

## Joshua R. Jacobson's *Chanting the Hebrew Bible: The Art of Cantillation*; Second, Expanded Edition (2017)

*Reviewed by Neil Schwartz*

The author prefaces this 845-page volume with an assurance that, despite the book's being long, heavy and technical with musical notation and strange diagrams, "it is worth the effort to explore." This reviewer would tend to agree. The many improvements in this Second, Expanded Edition warrant study and regular use.

As in the original edition, chapters 1 and 2 introduce the concept that *trop* (Yiddish: Bible-reading neumes) is first a system of punctuation, then a system of accentuation, and lastly a system of intonation or chanting. They then explore the syntax of biblical Hebrew and posit a detailed method of using "nested" and "stepping" diagrams to show relationships among text phrases and segments. They explain the neumes (*t'amim*) as a way of reflecting the syntax of biblical Hebrew texts via the concept of a "complement" as a "syntactic unit" that gives information about the verb in a sentence. This "unit" could be a subject, an object of the verb, an adverb, or a prepositional phrase that functions as an adverb.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 explore pronunciation of biblical Hebrew, including the *dagesh*, the *sheva*, and the *kamats* in all their variations. They analyze the Masoretic tradition of cantillation, and theories about sources of the *t'amim*. They also provide information on "parsing" and teaching biblical texts.

Chapter 6, comprising 40% of the book, shows how to musically notate each *trop* in a way that reflects the accented syllable, by using two different shades of gray behind the relevant notes. It also gives full notation for the various "systems" of *trop* in the Ashkenazic tradition: Torah, Haftarah, Esther, *Eikhah*, *Shir ha-shirim* and *Kohelet*, and High Holiday Torah.

Chapter 7 contains new material beyond what appeared in the First Edition (2002). Readers familiar with the "vertical" format of trope comparison charts in the writings of Abraham Idelsohn (e.g., *Tol'dot ha-n'ginah ha'ivrit*, 1924 and *Jewish Music*, 1929), will welcome this edition's horizontal chart. This chapter then discusses "The Ideal Reader" and includes a "Guide to the Readings," a supplement to the grammar details found in the annual *Luah* (Liturgical Calendar) prepared by Rabbi Miles Cohen ([info@milesb.cohen.com](mailto:info@milesb.cohen.com)). A large Glossary then offers changes and additions, including the feminine forms of Hebrew terms that identify a person's ritual role.

The book ends with an expanded Bibliography and an Index that the earlier edition notably lacked. There are over 50 additional items in the Bibliography, mostly new books and articles written during the last fifteen years. This expanded edition also includes a separate "Index of Biblical and Rabbinic Passages" at the end of the book.

In a 2017 interview, the author made clear that he had written *Chanting the Hebrew Bible* to present the systems underlying the structure and logic of biblical syntax and cantillation. His academic argument was that by understanding these underlying textual and musical systems, one could learn to chant biblical texts more easily and more accurately. In both the First Edition and a Student Edition that followed in 2005, an accompanying CD was included that demonstrated the chants for *trop* motifs. There were 73 musical examples of Torah segments and 14 summary examples of the other five *trop* systems.

The CD has been replaced with a website containing all of the above audio files and many more riches: [www.chantingthehebrewbible.com](http://www.chantingthehebrewbible.com). The home page has tabs labeled with over 330 musical examples for all six *trop* systems: "Watch," which so far has three videos; "Read," with books and four articles; "Insights," which delves into five issues; and "Connect," with links to 13 other *trop*-related websites.

Among other changes and improvements in this Expanded Second Edition are the fonts used for the English and Hebrew texts. There are two main advantages that result from this change: both the English and Hebrew texts are more legible, and Dr. Jacobson was able to "tighten up" the spacing on each page using these very clear fonts. While the Second Edition is 120 pages shorter than the First Edition, almost nothing was left out.

Among Jacobson's innovations is the use of one shade of gray to highlight accented musical notes in the "core" of each *trop* motif, and a lighter shade of gray for a final unaccented note when appropriate. In the First Edition, the darker of the two shades of gray interfered with the legibility of the notes on the music staves, and in the Student Edition, this interference was worse. The Second Edition solves the problem by lightening the tones of both the "medium gray" on the accented notes and the "lighter gray" highlighting a final unaccented note.

Another subtle improvement is moving discussion of the *Tevir* segment from that of the *Tipp'kha* segment. It now appears after the *Segol* segment in Chapter 2, and after the *Zakeif* segment in most of Chapter 6. Given that *Tipp'kha* is a "Level 2" disjunctive and *T'vir* is a weak "Level 3" disjunctive, this rearrangement makes more sense. Also, the concept of "*elision*" has been given the new term "*redistribution*" during discussions about "sharing" *trop* notes when one word is fairly long and the word before or after it is very short.

My only complaint about this book has nothing to do with its contents. After only two weeks of light use, the binding separated inside the front of the book, a problem shared by the *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary*, also produced by the Jewish Publication Society. Despite this reservation, the improvements and additions to the text, the new Index and enlarged Bibliography, the clear fonts and visual presentation, and the added charts make this book a "must-have" for the regular use of everyone who chants and teaches *trop*.

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