

A Response to My Respondents

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Abstract

This article presents Shai Held's extended response to reflections by Jewish and Christian biblical scholars who have interacted with his two-volume work, *The Heart of Torah: Essays on the Weekly Torah Portion* (2017), earlier in this theme journal issue. These reflections, along with Held's response, were originally presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Diego, CA, November 2019.

Let me begin with an expression of gratitude. I am profoundly honored that such an illustrious group of scholars has taken the time to read my work with such care and insight. I am indebted to each of them, and to all of them.

How I Came to Write *The Heart of Torah*

At the outset, I want to say a few words about how and why I came to write *The Heart of Torah*. Marvin Sweeney alludes to my father, the late Professor Moshe Held. My father was a renowned Semitic philologist; he loved words. For him there were few greater pleasures in life than discerning the meaning of a previously obscure word. Growing up in my home you could have been forgiven the impression that nothing less than the redemption of the world depended on deciphering the word *heryonim* in 2 Kings 6. From his example I learned what it meant to love a text, to spend hours lingering upon a word as if nothing else really matters.

My father died when I was twelve years old and as father-son dramas go, although I was in love with Jewish studies, there was nothing that interested me less than the Hebrew Bible. That was *his* thing, after all, and I needed my own. From a very young age I was drawn to philosophy and theology and those were the realms in which I lived and found myself at home.

There were glimmers of interest in Tanakh along the way. As a first-year rabbinical student I heard the late Tikva Frymer-Kensky deliver a lecture on intertextuality and the story of Rahab in Joshua and I was mesmerized by a way of reading that was new, unfamiliar, and even startling to me. As a young rabbi I

heard Judith Kates present a class on a text from the early prophets—I no longer remember which one—and again, I remember thinking, the Bible is a closed book to me, and yet there is so much here. At one point, I picked up Jon Levenson’s magisterial *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* and I was captivated—the Bible was just so much richer than the way it had been presented to me as a child in yeshiva; how could a serious student of Jewish theology not immerse himself in Tanakh, I wondered. But as I say, I had other passions and concerns. The focus of my research, and thinking, and writing was theology.

One day around 2010, a couple of years after I had the privilege of co-founding the Hadar Institute in New York, I found myself in a faculty meeting in which the consensus was that we needed to find a Tanakh teacher who could bring together the yeshiva and the academy; we wanted someone who would read midrash and traditional parshanut and/but would also make unapologetic use of academic biblical scholarship, all in the service of Torah. I had seen Bible taught in what amounted to a history-of-religions approach but that wasn’t what we were after. We wanted to use every tool available to us in order to better reflect on the question: “And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you?” (Deut 10:12)

Looking for the right person, we came up empty. After a great deal of back and forth, for reasons I cannot fully explain, I spoke up. “Give me six months,” I said, “and I will try teaching a course on Genesis 1–11. I don’t really know what I’m doing, but I hope I can learn.”

I have never looked back.

The essays that comprise these two volumes began as a weekly email Hadar sent out to some 7,000 readers—Jews from across the denominational spectrum, including close to a thousand rabbis, and over time, growing numbers of Christians as well (I hope Christian readership will continue to grow; for those who are not Jewish, it is perhaps worth explaining that many lay people’s primary engagement with the mitzvah of Talmud Torah, Torah study, takes place through study of the weekly Torah portion and its commentaries). My goal in writing these essays was to bring people into deep exegetical engagement with biblical (and sometimes later Jewish) texts (more on that later) and to draw out some of what I took to be their contemporary implications. I tried to keep Maimonides’ instruction to learn the truth from whoever says it close to heart, and it brought me great pleasure to bring traditional Rabbinic sources into conversation with modern academic scholars.

What I wanted to do in writing these essays was to learn to read and listen more closely; I suppose you could say that my goal was to adopt a prayerful posture, to see whether we could discern the voice of God speaking through the texts and their commentaries. The philosopher Jonathan Lear says that one of the greatest obstacles to learning is knowing—I think I know something so well that I can no

longer hear what it's saying. For me, and I hope for many of my readers, these essays were an exercise in setting aside what I thought I knew about the biblical text and listening anew. As the Jewish tradition puts it, the voice goes forth from Sinai each day.

There is a lot in the responses with which I would like to engage. But because of the critiques they offer of my work, let me focus especial attention on some of what David Frankel and Tamar Kamionkowski have said. My hope is that my own approach will be clarified in the process.

Response to David Frankel

As I understand him, David Frankel objects to my “accentuating theological consistency in the text, especially with regards to issues deemed fundamental.” As a result, he suggests, my approach fails to reckon adequately with what he calls the “full plurality and heterogeneity” of the Torah. (In this David reminds me of a mutual friend, a Bible scholar who regularly tells me that I ought to stop referring to “the God of Tanakh” and ought to speak instead of the “gods of Tanakh.”)

This is nowhere more true, David says, than in my portrayal of the God of Tanakh as a God of love. In David's words, God's “displays of volatile jealousy and indiscriminate vengeance, of deep insecurity and narcissistic pride, are hardly discussed or given serious attention” in *The Heart of Torah*. David's worries extend beyond the character of God to the nature of God's commands. “What of the passages,” he asks, that “summon us to exercise brutality and to renounce compassion?”

As an alternative, David proposes an interpretive model he thinks of as Buberian. By his lights, “we should openly contest biblical theologies that we find superficial or inadequate. True dialogue,” he insists, “involves the ability, nay necessity, to at times openly and respectfully disagree.”

Let me respond as honestly and forthrightly as I can. My response both to David's critique of what he takes as my approach and to his brief characterization of his own is: deep ambivalence.

On the one hand, there is something true and salutary in what David suggests. If source criticism has taught us anything, it is to be mindful of and attentive to the range of voices in the Hebrew Bible. The Bible itself, we might say, is in no small measure an argument over what the Bible should be. And it is indeed important to be candid about when texts strike us as problematic and even offensive. So far, so good.

Where David and I would part ways, I suspect, is in what comes after the process of identifying sources and distinguishing between them. The fact is that the text we have inherited, the text as it has been read by Jews and Christians for thousands of years, the text as it is *still* read by an overwhelming majority of

pious Jews and Christians, is a weave of those earlier sources—woven, I should add, not haphazardly, but with great artistry and sophistication. If I understand David correctly, on his approach we can speak of the theology of J or of P but we can't coherently speak of the theology of the Torah because, after all, for every ethical or theological claim *x* there is also an ethical or theological claim of *y* (or not-*x*). Or, to make a related point, for all the beauty Torah contains, there is also ugliness; for all the emphasis on love and compassion, there is also no shortage of hatred and cruelty. And so we must choose, and that choosing entails rejecting—so David holds—voices that we find problematic or (David's word) "deplorable."

But is it really true that multiplicity, and even cacophony, must be accorded the last word in biblical interpretation? I don't think so, and I don't think the Bible itself thinks so either. Let me explain.

Take God's self-description in Exodus 34:6–7: in the NJPS rendering, "The LORD! The LORD! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness (*hesed*) and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations." The first verse of God's self-description describes God's character, or *who God is*; the second describes God's actions, or *what God does*. Only one word is repeated in both verses, thus underscoring its immense significance *hesed*, steadfast love. Whatever else God may be, these verses teach, God is a God of love. Note well: in Exodus 34:6, which describes *who God is*, no mention whatsoever is made of anger; God's anger is introduced only in verse 7, which portrays *what God does*. The implication of this is crucial for a proper understanding of Jewish theology. Anger is not essential to who God is in the way that love is. God *gets* angry, but God *is* loving.

Some may object that this is, after all, only one characterization among many in the Hebrew Bible. But is it? These verses have an extremely robust afterlife; If I am not mistaken, within the biblical corpus itself no verses are cited more frequently.¹ And as the verses are quoted and reworked, greater and greater emphasis is placed on God's love and mercy.²

1 This is a claim also made, for example, by Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah: With a New English Translation and the Hebrew Text* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 290. For a careful book-length study of the ways the verse is quoted and reworked in Tanakh, see Nathan C. Lane, *The Compassionate but Punishing God: A Canonical Analysis of Exodus 34:6–7* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010). Thomas Raitt observes that "The formula in Exod 34:6–7 is as important as it is because of repeated enactment and continual expansion or abbreviation, restructuring or reapplication." Thomas Raitt, "Why Does God Forgive?" *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 13 (1991): 38–58, here 53.

2 Thomas Raitt explains that over the course of Tanakh, Exodus 34:6–7 is cited less to emphasize the polarity of divine mercy and divine judgment and more as "an unconditional assurance of God's mercy." Raitt, "Why Does God Forgive?" 46; see also 49–50.

In light of this, I would argue that what I am doing in interpreting the Bible is not simply privileging the texts that I like and dismissing the ones that I don't. On the contrary, I am following the Bible's own lead in placing divine love and mercy at the very center of my interpretive and theological project.

More than that: If one wants to read as a Jew, one cannot but note that these two verses are at the very heart of the Yom Kippur liturgy. As Jews approach God in repentance, the biblical passage that anchors their hope for mercy and forgiveness is this one. These verses are thus crucial not only to the Bible itself but also to the unfolding of Jewish religious life over time. We thus find both inner-textual and extratextual warrant for placing these verses at the core of Jewish biblical interpretation.

Making what I take to be a similar point, Terence Fretheim writes:

I would claim that there is an inner-biblical warrant to enter into evaluative work regarding biblical texts and to make distinctions among them regarding their more specific authority, even regarding God. That is to say, the Bible itself provides an *internal center* in terms of which the interpreter can begin to sort out matters regarding authority. That is to say, certain texts and/or themes constituting a center *within* the biblical material give some texts a higher value than other texts and constitute an inner-biblical warrant for such a task.³

Fretheim also places great emphasis on Exodus 34:6–7, on which he comments:

The God herein confessed is the *kind* of God whom Israel experiences in *every* circumstance. This “core testimony” with respect to God has an authoritative value in helping to sort out the varying theological dimensions of biblical texts yet without shutting down challenges . . . or portrayals that stand in tension with this core (e.g., Ps. 77:4–10).⁴

3 Terence E. Fretheim, “The Authority of the Bible and the Imaging of God,” in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 45–52, here 48.

4 Fretheim, “The Authority of the Bible and the Imaging of God,” 48. Elsewhere Fretheim writes that the claims made in Exodus 34:6–7 about the kind of God Israel worships provides a “hermeneutical key” to the biblical story as a whole, “delimiting possibilities of meaning”; these verses, he says, serve as “the confessional clue for determining the basic character of the God of the story.” Terence E. Fretheim and Karlfried Froelich, *The Bible as Word of God in a Postmodern Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 120, 122. For a distinctively Jewish approach, rooted in readings of Tanakh as well as Rabbinic literature, with a similar thrust, see Moshe Greenberg, “On the Political Use of the Bible in Modern Israel: An Engaged Critique,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi M. Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 461–71.

This leads to my second point of disagreement with David. As we've heard, David advocates rejecting certain biblical texts in the name of "honesty" and "truth." Here again I have sympathy with the concerns that drive David's approach; after all, we have all seen—and many of us have experienced very directly—biblical texts being wielded as bludgeons. And yet I don't find the idea of rejecting texts either coherent or meaningful.

At the end of the day, I seek to live *within* a religious tradition rather than outside or above it; I seek to stand *under* the text rather than over it.

In an extremely powerful essay on what she calls "critical traditioning," Ellen Davis reports on an exchange with a colleague who wants to know whether there is any text she would flatly reject. Explaining that her impulse, like my own, is to say No, Davis explains that "When we think we have reached the point of zero-edification, then that perception indicates that we are not reading deeply enough; we have not probed the layers of the text with sufficient care."⁵

Another way of making this point is to say that I am interested in the Bible as scripture—or in more Jewish terms, as Torah. And part of what it means to treat a text as scripture—and more broadly, as part of a sacred canon, is to read it generously and charitably, though, I emphasize, not passively or uncritically. (So far from simply submitting to it, to stand under a text sometimes requires us to wrestle with it until both we and it walk away wounded.) Here again Davis captures my own intuition perfectly: "Charitable reading requires considerable effort: it is easier to dispense with the problematic text. Those who regard a text as religiously authoritative are willing to sustain that effort because they perceive that the text comes to them, in some sense, from God."⁶ My hesitation about David's approach here is that when we consider ourselves free—let alone obligated—to reject biblical passages, it seems to me that they cease functioning as Scripture.

In my view, rather than reject disturbing texts, we should go on wrestling with them and, when necessary, reinterpret them. Our sense of who God is, and of who God intends us to be, sometimes bumps up against the plain sense of the text—and sometimes even against the way the text has been heard for thousands of years. Both the text and our moral and religious intuitions, themselves shaped by the

5 Ellen F. Davis, "Critical Traditioning: Seeking an Inner Biblical Hermeneutic," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 733–51, here 734.

6 Davis, "Critical Traditioning," 749. Davis cites Moshe Halbertal, who writes that "We apply the principle of charity in our reading of a holy text not only to ensure its meaningfulness, but also to ensure that it corresponds to the highest criteria of perfection. In the case of the Scriptures, there is an a priori interpretive commitment to show the text in the best possible light. Conversely, the loss of this sense of obligation to the text is an undeniable sign that it is no longer perceived as holy. Making use of the principle of charity, the following principle can be stipulated: the degree of canonicity of a text corresponds to the amount of charity it receives in its interpretation. The more canonical a text, the more generous its treatment." Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 29.

biblical tradition, need to be given weight. The text is never abandoned or repudiated in the dialogue, but it is sometimes transformed. (As I've already indicated, the fundamental question is not what to accept and what to reject but, rather, if I may put it somewhat colloquially, what to read in light of what.)⁷

To be clear, I am decidedly not advocating for—or even defending—easy harmonization. Several of the essays in *The Heart of Torah* are devoted to unresolved wrestling. To take just one example, as heirs of the Bible—or, to again invoke more traditional language, as students of Torah—how ought we to hear the mandate to wipe out Amalek? I consider various strains of interpretation, including symbolic and psychological interpretations; my point is not to resolve the problem the text poses—I don't pretend to know how to do that—but to confront the problem forthrightly and to consider some of the ways we might grapple with it.

What all this means is that although I think we *can* talk about a God of the Bible, we have to accept the fact that some passages will leave us disturbed and unsettled. Like Fretheim I “seek a unified portrayal of God, but with the understanding that some biblical texts will just not fit; they provide some ongoing over-againstness to that portrayal... I seek to present a unified portrayal of God to the modern world, but I recognize that that texts cannot so neatly be lined up behind such a portrayal as I might like and that the ongoing struggle with the differences leads one onward in the search for the truth about God.”⁸ Some degree of irresolution, we might say, has its benefits.

Response to Tamar Kamionkowski

Tamar Kamionkowski's fascinating response to my book seeks after its genre. If I understand Tamar correctly, her view of what biblical scholarship does is, at bottom, source critical. Thus, for example, speaking of what she identifies as the P and J strands of a story in Exodus, she avers that “Biblicists are interested in how the accounts are different, how they imagine God differently.” Tellingly, perhaps, when she speaks of Jewish biblical theology, she cites Benjamin Sommer's neo-documentarian insistence that “Modern critical readings are significant because they enable us to hear religious teachings that might otherwise be neglected.”

Tamar is undoubtedly correct in asserting that “modern biblical scholarship . . . seeks to understand who, why, and when the texts were created,” but I wonder whether her formulation makes adequate space for other things that biblical scholars also do, like wrestle with the final canonical text(s) and apply the tools of literary criticism to help understand the artistry of those literary wholes. More critically for my point here, biblical theologians do more than just retrieve voices

7 Whether or not the Bible has a center, a good interpreter necessarily does.

8 Fretheim and Froelich, *The Bible as Word of God in a Postmodern Age*, 125.

that are in danger of being silenced or forgotten. They—or at least some of them—also seek to read texts as wholes, and some go so far as to attempt sweeping interpretations of the canon(s) as a whole. For every Ben Sommer, there is also a Brevard Childs or a Walter Brueggemann.

Tamar writes that when she engages with biblical texts, her question is not “what do we learn about God?” but rather “what do we learn about God-beliefs?” Now, some of what contemporary Bible scholars do depends on this kind of methodological naturalism, which, I readily concede, has often yielded rich and wonderful fruit in helping us to understand the multiplicity and diversity that underlie scriptural texts. But like many readers, I am ultimately interested in the text as Scripture, and not (just) as cultural artifact. If I am reading her right, what Tamar offers is a kind of history of religions approach, which I see as a tool but not an end in itself, or, if you prefer, as a stopping point in our journey with the text but not a final destination. In reading Scripture, I seek to know God, not—or in any event not *only*—“God-beliefs.”

Now again, I am not advocating abandoning source criticism and historical scholarship more generally. What I am suggesting is that responsible biblical scholarship need not limit itself to historical criticism.

It bears noting, especially in this setting, that there is a burgeoning subfield of biblical studies that scholars refer to as “theological interpretation of Scripture.” On Walter Moberly’s definition, “Theological interpretation is reading the Bible with a concern for the enduring truth of its witness to the nature of God and humanity, with a view to enabling the transformation of humanity into the likeness of God.”⁹ What Tamar says of me, that I place “God” rather than “the author or authors” at the center of my work, would presumably apply to Moberly as well. Moberly (and I, though as Tamar rightly notes, to a lesser extent; more on that a bit later) do care about the author or authors but seek ultimately to hear *God speaking through the authors*. Not surprisingly, Moberly embraces Paul Ricoeur’s yearning that “Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again,”¹⁰ seeing it as the “the keynote for theological interpretation.”¹¹

To this point, most of the voices engaged in theological interpretation of scripture are Christian. But, *mutatis mutandis*, a Jewish version of this project (or series of projects) is also possible. And it seems odd to me to think that it would not qualify as biblical scholarship. (I can’t elaborate upon this here but I will add here that from my perspective not enough biblical scholars are willing to wrestle with

9 R. W. L. Moberly, “What Is Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3, no. 2 (2009): 161–78, here 163.

10 Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 349.

11 R. W. L. Moberly, “Theological Interpretation, Second Naiveté, and the Rediscovery of the Old Testament,” *Anglican Theological Review* 99, no.4 (2017): 651–70, here 655.

the historical locatedness of their own thoroughgoing commitment to historicism.)

Tamar points out that in some of the essays in *The Heart of Torah*, I rely on what she calls “a minimal textual hook” to take the conversation elsewhere; witness one of my essays on parashat Terumah, in which I explore two very different understandings of *tzimtzum* in Jewish thought and attempt to discern what we can learn from holding them together in productive and dialectical tension. I want to note that I do this on purpose, and with a goal in mind. For Judaism, commentaries themselves often become primary texts, in turn eliciting supercommentaries. It is extremely significant—I am tempted to say foundational—to Jewish thought that the word “Torah” refers not just to what is divinely revealed (that is, to what we call *the* Torah) but also the range of human commentary on and, if one may say so, human expansion of, that divine revelation. Tamar says, correctly, that my essay on Terumah will not help a reader who is interested in “learning something about the Torah portion Terumah [itself].” I have no argument here, only an observation: in light of what I’ve just said, I think it’s also true that Judaism’s Parashat Terumah consists not only of the biblical text but also of what’s been said about it by sages and scholars through the ages. So the midrash on Parashat Terumah upon which I build my essay is part of what Jews mean when they talk about the Parashah.¹² In any event, I think there’s value in both projects—hearing the original scriptural text anew and listening well to the ways it’s been read through the ages.)

Getting directly to the heart of my work as a theologian and an interpreter of the Jewish tradition, Tamar wonders whether I “could have written a very similar work organized around [my] central areas of interest: God’s love, God’s mercy, human responsibility” and asks “what . . . the presentation of theology via Torah portions offers us”; perhaps, she suggests, it “raise[s] up the core importance of textual engagement in developing theology.”

In fact I am currently engaged in a massive—and, I readily admit, a massively daunting—project: an attempt to reclaim love as a central category, and arguably *the* central category, in Jewish theology, spirituality, and ethics. In the new work, I treat many of the themes that emerge in *The Heart of Torah* more systematically and expansively than I could there. Yet in working on my current project I struggle to find a balance between what we might call a discursive mode and an exegetical one. The point is, as Tamar suggests, that Jews often do theology in the form of textual commentary. A more discursive mode allows you to zoom out, as

12 In a related vein, I’ve argued in the past, that, in this sense, the Jewish tradition is more Catholic than Protestant—more focused, that is, on the reception history of the text and not single-mindedly focused on the text itself. See Shai Held, “The Promise and Peril of Jewish Barthianism,” *Modern Judaism* 25, no. 3 (2005): 316–26, esp. 318–19.

it were, and engage “the big questions” on a broader canvas, yet it also threatens to lose the sheer and irreducible textuality of Jewish religious thinking.

Asking whether my work is “biblical theology or Jewish theology that invokes biblical passages,” Tamar opts for the latter. I am not sure about the answer to this question and in all honesty I don’t have a great deal invested in it. Another option, perhaps, is a term I learned from the opening pages of Ellen Davis: exegetical sermon.¹³ Many of the essays in *The Heart of Torah* could arguably be described as “high-end exegetical sermons,” in which I strive to take both the exegesis and the sermonizing extremely seriously. Or, as Ellen herself describes my work, I “resolutely hold together the text and God at the center of the conversation, never allowing either exegetical or theological claims to be abstracted from one another.” At the end of the day, I am not sure how to categorize what I do, but I know where I do it, at the interface of biblical studies and theological, ethical, and psychological reflection.¹⁴

Reading Emotion in the Hebrew Bible

I would like to respond to one further point, this one about how we read (or don’t) for emotion in the Hebrew Bible. David Frankel rightly observes that I characterize Judah as a paragon of repentance and self-transformation. When Joseph seeks to imprison his brother Benjamin, Judah steps forward and pleads to be incarcerated in his place. In this moment, I suggest, Judah embraces the role of brother and son more fully than he has heretofore. Expressing empathy for Jacob, he is horrified at the grief his father will undoubtedly endure should he lose another son. All this stands in stark contrast to the Judah of old, who leads his brothers in selling Joseph into slavery and betrays gross indifference to the suffering his father will endure. As Matthew Schlimm notes, with his offer of himself in place of Benjamin, “Judah unwittingly reveals to Joseph that he is not the same person he was many years ago.”¹⁵ What begins to change Judah, I suggest, is the death of his own sons, recounted in Genesis 38; perhaps, I speculate, losing his own sons enabled Judah to sympathize with his father in ways he had been unable to beforehand. As if this were not enough, Tamar soon confronts Judah with his own selfishness in withholding his youngest son from her, thus condemning her to a life

13 Ellen F. Davis, *Opening Israel’s Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2. Ellen also describes my writing as “existentially engaged criticism” and “moral theology in a homiletical key.” Both are provocative characterizations that shed light on at least some of what I try to do in *The Heart of Torah*.

14 In the opening essay of the first issue of *The Journal of Theological Interpretation*, Joel Green described theological interpreters of Scripture as standing “at the interface of biblical studies and theological reflection.” Joel B. Green, “The (Re-)Turn to Scripture,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1, no. 1 (2007) 1–3, here 2.

15 Matthew R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis*, Siphrut 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 176.

of solitude and childlessness. I suggest that the words Tamar uses in asking Judah to take responsibility for what he has done, *haker na*, “recognize, please,” must have shaken Judah to his core, since they are the very same words Judah and his brothers had used in presenting Jacob with Joseph’s bloodied tunic. Confronted with his guilt (twice over), something shifts in Judah. The Judah we soon meet evinces a greater capacity for empathy and a more developed sense of interpersonal responsibility.

Labelling all of this “anachronistic,” David asks: “Does Judah bemoan his harsh treatment of Joseph and Jacob, and painfully resolve to mend his ways? The fact is that the narrator never tells us so in plainspoken words. Nor does Judah give any verbal expression to such thoughts and feelings.” David’s complaint is accurate as far as it goes. Neither the narrator nor Judah explicitly tells us about Judah’s inner life—about the guilt he may have felt or about the growth in empathy he may have undergone. But David’s insistence that we cannot say anything about the emotional life of characters in a story unless their emotions are described by the narrator “in plainspoken words” strikes me as an extremely odd way to read the Bible—or any other literature, for that matter. Textual positivism of this sort can blind us to the subtle emotional richness of the text. Genesis 22, for example, tells us nothing explicit about what Abraham feels as he climbs Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son. Is it anachronistic to imagine that Abraham may have been bewildered by God’s command, wondering how God could demand that a father slay his son; confused about how God had finally fulfilled God’s promises to Abraham and now threatened to undo them; terrified that perhaps he would not be able to sacrifice his son, and no less terrified that perhaps he would? Guilt-ridden, about what Sarah would say? And so on. Part of the power of the text lies precisely in the fact that the narrator does not tell us what Abraham is feeling. But the implication of that silence is not that Abraham isn’t feeling anything, or that the reader should remain completely agnostic about the patriarch’s inner life. On the contrary, the narrator’s silence invites us in, opens the door for us to imagine the thoughts and feelings that were undoubtedly swirling inside Abraham on that fateful climb.

Taking inspiration from David Lambert’s argument about repentance being a post-biblical phenomenon,¹⁶ David accuses me of “project[ing] inner thoughts and feelings on the biblical character that the Torah narrator was not interested in developing.” Whether or not we can responsibly speak of repentance in the Hebrew Bible, it seems dubious to me to claim, as David does, that we cannot speak

16 David A. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, and the Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). For a provocative critique of Lambert’s equally provocative book, precisely on the grounds that it too readily dismisses conceptions of interiority in the Bible, see Walter Moberly, Review of *How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, and the Interpretation of Scripture*, *AJS Review* (November 2017) 463–66.

of something so fundamental to the human condition as guilt and regret. (Just why does Tamar use the words *haker na*? How is Judah's encounter with Tamar connected with his earlier treatment of his brother and his father? And why is the story of Judah and Tamar placed where it is?) I agree with David that the narrator was not interested in "developing" a complex language around inner thoughts and feelings, but I don't think that means that inner thoughts and feelings were alien to him—any more than they would be alien to any storyteller worth his salt. When a son who had once been callous to his father's pain now becomes overwhelmed at the mere thought of that pain returning; when a man who had been willing to sell one of his father's favorites into slavery now effectively volunteers to be enslaved in order to save another of his father's favorites, then clearly something has changed. To wonder what precisely has transpired in Judah's inner world is not anachronism; it's just careful reading. Now, I may well be mistaken in my analysis, which is, by necessity, speculative (as David notes, the narrator doesn't *tell* us). But the project of trying to discern what characters think and feel seems to me to be essential to what it means to read a story, whether sacred or not.

Let me conclude where I began, with heartfelt thanks to my respondents for engaging so deeply and substantively with my work, and for forcing me to think deeper and harder about the commitments, both methodological and theological, that animate *The Heart of Torah*.