusalem, Hebron, Bethlehem, and Babylon) while lesser-known names are transliterated closer to their original Hebrew pronunciations, retaining the "tz" and "v" sounds and sometimes punctuated with a hyphen or colon.

True to its reputation of being a readable and understandable translation, when it's relevant the Living Bible *translates* place names instead of simply transliterating them. So for instance in the list of Israel's camping spots in Numbers 33 Pi-hahiroth is translated as Freedom Valley, Baal-zephon as Lord-of-the-North, Migdal as Tower, and Kibroth-hattaavah as Graves-of-Craving.

How are Hebrew book names written?

The names of the books of the Bible are written in their traditional English form - Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Chronicles, etc. Yet one more way the Living Torah is made to be friendly to the newb.

How are the names of God written?

As cited earlier, "God" is written in place of the Tetragrammaton. An exception to this rule is to be found in Exodus 3:15 where God's name is represented by "YHVH". We'll cite this passage in greater detail as an excellent example of the Living Torah's dynamic translation style and carefully sourced notes. God tells Moses, 'You must [then] say to the Israelites, 'YHVH, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,

sent me to you.' This is My eternal name, and this is how I am to be recalled for all generations. Go, gather the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'YHVH, the God of your fathers, appeared to me - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'" While roughly transliterating the letters of the Divine Name, the notes are still careful to preserve its sanctity.: "YHVH - This is the Tetragrammaton which may not be pronounced under any circumstances (cf. *Sanhedrin* 90a; Philo, *De Vida Moses* 3:519, 529). If this section is read out loud, this name should be read as 'Lord' (cf. Septuagint). This name denotes God's utter transcendence (*Kuzari* 2:2; *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:61). This name also denotes the creative power that constantly sustains the universe. God is telling Moses that not only is the initial purpose of creation now being fulfilled, but also the process that will insure its continual existence." It goes on to comment on "eternal name": "The Tetragrammaton denotes the level where past, present and future are the same (*Tur, Orach Chaim* 5; Rabbi Eliezer of Garmiza on *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:1).

The verses directly prior are also relevant. Moses asks in verse 13, "I will go to the Israelites and say, 'Your fathers' God sent me to you.' They will immediately ask me what His name is. What shall I say to them?' 'I Will Be Who I Will Be,' replied God to Moses. God then explained, 'This is what you must say to the Israelites: 'I Will Be sent me to you.' The notes comment, "I Will Be...": *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* in Hebrew. This is a Divine Name (*Shevuoth* 35a), and it is therefore not translated by the *Targum*. It denotes that God has absolute existence (*Moreh Nevukhim* 1:63; cf. Septuagint), and that He is outside the realm of time (Sforno). According to the Kabbalists, this Name denotes the Crown (*Kether*) of creation, that is, the very first thought and impulse of Will that initiated the creative process. Hence it is 'I will be,' since at the time of that impulse, everything was in the future. This first thought is identified with the idea of Israel (*Bereshith Rabbah* 1:5; *Berakhoth* 6a; *Tikkuney Zohar* 17a; see *God Man and Tefillin*, p. 35 ff.). This name was revealed now that God was about to create the nation Israel.

The Hebrew title *Elohim* is handled in a somewhat dynamic manner also. While it's usually rendered as "God" (for instance in Genesis 1:1) in Exodus 3:6 we read "Moses hid his face, since he was afraid to look at the Divine." When *Eloheinu* is used in conjunction with the name of God, where older translations would read "the LORD our God", the Living Torah phrases it "God our Lord". The Introduction explains: "'Lord' has been used secondarily. This also reduces wordiness, since instead of "the Lord our God" we translate such a passage as "God our Lord".

El Elyon is phrased "God Most High". *Adonai Yhvh* is "Lord, God". *El Shaddai* is "God Almighty" with the note "*Shaddai* is interpreted as being the same as *she-dai*, 'He who has sufficient [power]' (Rashi)." *El Kana* is phrased as "a God who demands exclusive worship" with the note, " (Hirsch). *Kana* in Hebrew, used exclusively with relation to God; Exodus 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:24, 5:9, 6:15; cf. Joshua 24:19, Nahum 1:2. On the basis of the verbal form, 'jealous,' 'zealous,' or 'vengeful' (*Mekhilta*; Rashi), but more accurately, 'acting to punish' (*Moreh Nevukhim* 1:44; cf. Saadia Gaon)." *Ruach Yhvh* is "God's spirit". And *ruach kodshecha* in Psalm 51:13 is "Your holy spirit".

How are key terms rendered?

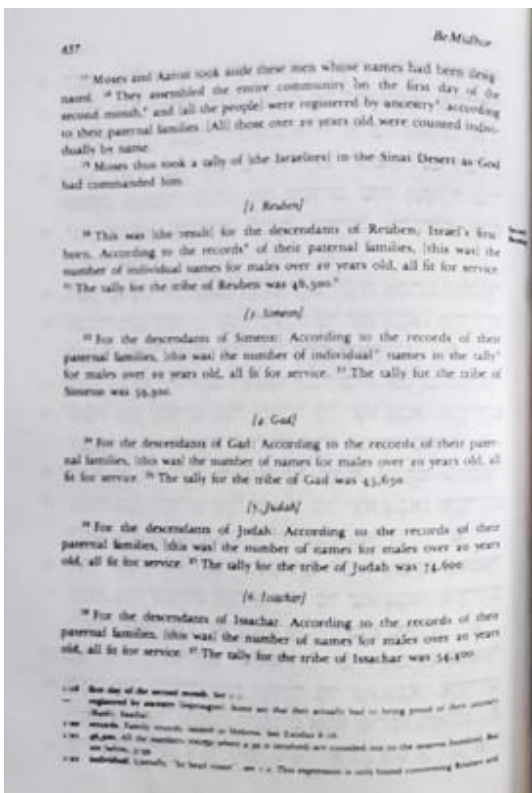
A sampling of keywords reveals again how dynamic this translation is, attempting to use just the right English word to capture the original energy of the Hebrew. *Acharit ha'yamim* is translated as "the final days", *brit* as "pledge" in Genesis 6:18 with the note "usually translated as covenant", *chesed v'emet* as kindness/love and truth/faith, *chukat olam* as eternal law, *ezer k'negdo* as compatible helper, *ger* as proselyte, *hasatan* as Satan, *matzot* as God's festival of matzahs, *mikra kodesh* as sacred holiday, *mo'ed* as festival/special time, *nephilim* as titans(!), *ohel mo'ed* as Communion Tent, *serafim* as fiery angels, *shabbaton* as day of rest, *sheol* as grave, *sukkot* as Sukkoth with the note "denoting thatched huts", *teruah* as sounding [of the ram's horn], *totafot* as "insignia" in Exodus 13:16 with excellent notes too long to replicate here, *tzedakah* as "righteousness" in Genesis 15:5 with the note "also meaning charity. Others interpret it, 'and he (Abraham) counted it as charity' (Ramban)" and elsewhere as charity, *tzitzit* as "tassels" and *techelet* as "sky-blue wool", *yada* as realize/give special attention, and *kippod* as...swamp owl. Not hedgehog.



How are the Messianic prophecies interpreted?

You'll have to [watch the video review here](#) for an in-depth discussion of that!

How's the general layout and navigability?



The Living Torah isn't just an easy-reading translation - the way it's laid out on the page is easy on the eye too. Clear readable text at the top, notes on the bottom, and then at the very top you'll see page number, the book with chapter and verse, and Torah portion.

In addition to the conventional chapter and verse the text is also divided up into the more ancient *parsha* and *sidra* sections. The Intro explains: "In the original, the Torah's text is broken into natural divisions known as *parshioth*. The text is also divided according to the weekly portions read from the Torah in synagogue, *sidroth* in Hebrew. In this volume, every *parshah* has been numbered and captioned. This will provide the reader with a feeling for the original text, as it existed before the scripture was broken into chapter and verse. The captions also serve to break up the text and give the reader a frame of reference. This system has also been incorporated into the Table of Contents, which is the first ever to list each *parshah* of the Torah. The *sidra* names

are also included in the Table of Contents, and in the running head on the top of the inside left hand page. This can serve as a ready reference where one can quickly find any idea in the Torah. The reader will also find the Table of Contents useful insofar as it will enable him to see the general structure of the Torah."

For visuals [watch the video review](#).

What does it have for notes, appendices, and extras?

The Living Torah and Nach is worth purchasing for the notes alone which, as was already touched on, are a compendium of traditional commentaries, alternative readings, and historical information, and even sport the occasional black and white sketch of the flora and fauna that show up on the pages of Tanach. In many places these concise small-print notes take up the bottom half of the page, and in some places almost the entire page. The Bibliography at the back listing and describing the sources cited is 23 pages long and features almost 400 commentators, historians, books, and tractates, and that's just the first of the four volumes! The Intro explains best.

Notes: "The Living Torah is a volume that is meant to be read and enjoyed. The language has been kept simple enough for even a fairly young child to understand the text and enjoy the stories. For the person who wishes to delve deeper, there are extensive notes, explaining most areas where questions are likely to occur. References to the notes are indicated

in the text by an asterisk (*). The asterisk therefore tells the reader that there is a note on the word or phrase that he is reading. In many cases, the major alternative interpretations of a verse are presented in the notes. Where some highly ambiguous verses are concerned, this might mean presenting as many as a dozen different opinions. Rather than

discuss each opinion, we have translated the verse according to each authority in the notes. In the notes, we have also tried to identify each person and place to the best of our ability. Both parallel texts from the Scripture, and Talmudic and Midrashic works have been widely consulted. Where geographical places are concerned, modern geographers too have been consulted. Although the notes were not meant as a commentary, they are intended to help the reader understand the text. Where the text does not provide all the information needed for comprehension, it has been supplied in the notes.

- ²⁷ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb.
²⁸ As she was in labor, one of them put out an arm. The midwife grasped it and tied a crimson thread* on it. "This one came out first," she announced.
²⁹ He pulled his hand back, and then his brother came out. "You have

38:18 wrap. *Pethilah* in Hebrew. This is alternatively translated as a cloak (*Targum*; Rashi), a belt (Saadia; Rashbam), a hood (Radak), or the special shawl worn by aristocrats (Ramban; cf. *Tzava'ath Yehudah* 12:4). Ancient sources note that in the Middle East, people usually wore a long tunic reaching to the feet, with a short white cloak thrown around them, and besides this, people would always carry a seal and a walking stick with an elaborately carved top (Herodotus 1:195). The *pethilah* would then be the white cloak. Other sources indicate that the seal and string (*pethilah*) were to bind the sheep, and the staff was the shepherd's crook (*Sekhel Tov*).

38:21 religious prostitute. *Kedeshah* in Hebrew. See Deuteronomy 23:18 which seems to indicate that the pagan custom was to use the hire of such prostitutes for sacrifice. The *kedeshah* is also associated with sacrifice in Hosea 4:14. See Numbers 25:1,2. Ancient sources state that among the Amorites it was a custom that girls would have to sit seven days as prostitutes before being married (*Tzava'ath Yehudah* 12:2; cf. Herodotus 1:199; also see *Kethuboth* 3b). Judah had no interest in her as a sacred prostitute, and, therefore, above (38:15), the word *zonah* denoting a simple prostitute, is used.

38:24 burned. It seems that there was no legal justification to burn her, but Judah was using the discretionary power given to the courts to prevent immorality by imposing particularly harsh punishments (Mizrachi;

Bibliography: "This volume also contains an extensive bibliography, listing virtually every work cited in the notes. For the most part, traditional Jewish sources have been used. In some cases, Jewish sources that are not considered part of the mainstream tradition have been cited, but these are always sources that are, at least on occasion, quoted in mainstream traditional sources. Although some ancient classical non-Jewish sources have been quoted, they are used mainly to clarify questions of geography or history, and not to explain the text."

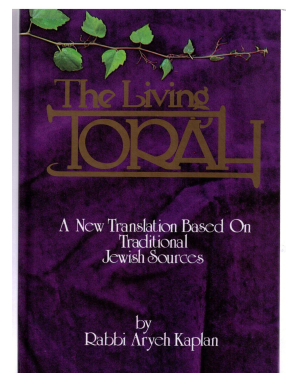
The Living Torah's volumes also feature handy indices: "An important feature of this volume is a comprehensive index, which is in itself a major work. Every name, place, law, idea, and concept that appear either in the text or the notes has been indexed. The index therefore opens up the text and makes it possible to find anything at a glance. Those who have spent hours trying to find an obscure reference will immediately welcome this feature."

The Intro concludes: "The volume is rounded out with maps, illustrations, diagrams and charts—everything needed to make it more understandable. No effort has been spared in making this the most comprehensive one volume translation of the Torah available." And the effort shows! In addition to the hundreds of black and white sketches of plants and animals and the dozens of "plates" illustrating everything from Moses' Genealogy and the Tabernacle Furnishings to Kosher Mammals and The Stomachs of a Cow, the four volumes also set the world of the Tanach in a solid geographical context with a total of 153 maps. The three volumes of the Living Nach also have helpful lists of the Haftorah readings at the front and a couple pages of Introduction before each book. Two other notable extras are the chronology of the 12 'Later Prophets' on page 488 of that volume, and a four-page appendix to Psalms in the 'Sacred Writings' wrestling with the "perplexing episode" of David and Bathsheba.

[Watch the video review](#) to see more of these sketches, maps, and plates for yourself.

How would you summarize the positives/negatives of this Bible?

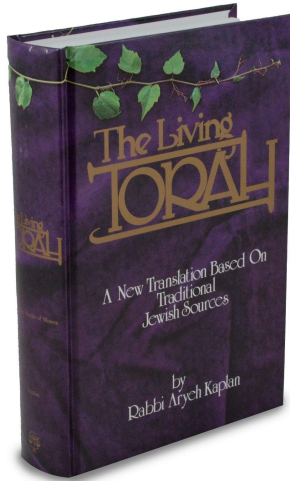
As you've seen, the Living Torah and Nach has many things going for it. The stated goal of this translation says it best: "What we have attempted to provide is a translation of Judaism's most important Book, that is accurate, clear, modern, readable, and above all, in consonance with the living tradition of Judaism. While most of the translation will be understandable even to a young teenager, there is considerable material that even the advanced scholar will find of interest. It is meant to be a book that can be given to a boy on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, and yet remain the subject of lifelong study. It is a volume that can be extremely valuable to the layperson and specialist alike. It will make studying the Torah a living experience for all."



As for negatives, we don't have any real problems with this version but there are three factors that may be an issue for some readers - size, cost, and publishing quality. As already mentioned, the combined four volumes run upwards of \$100 and are rather bulky which isn't helped by the standard paper thickness. The publishing

quality in general isn't bad but is pretty basic. Some readers may not appreciate how the Living Torah looks more like an average hardcover than a true holy book. On the other hand, some readers may like how this version feels more like a regular book, giving a down-to-earth vibe similar to how Rabbi Kaplan himself came across. It all comes down to personal preference.

Which formats can I get it in, and where?



The English Living Torah has gone through three editions. The newest can be ordered on Amazon [here](#). If you're looking for a lower-priced used copy take a look at the first and second editions [here](#) and [here](#). The English Living Torah was also originally published as a five-volume set but it's rather rare and expensive as you can see [here](#).

The Hebrew/English "Chumash" edition of the Living Torah can be had [here](#). There's also a Russian-only edition (!) [here](#).

For the Living Nach, the Early Prophets are available [here](#), the Later Prophets can be ordered [here](#), and you can get a copy of the Sacred Writings for yourself [here](#).

And if you're interested in other books by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, peruse them [here](#).

P.S. If you use these links we'll receive a small percentage of your purchase so if you appreciated this review use them to get yourself a copy and support our work at the same time. Be sure to also watch the [video reviews](#), check out our other [Bible Reviews](#), and [become a member](#)!