

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

Dr. Herbert Block's essay "Distinguishing Jacob and Israel" (XXXIV:3, July-September 2006) is insightful. However, Jacob's days of mourning for Joseph is in Genesis 37, not Genesis 32. Genesis 47:29 refers to "Israel" – not "Jacob" – acknowledging his forthcoming death. It is Genesis 48:20-22, not 48:29-30, that refers to Israel blessing Joseph's children and Joseph's portion.

I believe that Dr. Block's reference to Jacob calling his sons to gather around him in Genesis 49:2, as contrasted with Israel's urging his children to listen to their father is on target. Genesis 49:2 (stich 1) has Jacob inviting his children "to assemble yourselves and hear". Stich 2 has Israel inviting his children "to listen." May I suggest the following reason. Calling his children to gather around is much like the idiom in English "to stand around and do nothing." However the word "*lishmoah*" is both active and passive. That word appears in both stiches of verse 2. In the first part of the verse Jacob the passive is calling on his children to hear. We know that frequently people hear but do not listen. That is why the same word appears in the second half of that verse with Israel calling on his children to "listen." Hearing is passive, listening is active.

Finally, it is interesting that when discussions were held nearly a half-century ago the founders of the modern State of Israel chose the name "Israel" over the suggestions made by others to call the Jewish state "Judea." I would like to believe that Dr. Block's understanding was prescient.

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Sir,

It was with both joy and trepidation that I saw Professor Dan Vogel's book review of Yakov Azriel's [first] poetry book, *Threads From A Coat Of Many Colors: Poems on Genesis* (XXXIV:3, July-September 2006). Why my 'joy' and why my 'trepidation'? The joy – Because I really feel for, admire, indeed love, and am even 'envious' of Azriel's poetry. I am a poetess too, and published too, and it is a very rare poet – male or female – who I am "envious" of only because he or she has the brains and the guts to write what I would have wished to be able to write. Yakov Azriel is one such poet! In other words,

there are very few poets who I would be "envious" of, but Azriel has such distinction in my own poetic eyes and in my own poetic ears. I will return to my words "my poetic ears" regarding Azriel's poetry in a future paragraph.

But why "trepidation" when I encountered Dan Vogel's book review? Trepidation because Vogel, a brilliant man in his own right, could have been overly critical of Azriel's book, giving it a harsh review. Glad to say, Vogel was all-in-all positive in his review, recommending the book well, as well as his showing some vivid examples of Azriel's texts. Vogel himself is a PhD and a professor, justifying his true ability to be a critic.

Nonetheless, I refer back to my "poetic ears," and with those I now critique Vogel's comment that Azriel's poetry is "mostly free verse." I disagree with Vogel's analysis on that one significant point. I find Azriel's poetry to be fascinating insofar as it is actually quite structured, with a lot of subtle delicate internal rhyme, along with other more obvious external rhyme. Such poetry, by my definition, it is not "free verse." Nonetheless, his poetry is not overly structured nor overly rhythmical. In other words, Azriel's poetry strikes a beautiful balance between being structured and unstructured, and free, and yet not too loosely free. That is my only 'bone of contention' with Vogel's altogether favorable critique.

As for proof of my point, in poem after poem, when read aloud, giving it a voice and giving the listener what to hear – and not just what to read – Azriel manages brilliantly to [indirectly] rhyme such words as – hands / sands / arm[s] . . . sure / hers / others / stars . . . sand / wind / canyon / again . . . on / upon / descend. Reading those words out of context does not really give the full flavor, taste, richness that his poetry truly deserves. Azriel's poetry should be fully read in its fullest context – not in a fractured way that this kind of Letter to the Editor imposes on its readership.

My best suggestion is for others to order and own their own personal copy, to come to their own educated conclusions, and no less importantly, to purely enjoy and bask in the reflected richness glowing from such biblically-inspired poetry. Teachers could use it wisely and their students will not be bored from such a presentation or by a reading of it aloud.

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