

AMAZON REVIEW OF ROBERT ALTER'S BOOK OF PSALMS BY STEVEN TORREY

Customer Review

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★★★★☆ Robert Alter: trite, trivial, banal--Mr Gradgrind translates Hebrew, November 14, 2012

By

Steven J. Torrey

This review is from: The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary (Paperback)

Robert Alter, a Hebrew scholar, has made a translation of the Book of Psalms. He has discussed his translation of Psalm 69 on NPR. Psalm 69: "Save me, Oh God; for the waters are come onto my soul." The Hebrew word for soul is נפש {nephesh} The Greek Septuagint translates as ψυχη; the Latin Vulgate translates with anima. Robert Alter translates with 'neck'. Many modern translations (including Jewish texts) translate nephesh with neck, lips, throat, mouth, forgetting that if the ancient Hebrews had wanted to say "Save me, Oh God for the waters have come unto my throat, lips, mouth, neck", they would have used the appropriate Hebrew word.

Robert Alter argues in his NPR interview that the concept of soul did not exist in those ancient days as we understand it today. However. When Christ says: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37), the modern mind has to suspect, that notion of soul was an old idea even as Christ expressed it. Christ did not invent a concept out of thin air.

Study of Egyptian Literature--The Book of the Dead circa 1550 BCE--has a place for the BA--a principle of the soul. (Plate 27, Chapt 85--Faulkner) The Book of the Dead expresses concepts like eternity, an after-life, disposition of the soul and of the body in that afterlife based on one's behavior in the present life. (Chap CXXV--Budge)

Jonah--swallowed in the belly of the beast--prays: "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul נפש" and most translators retain 'soul.' Read Job:3 for an exposition of despair--Job knows he has been abandoned and beset by God, and does not know why. Read about the Holocaust. Read about the showers of Auschwitz. In those gruesome showers, there was nothing but screech of despair. It is the memorialist who thinks upon that scene and prays: "Save me, Oh God; for the waters are come into my soul." Think of the child at the mercy of a psycho-pathic killer, the child who has no words for that moment. "Save me, Oh God; for the waters are come in unto my soul." A prayer the memorialist is expected to make for the victim who had no prayers, no words. (That seems to be the whole point of Martin Buber's I AND THOU--to create relationship by looking at something completely in all its complexity and horror to grasp the full import. Also the work of meditation described by Ignatius Loyola.

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Or the BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS.)

The Hebrew word for waters--מים--becomes metonymy for despair, anguish, sin, grief. "Save me, Oh God; for the waters--the despair, anguish, sin, grief--are come in unto my soul." And as the Psalm is examined--it is a Psalm of despair. Not a Psalm about drowning--throw a life raft someone. But a Psalm of despair.

By translating soul--שׁוּפָּא--with neck, Robert Alter makes trivial, banal, trite, cynical, superficial the profundity of the religious moment of prayer. And Robert Alter ends up looking like a Mr. Gradgrind of translation. That so many modern Bibles have chosen to mis-translate soul--שׁוּפָּא--with neck, throat, or mouth, and that so many clergy, bishops, rabbis have not challenged this reading suggests they too are trivial, banal, trite, cynical, superficial.

Not so parenthetically, a Jew reading this Psalm in Hebrew would read שׁוּפָּא as soul; what Jew knowing Hebrew would consider translating שׁוּפָּא as anything but soul; for a Jew reading Hebrew to translate otherwise would make such a person look downright mashugana...

The memorialist is expected to pray for those victims. That is what this psalm is for. The memorialist gives voice to victims who had no voice. "Save me, Oh God, the waters are come to my neck." speaks to drowning. "Save me. Oh God; for the waters are come in unto my soul." Speaks to reality of a Jobian moment of despair. For that mistranslation of Psalm 69, I would not recommend this book. Better you should read the 1611 King James. Or Oesterley, or Bittenwieser, or Mowinckle

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Steven J. Torrey says:

Travel in the ancient Mediterranean world was not uncommon. Indeed, the fabled cedars of Lebanon were destroyed, even by David's time, for use in construction of Egyptian ships. So it would not be unreasonable to assume that these notions [from the Book of the Dead] would have been part of the discussion in cafes, market-places, etc. Robert Alter asserts that there was no notion of the after-life in the ancient world of the Hebrews. 1 Samuel 28 concerns the necromancer of Endor who evokes the dead Samuel from out of the grave. The Egyptian Book of the Dead details an afterlife, with judgment in the afterlife based on one's behavior on earth. One has to wonder, then that there was in fact some

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discussion at some level in the Mediterranean world re an afterlife. By the time of Christ the Pharisees and Sadducees debated this question, and again, one must suspect the discussion to have been very ancient.

Mowinckel tells us that the PSALMS were--even in ancient days--part of a liturgical Hebrew service, used in a public venue to celebrate feasts, make lamentation, thanksgiving, etc. This cultic notion of the Psalms would be consistent with the cultic Mesopotamian Akitu Festival--which the Jews would have witnessed while in Babylonia as merchants before they were captive or during the Babylonian captivity . The cultic notion of the Psalms would be consistent with the Egyptian cultic Abydos Funeral Procession--where Egyptian priests traveled in public procession to the funeral temples--since at least 3000 bce.

How old are the Psalms? Mitchell Dahood would assert that they originate from Ugarit and contain an Ugaritic vocabulary. The Jewish priesthood than took over an extant literature and used it for their own needs in cultic ritual. Something like the modern Synagogue service or church service. Hence, Alter's assertion that *nephesh*--*nun/pe/shin*--is nothing more than metonymy for neck.

Robert Alter's assertion in NPR is flat out wrong. He suffers from the worst parochial education possible. Not examining Hebrew literature in light of thought in the Mediterranean world has done him a disservice in his translation, and a disservice to his readers.

Your post: Nov 17, 2012 12:35:44 PM PST

Last edited by you on Nov 17, 2012 12:39:14 PM PST

Steven J. Torrey says:

"Save me, Oh TONY: for the waters are come into my neck." "Save me, Oh God---ELOHIM--; for the waters are come in unto my soul." One is a statement about drowning--Robert Alter's assertion. Another is a statement about profound despair--despair worthy of Job, or of Jews at Auschwitz, or of the child at mercy of the psycho, or the person profoundly afflicted to the the soul. Robert Alter's statement denies the metaphysical import that is at the heart/soul of religion, of prayer. A denial of that metaphysical world. A denial of that religious import. There is no God, there is no punishment in the afterlife, there is no heavenly reward, there is no justice. Better he should play a game of billiards on the Sabbath. Robert Alter finishes the work Hitler started: kill off the soul, kill off that transcendent Deity, complete what Hitler started--dust to dust/ashes to ashes. That is exactly where his mis-translation reduces religion. We

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are not looking at Hebrew literature alone, we are looking at Hebrew Religion. A believe in a Transcendent Deity, a believe in an afterlife, a believe in recompense in that afterlife for temporal existence. (Read TORAH FAITH: THE THIRTEEN PRINCIPLES by Rabbi Zechariah Fendel.)

Edit your post:

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Posted on Feb 12, 2013 4:58:19 PM PST

Last edited by the author on Feb 12, 2013 4:59:25 PM PST

Chicago Fats says:

I think it's generally acknowledged that the Hebrews did not separate body from soul. The body was all there was. It was animated by the breath of God. It seems to me perfectly proper to talk about waters coming up to one's neck, making an actual physical drowning of the body imminent - I.e., extinguishing the breath. Obviously, this speaks to a psychological state in which the speaker feels that he is about to be overwhelmed. The two comments above seem to me to be midrash. Midrash is fine, but is not the starting point Alter provides that with his concrete translation.

You replied with a later post

Reply to this post

Your post, in reply to an earlier post on Feb 12, 2013 5:14:50 PM PST

Steven J. Torrey says:

Your words: "Obviously, this speaks to a psychological state in which the speaker feels that he is about to be overwhelmed. " Which seems to me to be a description of nephesh--a location of despair. Robert Alter says just about the same thing in his NPR talk about this psalm when he suggests nephesh may be "even occasionally essential being." So both of you make an assertion of the soul as 'essential being.' Which is what the Psalm is about--Save my essential being...Oh Lord...

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Posted on Mar 19, 2013 11:21:48 AM PDT

☑ Stephen R. Harris Jr. says:

The reality is that שׁוּׁל is a multi-dimensional word, used throughout the (Hebrew) Bible to convey several different things. It's normal for words in English to take on different meanings based upon their usage. For example: puns against a word provide a different intonation of contextually conveyed meaning than if, for example, the word were being used as imagery or texture in poetry. שׁוּׁל has a Semitic heritage that is much older than Hebrew the roots that we encounter in the Bible, and its variety of semantic intonations in the texts reflect its linguistic heritage. It IS true that modern ontologies of the soul are different than that of our Greco-Roman, Hebrew, Egyptian, or otherwise generally Near Eastern predecessors. The differences in afterlife theology between Hebrew and other Near Eastern cultures are a witness to that, as well as the differences between the Testaments of the Bible. The insistence of rendering שׁוּׁל universally as "soul" is not only etymologically misleading, but semantically elementary. Theologically speaking, it might be appropriate for a Christian to see the use of שׁוּׁל in the Hebrew Bible as a "shadow" of its more complete realization as the "soul" of the New Testament, however when a translator works they have to make a distinction between translation and explanation; to render a word in English in a way that misrepresents its (at the time) contemporary usage, borders on the lines of explanation. Sometimes this is unavoidable, as with idiomatic expressions and so forth, but it is not so with שׁוּׁל. Alter, like any other translator, must make choices when trying to produce an English text that is representative of the Hebrew (or Greek), not just in word but in style as well, and in the present work, I as a translator feel that he has made a noble attempt that a lot of us can learn from even if we still favor more traditional translations that we are more familiar with. Afterall, the inspired text is not the English translation itself, but rather the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts that they represent.

☑ Steven J. Torrey says:

שׁוּׁל would be translated as 'soul' by a Hebrew speaker/reader. Only by an irrational stretch would שׁוּׁל be translated with 'shadow' or 'shade'. And so the sense of the psalm to the Hebrew reader would be: "Save me O god, for the waters have come to my soul."

For me, that statement represents a reality in the existence of a place of spiritual despair that religion address. Those sets of words represent recognition of that reality from others who must witness the act that causes despair. Any other reading is simply shallow and 'not religious.' You may as well be engaging in some kind of talismanic experience.

"Save Me O God for the waters are come into my soul." Robert Alter doesn't understand the poetry in

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those words and so changes the words to something he can understand. That is, to say the least, a novel approach to literary theory. "The horse must think it queer for me to stop without a farmhouse near." Well, since queer has an association with homosexuality not intended by Frost, let's change the word to something more acceptable that dismisses that homosexual element. "The horse must think it odd for be to stop without a farmhouse near." Alter's approach to literary theory would be scorned on comedy central.

Again, and again, and again: those words represent a real place where all people have been. It is not a stretch of the imagination to recognize that place. Our study of psychology, literature, history, reality will make that place self-evident again and again and again.

We need only turn to the events of December 14, 2012, Newtown Ct, to see the reality of those words. Twenty families in despair over the cold blooded murder of their children. A school full of students in despair. Staff in despair. Communities of families of the children.in despair. A neighborhood in despair, a community, a nation. Robert Alter's reading simply fails to recognize a reality of the human condition, a reality that motivates the religious experience, a reality that is the ground of the religious experience.

Shadow, צל or shade--meaning ghost of the dead person, the image of the person, or phantom (the way Dante might have conceived it) in the Septuagint is translated with εἰδωλον;. εἰδωλον; is used some 95 times in the LXX. εἰδωλον; translates many words but not שֵׁנִי . Robert Alter is translating a Hebrew text which had a particular outlook; he is not translating Ugaritic literature.

Your post: Mar 25, 2013 5:13:42 PM PDT

Last edited by you on Mar 25, 2013 5:15:34 PM PDT

Steven J. Torrey says:

To me Robert Alter's translation would please Hitler, Himmler, or Eichmann. What Alter is saying with his mistranslation is that there is no Transcendent Deity, there is no Transcendent Soul. The implications of Alter's mistranslation: Hitler, Himmler, Eichmann, et. al. have no place of judgment in the afterlife. That the Jews who died as martyrs in those death camps--have no place in an afterlife for recompense...

The Pharisees and Sadducees argued that very point in the days of Jesus, so the notion of an afterlife that Jesus spoke of must have been very much a part of the Hebrew world view for many years previous. Again, Alter's inane translation misses a core element to the Hebrew religion.

In reply to your post on Mar 26, 2013 10:27:55 AM PDT

Stephen R. Harris Jr. says:

Excuse me for not communicating clearly enough, but I was not in ANY way shape or form suggesting that שׁוֹרֵב be translated as "shadow." What I said was, "Theologically speaking, it might be appropriate for a Christian to see the use of שׁוֹרֵב in the Hebrew Bible as a 'shadow' of its more complete realization as the 'soul' of the New Testament..." I was using the colloquialism "shadow of...", much like the phrase, "shadow of things to come," to indicate that while שׁוֹרֵב doesn't mean the same thing as Ψυχή, in a theological sense Ψυχή can be seen as a more complete realization of the reality of שׁוֹרֵב in the New Testament. Your suggestion that, "Robert Alter doesn't understand the poetry in those words and so changes the words to something he can understand," and that, "Robert Alter's translation would please Hitler..." is a slippery slope argument that doesn't have anything to do with the art of translation. Let me make something very clear: while a modern Hebrew speaker might understand שׁוֹרֵב to mean, "soul" does NOT mean that is what it meant in its ancient context; usage and meaning changes over time and that is why שׁוֹרֵב in its ancient context is associated with the neck, throat, or the air/wind that passes through it. There is another word for neck in the Hebrew Bible, and שׁוֹרֵב refers most specifically to the "lifebreath" that passes through the throat/neck. It's not a far stretch to see how the idea of "lifebreath" developed into the concept of the soul later, but in its ancient context its semantic affiliations were known across a number of languages (Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Canaanite to name a few). Any translation work that is done, no matter the word, relies upon the lexical work of linguistic scholars that examine the semantic relatives of words in their chronological context. שׁוֹרֵב is no different, and that's why its meaning has changed over time, but scholars have received Alter's translations so well because of how well he takes his awareness about these issues and makes strong decisions about them. "Save me, O God, for the waters are come into my neck," makes more sense in terms of imagery than to render שׁוֹרֵב as soul, and it doesn't betray the word. The reality is that שׁוֹרֵב has not only changed meanings over time, but it also had a variety of meanings in that culture as well, depending upon the usage in the literature. There are DEFINITE cases where it is appropriate to label it as "lifebreath," others, "neck/throat," and even some as "soul." English works the same way; words change meaning based upon their usage. Alter DOES understand the poetry and he's not just leaning upon special pleading. שׁוֹרֵב is a dynamic word, the nuance of which cannot really be captured in a single English word. The imagery of drowning, which

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would quench one's lifebreath creates, poetically, in the text a double entendre that isn't easily captured in English. Poetry is art, and art is not easily translated from one language into another -and that's OKAY.

Your post, in reply to an earlier post on Mar 26, 2013 11:45:25 AM PDT

Last edited by you on Mar 26, 2013 11:59:37 AM PDT

Steven J. Torrey says:

Now you are arguing just for the sake of arguing. One of those people who simply have to have the last word.

And 'shadow' as you describe it--'shadow of doubt'--would be {tzel} and the word used in 'shadow of death' is {tzelmot}. The shade of the dead person would be {raphe} found only in plural {raphim}. There is also reference that these are found in Sheol--so sorta like Dante envisioned the afterlife.

There was an ancient Babylonian tradition that a woman accused of adultery would be thrown into a river. If she drowned, then she would be found guilty; if she did not drown, then she would be found not guilty. Imagine an accused woman's despair as she drowned--being punished for a crime she did not commit. Notice this is also the point of drinking the bitter waters--{mame hamarrah}-- a woman accused of adultery had to drink to determine guilt or innocence. (Numbers 5: 15-31) And again imagine the woman's despair at being found guilty for a sin she did not commit.

So PLEASE--"Save me, O God, the waters have come into my soul" is NOT about drowning, NOT about the soul--the words are about DESPAIR, DESPAIR located in the soul--not the neck, throat, lips. Why is that so complicated? How is that so complicated?

In reply to your post on Mar 26, 2013 4:59:13 PM PDT

Last edited by the author on Mar 26, 2013 5:01:24 PM PDT

Stephen R. Harris Jr. says:

The reason is because שׁוֹנֵן DOES NOT MEAN despair. All that I've been talking about the entire time is how the word שׁוֹנֵן should be translated. I would refer you to Koehler and Baumgartner's Lexicon in Veterist Testamenti Libros, or Holladay's Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, or even a more dated resource like The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. If you want a more in depth description of the word and its usage you could check out the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament by Harris, Archer, and Waltke, and also the Theological Dictionary of the Old

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Testament. Forget about the whole "shadow of a doubt" expression -somehow you still think that I'm relating the words "shadow" and "doubt" with שָׁדָד AND I'M NOT. Look of the definition of שָׁדָד in a current lexicon, and it will say that it means "throat," "neck," "breath," "living being," and etcetera. Those definitions were the basic meanings given by Holladay's lexicon (page 242-243), and that's probably the most common lexicon used in seminaries today. That's just what the word means, and that's why Alter translated it as he did.

You replied with a later post

Your post, in reply to [an earlier post](#) on Mar 26, 2013 8:14:49 PM PDT

Last edited by you on Mar 26, 2013 9:41:32 PM PDT

☑ Steven J. Torrey says:

Like I said earlier. You are arguing for the sake of arguing. I know 'nephesh' does not mean despair. What I said was the words: "Save me, Oh God, the waters have come in unto my soul" are about despair. Notice how {mayim} water takes on metonymy for despair as a result of Noah's flood, as a result of the Drink of Bitter Waters, as Jonah being thrown overboard into the water, as the splitting of the Reed Sea drowning pharaoh and his chariots. In the line: "Save me, Oh God, for the waters have come into my soul" 'waters' becomes the pivotal word by virtue of it metonymical extension for despair. An idea that eludes many a reader.

Since you did not read me very well, I doubt that you read Alter very well. And quite honestly, I think this whole discussion is way over your head.

In reply to [your post](#) on Mar 27, 2013 10:11:33 AM PDT

☑ Stephen R. Harris Jr. says:

DUDE. I think that you don't understand me. I plainly understand that water can be used as a metonymy for despair in the Hebrew Bible, and that water is even serving in that capacity here. I agree that the passage is about despair, all that I've been talking about all along is not the meaning of the verse, but the translation of שָׁדָד in the passage as neck verses soul. Let me put it to you this way: there is a difference between the translation of individual words and the interpretation of a verse in its literary context. You are talking about the meaning of the verse, I'm talking about how to render the word שָׁדָד. If you favor a literal translation, "neck" is pretty literal given the context. I'm assuming that you aren't a Hebraist, otherwise you would have to know what I'm telling you. If you know how to use a lexicon, look up שָׁדָד and see that the word means "throat," "neck," "breath," "living being,"

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and etcetera. I'm not talking about the interpretation of the verse, I'm talking about how to translate נפש and it means "throat," "neck," "breath," "living being," and etcetera. Let the imagery speak for itself. "Rescue me, God, for the waters have come up to my neck" carries with it all of the ideas about despair that you are talking about, but the translation itself is a very literal one. נפש can be translated as "neck." Just look it up in a lexicon. I don't know why you are insulting me by saying that the discussion is way over my head; I'm doing a master's degree in ancient history and I'm a Hebraist. I understand how Hebrew works, and I'm just trying to explain why Alter made the translation decision that he did -it's a valid one. It doesn't read the same as the 1611 King James, but that's okay. The Hebrew is the inspired text, not the 1611 King James' rendition of it.

Your post, in reply to [an earlier post](#) on Jul 19, 2013 7:22:24 PM PDT

Last edited by you on Jul 19, 2013 7:28:03 PM PDT

☑ Steven J. Torrey says:

I have open before me Brown, Driver, Briggs: {nephesh}: soul, living being, life, self, person, desire, appetite, emotion, and passion. 1) that which breathes, the breathing substance or being; 2) the {nephesh} becomes a living being by God's breathing ...into the nostrils... 3) the {nephesh} as living being whose life resides in the blood; 4) the {nephesh} as the essential of man stands for the man himself... 5) {nephesh} seat of appetite; 6) seat of emotions and passions; 7) occasionally for mental states...

Clearly, we do not agree. Suffice that your reading of {nephesh} is like Alter's: shallow, superficial, trite, and banal. And what it comes down to: I'm too stupid to understand the poetry, so the word {nephesh} must be wrong. After all, if the poet wanted to use the word neck, throat, mouth, or lips, the Hebrew word would have been used and not {nephesh}. Write all you want--case closed.

1 new post since your last visit

In reply to [your post](#) on Jul 20, 2013 1:23:54 PM PDT

☑ ⚡ Stephen R. Harris Jr. says:

I'm about the defense of our scriptures as well man. Calling me or Alter "shallow, superficial, trite, and banal" is just name calling. How can you square that with the Kingdom? All I was every trying to tell you is that his reading is a possible one. I still use Brown-Driver-Briggs too, but their work is from an older generation of scholarship, and while still good I would always check it against the most recent stuff. For example Holladay's lexicon based on Koehler and Baumgartner's work. Just so you can see that

Alter's reading isn't really controversial, here is the entry in its entirety (p. 243):

1. throat Is 514; - 2. neck Ps 105:18; 3. breath Jb 41:13, what makes man & animals living beings Gn 120, `soul' (to be sharply distinguished fm. Greek idea of soul) whose seat is the blood Gn 94f; - 4. nefesh μ ayyâ living being Gn 120 (= animals), 27 (man); - 5. man, men, person, people: a) nefesh $^{\circ}$ d $^{\circ}$ m man (i.e. person) Lv 24:17, = slaves Ez 27:13; hœrçgnefesh whoever kills a person Nu 31:19; pl. kol-nafšôt bêto all the persons in his household Gn 36:6; $^{\circ}$ e μ $^{\circ}$ d nefesh one (out of every 500) Nu 31:28; kol-nefesh $^{\circ}$ d $^{\circ}$ m any person Lv 24:17, nefesh b@hçmâ a head of cattle 24:18; \pm $^{\circ}$ â nefesh acquire people, rear persons (slaves?) Gn 12:5, q $^{\circ}$ nâ nefesh buy a slave Lv 22:11; b) population: kol-nefesh all persons, everyone Gn 46:15; w. numbers Gn 46:18; pl. n@fšôt Ex 12:4; - 6. personality, individuality: a) nafši (&c.), stressed I (myself) Gn 27:4, so nafšçnû we Ps 124:7; b) expression of reflexive, esp. stressed: k@nafšô like himself 1S 18:3; \pm annôt n $^{\circ}$ feš self-humiliation, penance Nu 30:14; c) kol-nefesh every one = each one Ex 12:16, kol-nefesh $^{\circ}$ šer the one who, whoever Lv 7:27, hannefes $^{\circ}$ šer 7:20, hannefes w. pt. 7:18, nefesh $^{\circ}$ šer one who 5:2; - 7. life (of a person, a single life): nefesh h $^{\circ}$ d $^{\circ}$ m Gn 9:5, \pm al-nafšek $^{\circ}$ (flee) for your life 19:17, biqqçš nefesh seek (s.one's) life 1K 19:10; b@fç $^{\circ}$ t nafš $^{\circ}$ h as her (breath =) life left her Gn 35:18; hikkâ nefesh strike dead 37:21; hçšib nefesh give (new, fresh) life Ru 4:15; - 8. `soul' as seat & support of feelings & sensations: a) desire (even inordinate desire): (of love) SS 17; n $^{\circ}$ $^{\circ}$ nefesh $^{\circ}$ el have desire for Ho 4:8; ma $^{\circ}$ $^{\circ}$ nefesh desire Ez 24:25; ba \pm al nefesh greedy (for food) Pr 23:2, r@ μ ab nefesh greedy (for possessions) 28:25; nefesh is never satisfied Ec 6:3, never quieted Ps 35:25; b) mood, state of mind: of gçr Ex 23:9, of cattle Pr 12:10; c) feeling, taste Nu 21:5; d) will: yçš $^{\circ}$ et-nafš@kem you are willing Gn 23:8; - 9. someone dead, a dead person, corpse: $^{\circ}$ ere%o lannefes a slash because of the dead Lv 19:28; nefesh mçt dead body Nu 6:6, > nefesh (w/o mçt) 6:11; Ez 13:18-20 nafšôt, hunted by women who prophesy, usu. of disembodied souls hunted by magic, but sugg. simply `persons'; - 10. b $^{\circ}$ ttê hannefes perfume-bottles Is 32:0. (pg 243)

☑ Steven J. Torrey says:

As a point in aesthetics: if you can't tell the difference between neck and soul, then... Tell me (and this is rhetorical but you will answer anyway) when a person translates {nephesh} with neck, is the person being anti-metaphysical or anti-Semitic? Calling Alter and you "trite, trivial banal" is an assessment--not name calling. I thought way back when, that this discussion is way over your intellectual ken, and nothing you have posted (or will post) has changed my mind, or will change my mind.

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Part of the 'Kingdom' consists of the Nazi crematoriums; Nazi factories of death where despair to the soul ruled... (That sentence should end the discussion for both you and Alter but it won't because you seem to argue for the sake of arguing and insisting on having the last word, even if your last word continues and reinforces your banality.)

Your post, in reply to [an earlier post](#) on Jul 22, 2013 7:49:23 AM PDT

Last edited by you 12 hours ago

☑ [Steven J. Torrey](#) says:

And here I am--Steven J Torrey--giving you and Robert Alter an F for your effort. The audacity of despair.

[ad--ayin dalet} is in fact extremely important to the phrase {ad-nephesh} providing a sense of locative to the word soul. The waters are come into the soul. or the waters have come to the soul. Micah 1:15 "The glory of Israel shall come even unto Adullam" and he uses {ad} a locative--which expresses 'place where'. So use of {ad nephesh} ,joined by a maggeph, suggests an actual physical location of a soul within the human body. Anyone who has lost a child, knows the soul/heart/mind/spirit is located physiologically within the body. (Read Harriet Sarnoff Schiff or John Gunther on the impact of the death of a child.) Josephus writes that the Pharisees and Sadducees differed on the opinion re judgment after death; is it not possible--that even in ancient days--Hebrew/Jewish thinkers also discussed the possibility that a 'soul' did not exist. But for purposes of poetry, for purposes of theology, prefacing {nephesh} with {ad} makes the conjecture for existence of a soul real, tangible. Just like Micah wanted Adullam to be tangible to his audience so he says {ad Adullam}.

Let's just say, with all that you have written, I am not impressed with your intellectual acumen. And least of all impressed by your shallowness and banality. And being snarky adds not one iota to your intellectual limitations.

The Nazi factories of murder should have been the alpha and omega of any meditation on this Psalm from Alter. Save me, O God, for the waters have come unto the soul...

📌 1 new post since your last visit

In reply to [your post](#) on Jul 22, 2013 2:50:43 PM PDT

AMAZON REVIEW OF ROBERT ALTER'S BOOK OF PSALMS BY STEVEN TORREY

☑ [Stephen R. Harris Jr.](#) says:

Help me out then. Explain your argument to me linguistically. We've already seen between that between BDB, KB, and Holladay that the "soul" and "throat/neck" readings are both possible renderings of "nephesh." So explain to me on linguistic grounds why it should not be rendered as "throat/neck."

That last was posted on July 22, 2013. Thirteen pages of notes and he still has the nerve to ask such a question. I don't know whether he is playing at being stupid or is in fact stupid. I don't think I shall respond for another couple of months. It's just too easy to call him stupid. I might add, he neglected to put in a question mark. Steven Torrey