



Hear,



O Israel...

In a perfect—perhaps *besheit*—collaboration, the Jewish Publication Society and the Jewish Braille Institute have published a complete audio *Tanakh* of the authoritative JPS 1985 translation. The year-long project not only brings this edition of the *Tanakh* to the blind and visually impaired but also makes it available on line, as an MP3 download, and on other audio devices, giving it total portability.

Although primarily a publisher of books, JPS, like other publishers, has been expanding its formats to reach people through the internet and other electronic systems. But the *Tanakh* proved a problem. Because of its 2,000-page length and the sixty hours required to record it, the project was too costly to produce commercially. Then someone recalled discussions with JBI a few years ago, and the collaboration was born. JBI had state-of-the-art equipment and the necessary experience as well as a crew of professional volunteer readers. JPS listened to recordings of about twenty readers and then selected thirteen, among them a few guest readers like Tovah Feldshuh, Bruce Feiler, Theodore Bikel, and Rabbi Harold Kushner. Rabbi Kushner reads from Psalms, and in alternating voices Theodore Bikel and his friend Marcia Rose Sheftack, the former Philadelphia radio and television broadcaster, read the *Song of Songs*.

For those used to hearing the weekly portion chanted in Hebrew or to reading it silently, a sampling of the audio *Tanakh* offered the opportunity to hear the text in a straightforward, almost conversational tone without the trappings of worship or study. The *Tanakh* once again speaks for itself. Having several readers prevents monotony and lends variety and an individual tone to the portions.

An interesting aside is the readers' experience.

Both Jews and non-Jews participated in the reading, and they reported that it was a personally meaningful experience. An Orthodox Jew was surprised to learn the actual written text of the *Tanakh* and realized how much of what he knew was midrash, or interpretation. He also had to master contemporary Hebrew pronunciation, which is not always used in communities of East European background. Pronunciation was the biggest challenge for most of the readers, and JBI produced both an audio and written guide to Hebrew pronunciation to help them. For the readers the reward was becoming familiar with the *Tanakh* or, for the non-Jews, the Old Testament, many of whom were unfamiliar with it.

In this audio version the *Tanakh* will be accessible to a broad audience in as many ways as possible. JPS is offering free podcasts of the weekly portion on its website, and soon the audio *Tanakh* will be available for purchase not only through the website but at Audible and the iTunes Store as well as an MP3 download. And an additional feature at the JPS website will soon allow people to place an icon on their home pages so that one click there will automatically broadcast the weekly portion. Purchasers may buy the entire *Tanakh*, the Torah, the Five Megilloth, or the individual books of the *Tanakh*. JBI will distribute the audio *Tanakh* to any eligible client who asks for it.

The project was funded by Aaron Feingold, Dr. Seymour and Jane Kessler, and Norman and Edith Weisfeld.

Maron L. Waxman, retired editorial director, special projects, at the American Museum of Natural History, was also an editorial director at HarperCollins and Book-of-the-Month Club. She also leads editorial workshops.

Featuring the
voice talents of...



Bruce
Feiler



Harold
Kushner



Marcia
Rose



Theodore
Bikel



Tovah
Feldshuh

By Maron L. Waxman