

December 2019 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

In anticipation of Hanukah, and with two fabulous *bar mitzvah* ceremonies now behind us, I've been thinking recently about gifts in general, and the TaNaKh in particular, because that is one of the gifts we customarily give to our *b'nei mitzvah* at the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey.

Over the past month, I've come to understand something I didn't appreciate until now, which is that while I've been using the term, TaNaKh, quite freely, not everyone has been understanding what I mean by that. I'd like to remedy this confusion with my monthly message here.

The TaNaKh is, simply put, just another name for the Jewish Bible, which is made of three sections: **T**orah (the First Five Books), **N**evi'im (Prophets), and **K**etuvim (Writings). When we take the first letter of each section and piece them together, we wind up with **TaNaKh**.

The Torah and the first few books of Prophets tell the national history of Israel, from Abraham (and Creation before that) to the Exodus to entering and settling the Promised Land. We see that the Prophets tend to serve as a call to moral behavior, and that the Writings represent a wide variety of literary genres.

The purpose of TaNaKh can be categorized in many different ways. For example, it can be seen as history, as literature, as legal code, as wisdom for life, as the explanation for the origin of things, as mythology, as a statement of covenant, and probably many other ways as well. Given my limitations on space and time in this short message, let me just say I believe it is all of these these things simultaneously. In short, if we are the "People of the Book," then I would say that the TaNaKh is the "Book of our People."

Two other terms that you may hear referring to this same book are "Hebrew Bible" and "Hebrew Scriptures." While Christians may refer to the TaNaKh as the "Old Testament," these two terms are not equivalent. This is for a few reasons:

1. From a practical point of view, while the TaNaKh and the Protestant Old Testament contain the same books, they are presented in different orders, with the Old Testament leading "chronologically" to the promise of messianic redemption. The Catholic Old Testament, on the other hand, follows the same order as the Protestant Old Testament, except it includes some books that are in neither the Protestant nor the Jewish canon. Eastern Orthodox Old Testament includes even more books than the Catholic version. In other words, depending on which form of Christianity is being considered, not only are the same words told in a different order, but in many Christian Bibles the words aren't even the same.

2. From a theological point of view, we mustn't ignore the fact that Old implies there must be New. That is, if we accept TaNaKh as the Old Testament, that would suggest there must be a New Testa-ment, which, of course, is exactly what Christians believe. In the Jewish tradition, there is no Old Testament, because there is no New Testament.

For those of you interested in taking a whirlwind tour of every book in the TaNaKh, I invite you to read through the synopsis on the next three pages, as presented on the [Open Yale Courses website of Yale University](#).

L'Shalom

Rabbi Dubin

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