

Prospects of Japanese Translation of the Babylonian Talmud

by Hiroshi Ichikawa

Abstract

An academic project of translating the Babylonian Talmud into Japanese was initiated by a president of private jewelry company in 1986 and sixteen volumes of it were published with the collaboration of more than ten Japanese scholars of the Bible and Judaism until 2016. In order to make an assessment for possible impacts of this translation on Japanese cultural revitalization, the author tried to perceive the collision and struggles the Talmud has faced in transmitting itself to later generations even to the present days as it has still claimed its universal validity. It will be helpful to envisage Jewish intellectuals of the subsequent generations wondering what it was to live according to the Torah and the Talmud and how they coped with difficulties in facing the collision of foreign cultural impacts especially in the modern era.

As the Japanese people had been profoundly influenced by Buddhism before the modern era, the assumption of the similarity between the Buddhist notion of enlightenment through transmission of the ineffable truth and the similar notion of Rabbinic Judaism will help prospect the possible influence of the Jewish scripture. This Buddhist notion had been most successfully developed in the tradition of Zen Buddhism in Japan. Furthermore this notion was fully and more influentially developed in the sphere of education of Japanese military ruling class and their cultural achievements before the modern era. So we suppose that Jewish endeavors in the Talmudic studies facing collisions and struggles against western impacts will give some insights in considering Japanese struggles against, and responses to, the forceful impacts of the modern West upon our traditional value system.

1. Introduction

An academic project of translating the Babylonian Talmud into Japanese was initiated by a thoughtful president of private jewelry company in 1986 and sixteen volumes of it, thirty six tractates of sixty three, were published with the collaboration of more than ten Japanese scholars of the Bible and Judaism until 2016. As this publication was intended to be a public contribution of private companies, About five hundred copies of each volume were distributed to universities, public libraries and individual scholars who were interested in religion and philosophy for free. With the bankruptcy of the company in 2015 after the decades of Japanese economic deterioration this project forcefully came to an end and about half of the tractates are left unpublished or untranslated. During these years interests in Jews and Judaism have fortunately been aroused in public and academic spheres in the 1990s and young generation began to be interested in Jewish studies. In addition, introductory books on Judaism appeared and especially the books on the Talmudic discourses by Emanuel Levinas have been translated into Japanese by T. Uchida,¹ a scholar of French literature. At such a situation the author of this article as a general director of this project would like to make an assessment of this translation for its possible impact on Japanese cultural revitalization.

2. Outline of the Project and Its Results

The idea of this project by Mr. K. Kimura, former President of Miki Corporation, came from his business experience. He showed us his idea at several editorial meetings that he had become acquainted with many Jewish business counterparts in the thirty years of his diamond jewelry transaction and had felt that his brilliant business success was owed much to them because they helped him beyond usual business partnership when he fell into financial difficulties. Touched by their spiritual strength in his intimate friendship, he asked them the reason why Jewish spiritual toughness in spite of their diaspora of many generations. They would often show him the volumes of the

¹ Tatsuru Uchida was born in 1950, literary critic and former professor of French literature at Kobe-Jogakuin Daigaku (The Women's College of Kobe). His translations include *Kon-nan-na Jiyu (Liberte Difficile)* in 1985, *Talumudo Yon-Kowa (Quatre Lectures Talmudiques)* in 1987, and *Talumudo Shin-Go-Kowa (Du sacre au saint, cinq nouvelles lectures talmudiques)* in 1990, all three were published by Kokubun-sha, Tokyo, Japan.

Talmud in their houses. He thought the Talmud seemed to be for Jews what the Confucian Analects would be for Japanese and looked for some venues to introduce Jewish spirit to Japanese people for the token of his gratitude for the goodwill of his Jewish friends. He was advised by his mentor, Professor S. Kanzawa, professor of philosophy in his graduated Waseda University, of an academic project of publishing the Japanese translation of the Talmud as public contribution of a private company, according to which he decided to make Japanese translation of the whole volumes of the Babylonian Talmud. It was when I had just returned from the study of the Talmud from the Hebrew University in 1986, that his agency offered me to help realizing the idea. As I was just junior research associate at Tsukuba University, we invited Professor T. Ishida,² a senior Biblical scholar of Tsukuba University, for the general director of this project. Responding to our call, other Biblical scholars gathered, made editorial board and began to convene many meetings to establish the methods of translation. We had to decide many things: who will translate which tractate? From which tractate to start, whether to translate from the original or from an extant English translation of the Talmud like Soncino Version etc.

After meetings of editorial board we reached the conclusion that the first publication would be the tractate Megillah by collaboration of a professional translator with the background of Biblical scholarship and myself in 1992. He prepared a draft of a Japanese translation from the English versions of the Talmud of Soncino and Art Scroll with very minute footnotes and explanation of the technical terms, which were very helpful for me to read the original and revise his draft. Based upon this experience, we established some basic methods of translation.

Firstly, the Japanese version of the Mishnah and the Gemara of the Babylonian Talmud should be in principle a translation from the original text with the help of the translations of European languages. There was another valid idea of translating from some extant English versions insisting that as there were very few Japanese scholars with the knowledge of the Talmud and the project of translating the complete volumes of the Talmud should be

² Professor Tomoo Ishida, born in 1931, received PhD in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, taught at Tsukuba University, published *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel* (BZAW 142), Berlin 1977; *Yudayakyo-Shi (History of Judaism)* (in Japanese), Tokyo 1980.

done within a limited term, we were compelled to do the work from an extant English version with the help of the ultramodern automatic English translation system of the printing company responsible for this project. However, all the scholars of the editorial board rejected it, claiming that only an academically trusted translation from the original text will be valued and endured forever.

Secondly, in doing the work we designated passages of the Bible, the Mishnah, and the baraita with the bold-type printing in the layout of the Japanese translation to discern from sayings of the Amoraic sages and the Aramaic sentences. It was sometimes difficult to discern them in some tradition in which the Amoraic sage used the Hebrew language in his saying and even more difficult, though it was very rare, to tell where to end the Tannaitic and where to start the Amoraic statement in which they were intermingled. This method was thought to be crucially important for Japanese readers because the Talmudic passages almost always consist of oral debate and discussions based upon the citation from the Biblical passages and the recital of the Tannaitic traditions.

Thirdly, we devised to put a sign or a space or even to insert editorial explanation in separating one *sugya* discussion from another. As the original text does not put any sign of period at the end of each sentence, extant European translations which are conscious of the separation of paragraph have been very helpful in understanding the content but they are sometimes not so aware or conscious of the sign “Sof-Pasuk” of the original text, i. e. the end sign of the *sugya*. Division of the *sugya* and the paragraph is very important to understand the structure of the logic of the sages.

Lastly, footnotes and explanations of the technical terms and the lexicography of lives of the sages were added in the publication in addition to the introductory explanation of the tractate and we made a booklet of these for further work of translation by our colleagues as a useful side book for the identification of terms and human figures.

Prof. Ishida led the editorial board as general director in the first decade of this project. Though he himself did not translate the text, he watched the results of each publication with rigid eyes on formal aspects of the publication. He left our project after the decade and I took over his task. Late Professor M. Miyoshi was a Catholic scholar of the New Testament and made a huge contribution to our project in translating almost all the volumes of Seder

Nashim, and Tractate Niddah and other Mishnaic tractates of Seder Tohorot, and the Mishnaic tractates of Seder Zeraim except Tractate Berakhot.³ He made use of the Goldschmidt German translation of the Talmud in understanding the original. He invited his colleague, Professor K. Usami,⁴ a Catholic scholar of the Bible, who translated tractates Sukkah, Avodah Zarah, Eduyot and Horayot. Professor S. Nagakubo,⁵ a senior scholar of the New Testament and Rabbinic Literature, also made a considerable contribution to us in translating the Pirkei Avot and Avot de-Rabbi Nathan in one volume, and made a monumental translation of Tractate Shabbat. As he was a devout believer of the Seventh Day Adventist, it was an appropriate choice of the texts. My second work was Tractate Makkot, challenging to write a lengthy explanation of the structure and content of the whole text, which was my little contribution to vindicate the spirit and logic of the Talmudic discussion. Each of us talked with colleagues and friends about the project and some scholars agreed to participate and others hesitated. Then the editorial board expanded and added other scholars. Other scholars too had great contribution to our translation, some of their works were published and others not finished by the end of this project. It was ended in the middle of my working on Tractate Sanhedrin. It was the great regret that we could not publish works of several important tractates including Berakhot, Pesahim, Yoma, the first three Tractates of the Seder Nezikin i. e. Bava Qamma, Bava Metzia, Bava Batra, Sanhedrin and all the volumes of Seder Kodashim.

³ Professor Michi Miyoshi, born in 1931, graduated the master course of Graduate School of Theology, Sophia University in Tokyo in 1963, received Doctor in re Biblica at Vatican Biblical Institute in Rome in 1974. Taught at Nanzan University and at Hirosaki University. Published: *Der Anfang des Reiseberichts (Lk 9,51–10,24). Eine Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, *Analecta Biblica* 60, Rome 1974.

⁴ Professor Koshi Usami, born in 1939, graduated the master course of Graduate School of Theology, Sophia University in Tokyo in 1965, received Doctor in re Biblica at Gregorian University in Rome in 1980, taught at Sophia University and at Women's University of Sacred Heart, published: *Somatic Comprehension of Unity: The Church in Ephesus*, *Analecta Biblica* 101, Rome 1983.

⁵ Professor Senzo Nagakubo, born in 1933. PhD of Duke University, participated as a Duke University staff in the excavation at Meron in 1974. President and professor of San-iku Gaku-in College.

3. Some Remarks concerning the Difficulties in Translation

In this occasion I would like to take note on the problems that I felt in reading or translating the Talmud. I will take some examples on the difference in the way of exegesis of the Scriptures as well as the difference in concepts and some technical terms designating the same Hebrew terms as the Ten Commandments and the Faith between Judaism and Christianity and then take some problems on the division of the *sugya* and the division inside the *sugya*.

3.1 Counting the Decalogue

Jews have been accustomed to seeing that the first commandment of the Decalogue should be “I am the Lord thy God, who has brought thee out of the land of Egypt” as is shown in the symbol mark of Two tablets of the Decalogue put on the top of the Holy Ark in the synagogues. So it is easy to read the passage from the Talmud explaining the number of the commandments of the Torah. We have it toward the end of Tractate Makkot of the Talmud Bavli (23b–24a), that the Torah was given to the Israelites mediated by Moses and the total number of the commandments of the Torah was 611 according to the numerical value of each letter of Torah which is less than whole of 613 commandments. What are these two? These two sayings were directly declared by the Lord to the Israelites; the first was “Anokhi Adonay...” and the second one was “Lo yehiyeh lekha elohim aherim...,” however after that they could not endure to hear the divine sayings any longer and asked Moses to hear the divine words instead of them. The sages took the first saying as Mizvat Asse, an affirmative commandment for we know that Maimonides took it as the first of 248 affirmative commandments in his Mishne Torah. This tradition, however, seems very hard to grasp for us for we are accustomed to counting the Decalogue unconsciously according to the Christian point of view, taking “You shall have no other gods besides me” as the first commandment. The Hebrew concept of “Aseret ha-dibrot” has been translated into Japanese not as the ten sayings like the Decalogue but as “Jukkai” or “Jikkai,” i. e. the ten commandments, so that the saying should be either affirmative commandments or negative commandments.

This is not the only problem of the counting. We have to be aware of the reason why the Talmud took the saying “I am the Lord” as the first commandment. Talmudic tradition presupposes the fundamental idea of “acceptance

of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven,” i.e. “Qabbalat ‘ol Malkhut Shamaim” in Jewish religion which was totally different from the Christian idea of the kingdom of heaven.⁶ This Jewish idea can be seen in such traditions as those of the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael on the order of the ten commandments of why the saying of “I am the Lord” should be the first and be followed by the “Lo yehiyeh lekha elohim aherim.” This question was compared to human affairs in this tradition: After conquering the new territory, the king was demanded by his men to issue an edict of directives over the inhabitants there, however he opposed his men and told them to ask the inhabitants whether they would accept his authority or not, saying if they do it, I will issue an edict but if they don’t, why should I issue an edict? This is the idea of the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of heaven, which should be the first act of the people of the Lord followed by their obedience to the divine laws that is the idea of the acceptance of the yoke of the Torah and Mizvot. The difference of the Jewish way of counting the ten commandments from the Christian ones has been firmly connected with the Jewish idea of the kingdom of Heaven which must also differ from the Christian one. I did not know the original idea of the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven that was set behind the Talmudic passage of Makkot. Later I recognized this idea recurred in Rabbinic literature explaining the order of the reading of three passages of the Shema and found it very important for Japanese to know the Jewish way of counting the Decalogue. It may be an impressive and easy way of knowing the difference of theological ideas between Judaism and Christianity.

3.2 Faith or Trustworthiness on Habakuk’s “Emunato”

After the aggadah explaining the number of the mizvot around the end of the Bavli Taractate Makkot of 24a, we have a long story related to the reduction of the commandments because of the weakness in the integrity of the Israelites who could not keep all the commandments of the Law for generation after generation. 613 commandments were replaced by 11 principles of the behavior on which all the commandments were based, introduced by king David based upon the verses of the Book of Psalms. And then the number of the precepts was reduced one by one and finally we are led to the conclusion that

⁶ Efraim A. Urbach: *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* [Hebrew]. Jerusalem 1982, p. 348.

Jews were permitted to live according to the only one fundamental principle; namely “Ve-Zadik Be-Emunato Ihye” Habakkuk 2:4. This passage reminds us immediately of Paul’s remark on the fundamental principle of the Christian faith in the New Testament, in the Letter to the Galatians 3:11. This sentence has usually been translated into English in the following: “But the righteous shall live by his faith” and so does in Japanese. What does it mean by “his faith”? It would be easier to understand the meaning in Christianity for it demands the faith in one God or the faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of that we have to explain the pronoun “his,” which suggests subjective faith, but faith should be objective in this connotation. For me it seemed inappropriate to translate it as “his faith.” I preferred the meaning of his trustworthiness in both the Habakkuk context and in the Talmudic context. However we translated this sentence as “faith” according to the extant Japanese Biblical translation with the footnote referring to several other meanings.

3.3 Apprenticeship of the Disciples to their Master

Apprenticeship was the most remarkable feature of Jewish sages in Rabbinic literature and we are often taught that the total service of the disciples to their master was complete subjection which was designated by *Shimush ha-Rav*.⁷ It seems that silence was more valuable among the disciples in learning from their master. As this teaching so resembles East Asian traditional social virtue, I used to imagine with comparison with the Japanese tradition of apprenticeship that *Masa u-Matan* was common only among the same rank of the sages in Jewish tradition too while their disciples concentrated on hearing masters’ discussions in silence. However we are also told of the characteristics of the debates and disputes among the master and his disciples. Today most Jews like to talk about their fondness of discussions, saying “Two Jews have three opinions.” Which is more desirable for them, silence or discussion?

There were many discussions of Rabbi Johanan and his disciples concerning the *halakha* in this Tractate *Makkot*, however here I am concerned with some struggles between fellow disciples. I found two interesting descriptions, which were taken from the ordinary study scenes in the school of Rabbi

⁷ Ezra Zion Melamed: *Mavo le-Sifrut ha-Talmud*. Kiryat Sefer/Jerusalem 1977, pp. 68–70.

Johanán. First example may let us glance at the relation between fellow disciples. We have it in the BT Makkot 5b:

“Said Resh Lakish: This woman is suspect. Said R. Eleazar to him: ‘Assuming she is suspect, are all Israel to be held as suspects?’ Once as they were both present at the sessions of R. Johanán, then came such a suit before them and Resh Lakish observed: ‘This woman is suspect.’ Thereupon R. Johanán replied to him: ‘If she is suspect, are all Israel to be held as suspects?’ Resh Lakish then turned round and looked askance at R. Eleazar, saying: ‘So you had heard this from [Johanán] bar-Nappaha and did not tell me in his name!’”⁸

Rashi commented on this sentence that R. Eleazar had not mentioned the name in citing this teaching to Resh Lakish, and we learn that Resh Lakish was an elder fellow, sitting in the front row, and R. Eleazar, a younger fellow, sat behind him. Though we have many cases in which Resh Lakish already discussed with Rabbi Johanán in equal status as a matured sage, he seemed still a senior disciple sitting before the master this time. He was upset at the attitude of his younger fellow but it was proved that he had not taken his younger fellow’s view into consideration and that he should have been attentive to his fellow’s opinion which was opposed to his. It seemed that he was ashamed with his boastfulness by his master. In addition, it is hard to imagine in Japanese traditional virtue that the disciple would have called his master by the nickname as Resh Lakish called his master “Bar Nappaha” among the fellow disciples.

In another case we find Rabbi Johanán told his disciple to think for himself without telling the answer. This seems to me a rare case of the master encouraging his disciple. We have it in BT Makkot 16a: “R. Johanán observed: We have only this instance and one other. R. Eleazar asked him: Where? – When you find it [you will know], was his reply. He left him, made careful search and found [the following] etc.”⁹ This story was included in a long chain of discussions concerning the responsibility and punishment of the special type of the affirmative commandment of Mizvat Asse which includes in it the

⁸ BT Makkot 5b, Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin, Shebu’oth, Makkoth, London 1987.

⁹ BT Makkot 16a, Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin, Shebu’oth, Makkoth, London 1987.

negative commandment of Mizvat Lo Taase. It is said that even Rabbi Johanan was forced to withdraw his previous judgment by harsh counter arguments.

3.4 A Blind Man May Repeat the Blessing

Of two tractates of my translation most touched discussion was on the dispute between the sages and Rabbi Juda on permission of repeating the blessing before the Shema by a blind man in Tractate Megillah 24b. As I was familiar with a Buddhist parable concerning altruism, comparison in view and situation was attractive. The Buddhist parable was used to praise the charitable act without anticipation of reward, saying that putting a light for the sake of others gives light before me.¹⁰ Though it was not concerned with a blind man in this Buddhist parable, the situation is similar. A parable in Jewish teaching was not concerned with altruism, but it sheds light on the benefit caused by the lighting in the darkness.

In the Mishnah Rabbi Juda was opposed to the majority opinion, declaring that one who has never seen the light from his birth may not recite the blessings before the Shema because he has never got benefit from the light. After the Masa u-Matan between them in the Gemara, the Rabbis won him in the dispute based upon the remark of Rabbi Yose. Rabbi Yose said:

“I was perplexed by this verse, *And thou shalt grope at noonday as the blind gropeth in darkness (Deu28:29)*. Now what difference [I asked] does it make to a blind man whether it is dark or light? [Nor did I find the answer] until the following incident occurred. I was once walking on a pitch-black night when I saw a blind man walking in the road with a torch in his hand. I said to him, ‘My son, why do you carry this torch?’ He replied, ‘As long as I have this torch in my hand, people see me and save me from the holes and thorns and briars.’”¹¹

This *sugya* was interesting too in another aspect. It comprised of three parts, of which the first and the third parts were conducted in Hebrew while the

¹⁰ “Three Virtues of Food” (Shokumotsu Santoku Goshō): Nichiren Daishonin Goshō Zenshu, Hen-nen-tai (Collective Writings of Nichiren Daishonin in one Volume in Chronicled Edition), Soka Gakkai (37th ed.), Tokyo 1984, p. 1466. Nichiren 1222–1282 was a Japanese Buddhist monk, founded mass congregation in the Kamakura period, whose teachings have given rise to New-Religious movements in modern Japan including Soka Gakkai International.

¹¹ BT Megillah 24b, Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo’ed, Ta’anith, Magillah, Hagigah, London 1984.

middle one was written in Aramaic. Usually in such a case, the Hebrew parts are looked upon as the baraita and the Aramaic part is taken as the Amoraic explanation. It is true the first Hebrew sentence was introduced by the introductory word *Tanya* and the third was also led by the *Tanya*. And my translation followed these words of *Tanya*. However, the second sentence was strange in that it seemed to be a continuation of the first sentence but suddenly in the middle turned into Aramaic when the speaker changed from the sages to Rabbi Juda. It seemed to me the baraita was originally the dispute between the sages and Rabbi Juda, consisting of two parts but in the middle of the sentence Rabbi Juda's saying turned into Aramaic as if it was a part of discussion of the Amoraim. However, it is hard to tell when the baraita ended and when the Amoraim started saying. In addition all of the discussants in it seem to be Tannaim as if they continued to make clear the reasoning of the dispute after reciting this topic of the Mishnah. I guess that the Mishnaic sages were interested in discussing such a crucial issue as this controversial subject including mystical experience so that the tradition of this *sugya* was inseparably transmitted with the teaching of the Mishnah in the Mishnaic period. And then Amoraim could have cited the second part freely in the Aramaic to the effect that this *sugya* resembled to a usual structure of the Gemara.

3.5 Significance of the *Sof-Pasuk*

One of the devices of our translation was to mark the *Sof-Pasuk*. I referred that extant European translations usually do not take it into consideration. I will show a great example that would make me reconsider the significance of this ending sign. It was found in the Talmudic discourse of E. Levinas. It is fortunate for Japanese to read it in Japanese owing to Professor T. Uchida. Levinas did not take this mark into consideration in almost all his discourses and especially interesting was the passage from the Tractate Sanhedrin in discussing the power of magicians. It seems to me he did intentionally neglect the end mark. And we Japanese luckily appreciate that Uchida's translation was accurate and loyal to Levinas in this respect.

In our text we read the saying of Rabbi Johanan and then the end mark of *Sof-Pasuk*. I quote it according to the Soncino edition; "R. Johanan said: Why are they [sorcerers] called KaShaFYM? Because they lessen [MaKhHiShiN] the power of Divine agencies." The *sugya* ends here, the *Sof-Pasuk* being put

at the end of this sentence. And then comes new exegetical *sugya* with the citation of the sentence from the book of Deuteronomy, "There is none else besides Him (4:35)." The Soncino and other translations followed this reading and I had no problem to do the same. But Levinas included this citation of the Torah into the statement of Rabbi Johanan so that this citation concluded his statement.¹² These two sentences contradict each other. His view on the power of sorcerers contradicts the view of the Torah on the same subject. But who put the end mark here? It was perhaps done by Saboraim, the compilers and editors of the Gemara and then by the editors of the printing text. They had certainly in mind the problem that the statement of Rabbi Johanan contradicted the passage of the Torah. Even more interesting was the fact that the new exegetical *sugya* would endeavor to persuade the view of Rabbi Johanan as a majority opinion among the sages, making the view of the Torah a minority opinion. Levinas's reading dares to suggest us that Rabbi Johanan had already been conscious of the contradiction and would have posed the crucial question to his disciples and following generations. He might have asked himself this problem. In so doing we are inevitably led to the exegesis of this sentence of Deuteronomy. I appreciated the reading of Levinas and learned more that we the reader should not be totally bound with the printed edition of the Talmud.

This experience immediately reminded me of the intellectual influence on him of his master Shushani, the legendary wandering master of the Talmud. Levinas noted that the sayings of the Talmudic rabbis were not doctrinal statements but the intellectual confrontations and the anatomical operation into the structure of human knowledge and categories. Through their debates multiple meanings of the divine revelation were conjured up from the verses of the Talmud. Exegetical acts brought forth new revelations of the Bible. In this manner, I felt a shade of his master behind the discourse of Levinas.

In this respect, remark of Ellie Wiesel on Shushani will be helpful for the study of the Talmud. Shushani's lesson made Wiesel think that everything he had learned till then was as nothing by comparison. Shushani was fond of shaking the conventional faith of people and to scare them. His method of

¹² III Traite Sanhedrin pp.67a–68a, "Desacralisation et Desensorcellment," Emmanuel Levinas: Du Sacre Au Saint, Paris 1970, p.84; Emmanuel Levinas: Nine Talmudic Readings. Tr. by Annette Aronowicz, Bloomington 1994, p.137.

teaching was “to demolish before rebuilding, to abase before recompense.” “It is to him,” said Wiesel “that I owe constant drive to question, my pursuit of the mystery that lies within knowledge and of darkness hidden within light.”¹³

3.6 Toward the Implications of the Study of the Talmud in Japan

Most basic elements of the Talmudic study are such notions as the incessant chain of oral transmission, the disciplined way of living in communion, the intimate personal relationship between master and disciple, the authoritative ordination, and human perfection as the ultimate end. All these elements are interconnected with one another with the value of the study of the Torah for its own sake in the center. The genealogy of the transmission of Zen Buddhism is likely to remind us of the similar notions of Rabbinic Judaism. Here in the end I would like to consider the significance of the study of the Talmud in modern Japanese culture based upon the resemblance of the characteristics of Rabbinic Judaism with those of Zen Buddhism, which were fostered in Japanese cultural achievement.

The Jewish experience in the struggle of modernity seems likely to shed light on the Japanese situation in the modern ages especially after World War II. It is important for Japanese to have an opportunity to read the Talmud in Japanese and perceive the strength of the Jewish tradition of the Talmudic thinking. For that purpose it will not be enough to publish the translation. We have to present a whole history of Jewish intellectual endeavor to live according to the Torah until the present day. Japanese Scholars of Jewish studies are responsible for the task. This is the one thing. Another task is to re-examine modern Japanese intellectual history with modern Jewish perspectives. The question involves how the traditional common value of Buddhism could cope with the struggles of modernity.

The first act of the integrated government of modern Imperial Japan was to sever the Buddhist influence from Shintoism and promulgated the edict of the separation of Shintoism and Buddhism totally denouncing the teaching of the Gautama Buddha and its values. Monks were secularized and Buddhist temples were destroyed and statues and sacred scrolls were burned or ruined. The government wanted to unite Japanese people under the state Shinto.

¹³ Ellie Wiesel: *Memoirs All Rivers Run to the Sea*. New York 1995, p. 128.

Militarism and invasion of neighboring countries was the state policy with the help of Western science and technology facing overwhelming Western Powers. Japan became an arrogant, rude and merciless country with the cost of being deprived of Buddhist value of compassion and non-violence. For the worse the spirit of Zen Buddhist eschatology was adapted to the self-negating Kamikaze Suicide Bombing and the Confucian ethics was abused to the total subjugation to Divine Emperor worship.

In such a state of affairs, intellectual thinkers still endeavored to pursue the Buddhist value serving Zen monks under the regime. We can make mention of the names of Daisetsu Suzuki and some scholars of the Kyoto school of Japanese philosophy for their contribution to regenerating tradition of Japanese Zen Buddhism. Owing to their effort the traditional common value of Buddhism in the intellectual sphere persisted the oppressed era and is still relevant today, or may seem more desirable than before. But weary of the failure of the political enforcement of state Shinto the democratized government after World War II prohibited the general education of the basic knowledge of religion to children and youth in Japan and most Japanese people have been indifferent to religion and even hate it and feel scared by it.

We Japanese still have a crucial question of how to regenerate or establish renewed common values. In what sense can we say that the traditional common values of Buddhism are still relevant today? The end of Buddhist teaching may be said to direct the way to see things as they are. It is to seek the untainted perception and just judgment of how to see and behave. This notion is equivalent to the Jewish concept of purification from idolatry. We still find it very difficult to say that we are caught up with our own preconceptions and prejudices. This perennial question and the quest for the response to it are relevant and thus demanded today. F. Rosenzweig, a favorite philosopher of Levinas pointed out that the contemporary world is full of idolatrous things.¹⁴ Even scientific studies cannot be free from idolatrous traps. In this sense this serious endeavor by Jewish and Japanese intellectuals should be kept on.

¹⁴ The passage of F. Rosenzweig on the influence of idolatry in modern era was cited in her discussions on "Lo ihye lekha" in: Nehama Leibowitz: Yiyunim Hadashim be-Sefer Shemot (13th ed.), Ha-Histadrut Ha-Ziyonit Ha-olamit, Jerusalem [undated], p. 235.

תלמוד בבלי
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Fig. 1: A photocopy of the title page of the first volume of the Japanese translation of the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, published in 1993 translated by Yoji Iwashita, directed by H. Ichikawa.

2 a

メガラー 第1章

*1 「字の形には「念」。
*2 エラビの形は「念」。
*3 エラビの形は「念」。
*4 ユダヤ人の「念」。
*5 ユダヤ人の「念」。
*6 字の形は「念」。
*7 字の形は「念」。
*8 「念」の形は「念」。
*9 すなわち「念」の形は「念」。

ミシュナ 1. 2

メガラー¹は(アダル月)十一、十二、十三、十四、十五日に朗誦される。決してそれ以前でも以後であつてもならない。² ヌンの子ヨシヤの時代から城壁に囲まれている都市は、十五日に朗誦する。村や大きな町では十四日に朗誦する。ただし、村では市が立つ日まで繰り返して朗誦することができ

る。
 どのようにしてか。たまたま、十四日が月曜日³に当たるならば、村や大きな町はその日に朗誦し、城壁に囲まれた都市は翌日に読む。
 火曜日または水曜日⁴に当たるならば、村は市が立つ日に繰り返して朗誦し、大きな町ではその日に朗誦し、城壁に囲まれた都市ではその翌日に朗誦する。
 木曜日⁵に当たる場合は、村や大きな町ではその日に朗誦し、城壁に囲まれた都市ではその翌日に朗誦する。
 金曜日⁶に当たる場合には、村は市が立つ日まで繰り返して大きな町と城壁の都市はその日に朗誦する。
 安息日に当たる場合には、村と大きな町は市が立つ日まで繰り返して、城壁の都市ではその翌日に朗誦する。日曜日に当たる場合には村は市が立つ日まで繰り返して、大きな町はその日の城壁に囲まれた都市はその翌日に朗誦する。

ゲマラ

メガラーは十一日に朗誦される。
 [質問者はミシュナの最初の部分の聖書の根拠

を尋ねよ。
 (聖書の)どこからこれが分かるのか。
 [返答者はこの質問に対する驚きを表す]
 どこからこれが分かるのかだ。だって、「どうしてそんな質問をするのか」
 これは後で説明する通りなのだが、賢者たちは村に対しては規定を軽減し、市が立つ日まで村が朗誦を繰り返すことを許した。それは、村人が大きな町の同胞のために食料や水を供給することができたためであった、ということである。

「初めの質問の意味を説明する」
 われわれが尋ねようとしたことはこのことである。ここで考えてみよう。これらの日付はすべて大会堂の人々によって決められたと考えるべきである。なぜなら、もし大会堂の人々が十四日および十五日のみを(メガラー)朗誦の日として決めたならば、(後代の)ラビたちがやってきて大会堂の人々が決めた規則を無効にすることができようか。
 というのは、われわれはミシュナで、「一つの法廷(「ペー・ティーン」)は知恵と教において他の法廷に勝っている限り、他の法廷の判決を放棄してはならない」と学んでいるからである。それゆえ、明らかに、これらのすべての日付は大会堂の人々によって決められたものでなければならぬ。

「初めの質問を言い換えてもう一度尋ねる」
 いったい、(これらの)日付は聖書のどこに暗示されている

*10 「ゲマラ」は「アダル月」の十一、十二、十三、十四、十五日に朗誦される。決してそれ以前でも以後であつてもならない。
 *11 ヌンの子ヨシヤの時代から城壁に囲まれている都市は、十五日に朗誦する。村や大きな町では十四日に朗誦する。ただし、村では市が立つ日まで繰り返して朗誦することができ
 *12 「アダル」は「念」の形は「念」。
 *13 「アダル」は「念」の形は「念」。
 *14 「アダル」は「念」の形は「念」。
 *15 「アダル」は「念」の形は「念」。

Fig. 2: The first page of Tractate Megillah in the Japanese translation (on details see n.13). The first chapter of the Mishnah 2 followed by the Gemara, which is marked by the squared line and the letters designated with bold type printing.