



The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary

By Robert Alter

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"A modern classic....Thrilling and constantly illuminating."?Michael Dirda, *Washington Post Book World*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This brilliant and rigorous book by Alter, who teaches Hebrew and comparative literature at Berkeley, strikes the perfect balance. It delves into literary and biblical scholarship, yet is accessible to the general reader. It argues forcefully and persuasively, but is never arrogant, even when Alter is detailing the inadequacies of other biblical translations. It points to the ways a single Hebrew word can make all the difference in our understanding of the text, but it never loses the forest for the trees. In a stimulating and thorough introduction, Alter makes a case for the coherence of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) as a whole, while acknowledging that it is "manifestly a composite construction" that was written and edited by many people over several centuries. He discusses why we need yet another translation, contending that every existing English translation has an anemic sense of the English language, while the King James Version—the most beautiful and literary English-language translation—is unreliable and sometimes inaccurate with the original Hebrew. After this energizing introduction, Alter proceeds with his eminently readable translation and fascinating footnotes on various Hebrew terms. This may well be the best one-volume introduction to the Torah ever published in English.

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Review

A godsend. The foundational texts are here given their due in prose at once modern and magnificently cadenced. Immediately readable. -- *Seamus Heaney, Times Literary Supplement*

Engrossing...the translation [that] deserves to become the version in which future generations encounter this strange and inexhaustible book. -- *Judith Shulevitz, New York Times Book Review*

The poets will rejoice. Alter's language ascends to a rare purity through plainness that equals the plainness of the Hebrew. -- *Cynthia Ozick, The New Republic*

About the Author

Robert Alter's ongoing translation of the Hebrew Bible, the magnificent capstone to a lifetime of distinguished scholarly work, has won the PEN Center Literary Award for Translation. His immense achievements in scholarship ranging from the eighteenth-century European novel to contemporary Hebrew and American literature earned Alter the Robert Kirsch Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Los Angeles Times. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society, Alter is the Class of 1937 Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley.

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