

## The Difference between God-Fearing and YHWH-Fearing:

On translating *yir'at 'ēlōhîm*

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### 1. The Problem: *yir'at 'ēlōhîm* and *yir'at YHWH*

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7). This is the basic principle of the biblical wisdom teaching and the foundation of the biblical religion. However, is there any difference between *yir'at YHWH* “the fear of Yahweh” and *yir'at 'ēlōhîm* “the fear of Elohim” in the Bible? In biblical monotheism, “Yahweh” and “Elohim” appear in apposition, as well as co-referentially with “Yahweh” parallel to Elohim.<sup>1)</sup> It therefore seems that for an Israelite there would be no difference between fearing Yahweh and fearing Elohim. But, is there any distinction between the terms *yir'at YHWH* (Yahweh-fearing) and *yir'at 'ēlōhîm* (Elohim-fearing)? Also, in Japanese, is there a difference between *shu o osoreru koto* 「主を恐れること」 (Yahweh-fearing) and *kami o osoreru koto* 「神を恐れること」 (God-fearing)?

This brings up another crucial issue. When translating into

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1) David Toshio Tsumura, *Vertical Grammar of Parallelism in Biblical Hebrew* (AIL 47; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2023), 11, 50. Also, 津村俊夫 (D. T. Tsumura) 『聖書へブル詩の並行法：詩行の反復表現が表すもの』 [Grammar of Hebrew Parallelism: Appreciating Biblical Poetry] (ひつじ書房 [Hitsuji-shobo]), 2022).

Japanese, how can we distinguish between the singular  $\text{'ēl}$ ,  $\text{'ēlō}^ah$  and the plural  $\text{'ēlīm}$ ,  $\text{'ēlōhīm}$  using the usual word *kami* 神, which can be either singular or plural?<sup>2)</sup> While the English language distinguishes between “god, gods” (a generic noun) and “God” (for one and the only biblical Deity) by using the lower letter “g” or the capital letter “G”, the Japanese language distinguishes only between singular and plural, that is, *kami* 「神」 or *kami-gami* 「神々」. However, just as in the case of the Greek *ho theos* and *hoi theoi*, in polytheism there is sometimes no distinction between “god” and “gods.” Similarly, the Japanese *kami* can be used not only for “a god,” but also for “gods,” as well as for the one and only God expressed by Hebrew  $\text{'ēl}$ ,  $\text{'ēlō}^ah$  and  $\text{'ēlōhīm}$ .

## 2. The Meaning of “to fear” *osoreru* 恐れる・*osoreru* 畏れる・*uyamau* 敬う

In the history of Japanese Bible translation,<sup>3)</sup> two issues concerning the “fear of God” are particularly noticeable. One is the question of the meaning of the Japanese phrase, and the other is how consistently we should translate it.

When we translate the Hebrew term  $\text{*yr}$  “to fear” into Japanese, the first problem is this: in collocation of the deity, i.e. *kami* (“God”, “god”), which character should be used for the term “fear,” *osoreru* 「恐れる」, or *osoreru* 「畏れる」?

2) For the theme of the translatability of “god,” see M. S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

3) 津村俊夫 (D. T. Tsumura), 「日本の聖書翻訳」 (“Recent Japanese Bible Translations”) 『日本の神学』 (Theological Studies in Japan) 60 (日本基督教学会) [Japan Society of Christian Studies], 2021), 9-30.

While the first *osoreru* 「恐」 has a broader meaning and can be used in any situation such as a fear of war, enemy, danger, bad misfortune, or other people, the second *osoreru* 「畏」 is used primarily in a religious context with a positive sense of respect and honor. Sometimes *uyamau* 「敬」, “to honor,” is used instead of *osoreru* 「畏」 or 「恐」 in cases such as “to revere” parents, as in Lev 19:3 “revere his mother and his father” *chichi to haha o uyamai-nasai* 「父と母を敬いなさい」(新共同; cf. *osore-nasai* 「恐れなさい」新改訳、協会共同<sup>4)</sup>) or in Lev 19:30, 26:2 “reverence my sanctuary” (ESV) – *seijo o uyamai-nasai* 「聖所を敬いなさい」(新共同訳; cf. *watashi no seijo o osere* [恐] *nakereba naranai* [新改訳], *watashi no seijo o osere* [畏] *nasai* [協会共同訳]).

However, while *uyamau* 「敬」 may be acceptable for revering one’s own parents or leaders of the Israelites such as Moses and Joshua (Josh 4:14 *uyamau* 「敬う」[新共同]; *osore-uyamau* 「畏れ敬う」[協会共同]), it seems that “revering” or “respecting” the Lord, *shu o uyamau* 「主を敬う」(新共同), instead of “fearing the Lord” *Shu o osoreru* 「主を恐れる」(新改訳), can sometimes be unsuitable, as in Josh 4:24, (“that you might fear the Lord your God forever”; *Shu o uyamau* 「主を敬う」(新共同); cf. *osoreru* 「恐れる」[新改訳]; *osoreru* 「畏れる」[協会共同]).

In the biblical tradition, before the holy presence of God, it is suitable for sinful human beings to feel fear, not just respect or reverence. That is because they know they might perish because of God’s awesome and fearful presence and his anger toward sin. Note that Yahweh is a fearful God who “sent a plague on the people, because they made the (golden) calf” (Ex 32:35). Also, on the day of Yom Kippur *aganai no hi* 「宥めの日」, the

4) *The Bible: ShinKyodoyaku* [『聖書 新共同訳』] (Japan Bible Society, 1989) [=新共同]. *The Bible: ShinKaiyaku* 2017 [『聖書 新改訳 2017』] (ShinNihonSeishoKankokai, 2017) [=新改訳]. *The Bible: SeishokyokaiKyodoyaku* [『聖書 聖書協会共同訳』] (Japan Bible Society, 2018) [=協会共同].

holy places must be purified and sanctified from sin and impurity “to make atonement aganai for the holy sanctuary” (Lev 16:33).

Looking at three modern Japanese Bible translations, the *ShinKyodoyaku* 「新共同」(1989), the *ShinKaiyaku* 2017 「新改訳」(2017), and the *SeishokyokaiKyodoyaku* 「協会共同」(2018) they take distinct positions in deciding which character for fear should be used - 「恐」 or 「畏」 (the shaded term in the table below).

|              | 新共同訳(1989) | 新改訳(2017) | 協会共同訳(2018) |
|--------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Gen 28:17    | 「畏れ多い」     | 「恐れ多い」    | 「恐ろしい」      |
| Ex 15:11     | 「畏れられ」     | 「恐れられ」    | 「畏れられ」      |
| Ex 34:10     | 「恐るべき」     | 「恐るべき」    | 「恐るべき」      |
| Jud 13:6     | 「恐ろしく」     | 「恐ろしい」    | 「恐ろしく」      |
| Job 37:22    | 「恐るべき」     | 「恐るべき」    | 「恐るべき」      |
| Ps 47:2(3)   | 「恐るべき」     | 「恐るべき」    | 「恐るべき」      |
| Ps 66:5(6)   | 「恐るべき」     | 「恐ろしい」    | 「恐るべき」      |
| Ps 68:35(36) | 「恐るべき」     | 「恐るべき」    | 「畏れられる」     |
| Ps 76:12(13) | 「畏れる方」     | 「恐るべき方」   | 「恐れられる方」    |
| Ps 96:4      | 「畏るべき方」    | 「恐れられる方」  | 「畏れ敬われる方」   |
| Ps 99:3      | 「畏るべきこと」   | 「恐れ多い」    | 「畏るべき」      |
| Ps 111:9     | 「畏れ敬うべき」   | 「恐れ多い」    | 「畏るべき」      |
| Isa 18:2, 7  | 「恐れられている」  | 「恐れられている」 | 「恐れられている」   |
| Zeph 2:11    | 「恐るべき者」    | 「恐れ」      | 「恐るべき方」     |
| Mal 1:14     | 「畏れられ」     | 「恐れられ」    | 「畏れられ」      |

When the verb *osoreru* is used with a negative imperative in Japanese, it is normally used to mean “do not fear (something); do not be afraid (of something)” as *osoreru-na* 「恐れるな」, not the reverential fear *osoreru-na* 「畏れるな」. In the case of pagan deities, however, the negative imperative “do not fear” is translated by *ShinKyodoyaku* using *osore-uyamau* “reverential fear and honor” (*hoka no kami-gami o osore-uyamatte wa naranai* 「(他の神々を)畏れ敬ってはならない」 (Jud 6:10, 2 Ki 17:35, 38). The negative of “reverential fear” 「畏」 appears always with the element “to honor” 「敬」.

However, in contrast to *ShinKyodoyaku* and *SeishokyokaiKyodoyaku*,

which distinguish between 「畏」・「敬」 and 「畏・敬」 according to their contexts, the *ShinKaiyaku* translates all these cases by *osoreru* 「恐」, which covers the entire range of meaning suggested by the Hebrew \*yr'.

It is certainly difficult to judge consistently according to the context which character should be used. We should be careful, however, not to dilute the biblical message by using an inadequate character.

### 3. Meaning of “Fear of God” *keiken* 敬虔 *keishin* 敬神

#### 3.1. 「敬神」 “reverence towards god”

Now, the direct translations of the noun phrase “fear of god(s)” into Japanese characters would be theoretically either 「恐神」, 「畏神」 or 「敬神」, but only the last is used in ordinary Japanese; however, it is not used in the Bible. Instead, *keiken* 「敬虔」 “reverent awe” is used for a friend’s description of Job’s *yir’āh* “fear” in Job 4:6, *anata no keiken-sa* 敬虔さ [note: direct translation is “what you fear” *osorete iru koto*] *wa anata no kakushin de wa nai ka?* (新改訳) “Is not your piety your confidence?” while on the other hand, for “piety” the *ShinKyôdôyaku* has “your way of living reverencing God” *kami o osoreru* 畏れる *iki-kata*. Its New Testament Greek counterpart is *eusebeia* (‘piety, reverence, loyalty [exhibited towards parents or deities], fear of God’), which is usually translated as *keiken* 「敬虔」.

### 3.2. GOD *kami o osoreru* 神を恐れる・*osoreru* 畏れる : *keishin* 「敬神」・*keiken* 「敬虔」

What does the phrase “fear of God” mean in the Bible? The term used for “God” here is usually *ʾēlōhîm* אֱלֹהִים which is morphologically the plural form of *ʾēlōh* אֱלֹהִי (“god”) but is treated as a singular noun, hence translated as “God” in English. And a monotheistic author would consider that this “God” is co-referential with Yahweh.

On the other hand, *ʾēlōhîm* is sometimes translated as the plural “gods” in “you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites (אֱלֹהֵי הָאֲמֹרִי) (Jud 6:10). So, *ShinKaiyaku* translates it using the plural “fear 恐 the *kamigami* 神々” while *KyokaiKyodoyaku* uses the singular “reverently fear 畏敬 the *kami* 神. Whether in a polytheistic context one should translate “gods” as 「神々」 or 「神」 is a good question. We will deal with this problem in Section 4.

It should be noted that “fearing the gods of ~” is a reality for the polytheistic people, who are *actually* afraid of the harmful influence of various gods, such as the gods of the earth who cause human beings trouble through things like *tsunami*, avalanches, or mudslides (e.g. 地鎮祭、津波・雪崩・土石流への安全祈願). They do not only respect these gods; they are *really* afraid of various misfortunes and illnesses as well as dangers, so have various rites and charms against things as illness or traffic accidents in a polytheistic country like Japan (see 無病息災、家内安全、交通安全).

An elderly Japanese might still remember that the emperor was supposed to be revered or feared as a divine being and say something like, “I felt great fear (*osore-ooku*) at having been spoken to by the Emperor himself.” Either character for “fear” could be used here, but it is often difficult to decide which

is most appropriate. 「恐」 might better express the feeling of “awesomeness” among members of the older Japanese polytheistic society. In the light of above, translating “do not fear the gods of the Amorites” as “Do not fear and revere” in *ShinKyodoyaku* (also *KyokaiKyodoyaku*) might seem a rather weak prohibition in the context of the Canaanite polytheism.

### 3.3. Pentateuch

In the Pentateuch, there are several occasions where the phrase *yir'at 'ēlōhîm* is used. What does it mean in these ancient Canaanite contexts? What was meant by the term *'ēlōhîm*? One must judge the meaning of the phrase according to its context.

#### Gen 20:11

In Gen 20:11 Abraham excuses his lie to the people of Gerar that Sarah was not his wife by saying, “I did it because I thought, ‘There is no *yir'at 'ēlōhîm* at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’” (cf. ESV) Did he mean that in Canaan there was no worship of the true God, who was co-referential with Yahweh? Or, simply Abraham assumed that there was no piety,<sup>5)</sup> hence no true morality in this place?

According to Clause Westermann,<sup>6)</sup> Abraham was simply referring to *the religious condition* of the “Philistine” Gerar in his visit to the area, not particularly indicating any specific deity. However, Westermann’s view that this very general meaning

5) Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 65.

6) Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985).

is also expressed in Prov 1:7, even if it says “the Lord,” is not convincing, in the light of the fact that the biblical authors distinguish the phrases “fear of Yahweh” and “fear of *’ēlōhîm*” according to context (see below).

### Gen 42:18

In the next case, it is not clear whether the phrase “to fear *hā’ēlōhîm* [article + noun]”, means “to fear the deity (god/gods)” or means “to fear God.”

On the third day Joseph said to [his brothers], “Do this and you will live, for I fear God (*hā’ēlōhîm*).

However, this does not explain which god Joseph is referring to—to the particular God of his brothers, or to the deity in a general sense. We assume that Joseph actually feared the God of the Israelites even in Egypt, but it may be that he used the term *hā’ēlōhîm* vaguely, either as “God” or “the Deity” (the collective godhead in Canaan; see below) in order to hide his identity from his brothers.<sup>7)</sup>

## 4. Plurality of “god”: *kami* 「神」 vs *kami-gami* 「神々」?

Now, in the phrase *yir’at ’ēlōhîm*, who is *’ēlōhîm*? Does the plural form mean the plurality of deity (“gods”) or, as it is usually explained, is it the majestic use of grammatical plural, hence “God”?

The use of the plurality of the god *Baal* probably refers to the phenomenon of the *seven* local manifestations of Baal

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7) See also Lev 19:14, 32, Deut 25:18, Job 1:1, 8. Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Melrose Park, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 143, 361 n 7.

(see below in the Ugaritic pantheon, lines 4–10), like in the Japanese case of Benten, one of the seven gods of happiness. This plurality does not mean that there are actually many Baals or Bentens, rather, that one and the same god, Baal or Benten, is manifesting himself or herself at various localities.<sup>8)</sup>

On the other hand, in a pantheistic context, the god(s) can be present at any place at any time. Hence, “god” is always present in every place, regardless of the location or time. Such a pantheistic deity has been explained as either a generic god or a particular god like the Ugaritic god El, as well as the collective godhead *The Deity*. Similarly, Hebrew *ʾēlōhîm* may be an expression for the plurality of a generic god “god(s),” the specific entity “God” as well as *The Deity*.

While the grammatically plural form *ʾēlōhîm* may refer to a single deity, in the Japanese Bible, in a polytheistic situation the grammatically singular form *kami* may refer to more than one deity.

For example, Ex. 32:4, which describes the golden calf as the “gods who brought you up (pl. verb *heʿēlūkā*) out of the land of Egypt!,” and its parallel text in 1 Ki 12:28 “Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up (same pl. verb) out of the land of Egypt” have been translated in Japanese as follows:

|                    | Ex. 32:4                     | 1Ki 12:28                               |
|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <i>ShinKyodo</i>   | anata no <i>kami</i> da      | anata no <i>kami-gami</i> da            |
| <i>ShinKaiyaku</i> | anata no <i>kami-gami</i> da | anata no <i>kami-gami</i><br>ga orareru |
| <i>KyokaiKyodo</i> | anata no <i>kami</i> da      | <i>kami-gami</i> de aru                 |

As for *ʾēlōhê zāhāb* (“gods of gold”, ESV), in the Japanese Bibles it is translated in the singular as *kin no kami* 「金の神」)

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8) See David Toshio Tsumura, *Was There a Cult of El in Ancient Canaan? Essays on Ugaritic Religion and Language* (ORA 55; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2024), 51–55, 68.

rather than as the literal translation with the plural, *kin no ka-mi-gami* 「金の神々」. But either of the Japanese translations can correspond to the English “gods of gold” or “God of gold,” though the latter is unacceptable in Biblical religion.

|                    |                          |              |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
|                    | ʿĒlōheykā ʾāšer heʿĒlūkā | ʿĒlōhē zāhāb |
|                    | (Ex) (1Ki)               | (Ex 32:31)   |
| <i>ShinKyodo</i>   | 「神々」 · 「神」               | 「金の神」        |
| <i>ShinKaiyaku</i> | 「神々」 · 「神々」              | 「金の神」        |
| <i>KyokaiKyodo</i> | 「神」 · 「神々」               | 「金の神々」       |

4.1. *kami* 「神」 or *kami-gami* 「神々」

These examples exhibit how the grammatically plural English term “gods,” which is the subject of the plural verb (הָעֵלֹדִים), can be translated either as *kami* or *kami-gami* in Japanese. In other words, a grammatically plural form *kami-gami* may be used to refer to a single item, “a golden calf” (Ex 32:4), while a grammatically singular form *kami* may be used to refer to “two calves of gold” (1 Ki 12:28). On the other hand, the grammatically plural form ʿĒlōhîm can refer to God, rather than “gods,” in contexts where it occurs with a singular Hebrew verb, as in Gen 1:1, which is translated “God created” in English, with a capital “G” letter, and in Japanese with the singular *kami* (*kami-wa souzou sareta*).

It may be that, in a polytheistic context, whether the word “god” is a grammatical singular or plural often *does not matter*, as shown by Greek examples in Homer where both the singular form *ho theos* and the plural form *hoi theoi* can refer to either “god” or “gods”.<sup>9)</sup>

9) See B. N. Porter (ed.), *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2000). Also Tsumura, *Was There a Cult of El in Ancient Canaan?*, 3.

## 5. Collective godhead “*The Deity*” *Kami-sama* 「神さま」 (GOD)<sup>10)</sup>

### 5.1. *Kami-sama* 「神さま」 (GOD) *The Deity* in ancient Canaan and in Japan

It is significant to note that *IL* in Canaanite, or more precisely, Ugaritic, ritual texts refers not only to (1) the generic “god(s)” or to (2) the god *El* (DN), but also to (3) “The Deity” (GOD), the collective godhead like *Kami-sama* in Japanese.

### 5.2. “*Kami-sama*”-worship and Ancestor-worship

In the Ugaritic lists of gods, the *Deity* (*ʾIlū*), which is a grammatically “old” plural form of a singular *ʾilu*, is listed following the Ancestor *par excellence*, *ʾIlūʾibū* “The Divine Ancestor,” which corresponds to the Japanese *Go-senzo-sama* 「ご先祖さま」.

### 5.3. *IL* // DINGIR<sup>lu4</sup> or DINGIR<sup>lum</sup> (KTU 1.118, RS 20.24, 1.148, RS 26.142)<sup>11)</sup>

| Line | KTU 1.118 (Ug.)        | RS 20.24 (Akk.)            | Translation     |
|------|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1    | <i>Ilib</i> [ʾIlūʾibū] | DINGIR <i>a-bi</i>         | Divine Ancestor |
| 2    | <i>Il</i> [ʾIlū]       | DINGIR <sup>lu4</sup>      | ʾIlū (= Deity)  |
| 3    | <i>dgn</i>             | <sup>d</sup> <i>da-gan</i> | Dagānu          |

Here, The *Divine Ancestor* and *The Deity* are treated as the two top gods in the official Ugaritic pantheon list, which is attested in three major languages, Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Hurrian. Only after these two deities come the specifically Syrian gods such as Dagan and Baal. This pantheon list, as well as the liturgical texts, suggests that *Ancestor* worship and *Deity* worship were the main religious practices in ancient Ugaritic, and

10) For a detailed discussion of the collective godhead *ʾIlū* in the ancient Canaan, see D. T. Tsumura, “IL as the Collective Godhead *ʾIlū* in LB Ugarit,” *JAOS* 143 (2023), 365–83; *Was There a Cult of El in Ancient Canaan?*, 68–80.

11) Tsumura, *Was There a Cult of El in Ancient Canaan?*, 68–72.

hence, in a broader sense, in Canaanite polytheistic society.

The full list of gods in the Ugaritic pantheon is as follows:<sup>12)</sup>

| <Line> | <Ug.>              | <Akk.>                                                          | <Translation of Ugaritic>   |
|--------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1      | <i>ilib</i>        | DINGIR <i>a-bi</i>                                              | Divine Ancestor             |
| 2      | <i>il</i>          | DINGIR <sup>lu4</sup>                                           | ʾIlū (= Deity)              |
| 3      | <i>dgn</i>         | <sup>d</sup> <i>da-gan</i>                                      | <i>Dagānu</i>               |
| 4      | <i>bʿl špn</i>     | <sup>d</sup> <i>adad be-el ḥuršān ḥa-zi</i>                     | <i>Baʿalū Šapuni</i>        |
| 5      | <i>bʿlm</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>adad</i> II                                     | <i>Baʿalūma</i>             |
| 6      | <i>bʿlm</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>adad</i> III                                    | <i>Baʿalūma</i>             |
| 7      | <i>bʿlm</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>adad</i> IV                                     | <i>Baʿalūma</i>             |
| 8      | <i>bʿlm</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>adad</i> V                                      | <i>Baʿalūma</i>             |
| 9      | <i>bʿlm</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>adad</i> VI                                     | <i>Baʿalūma</i>             |
| 10     | <i>bʿlm</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>adad</i> VII                                    | <i>Baʿalūma</i>             |
| <hr/>  |                    |                                                                 |                             |
| 11     | <i>arṣ wšmm</i>    | <sup>d</sup> IDIM ù IDIM                                        | <i>Earth-and-Heavens</i>    |
| 12     | <i>kt[r]t</i>      | <sup>d</sup> <i>sa-sú-ra-tum</i>                                | <i>Kotharatu</i>            |
| 13     | <i>[y]rḥ</i>       | <sup>d</sup> <i>sin</i> (EN.ZU)                                 | <i>Yariḥu</i>               |
| 14     | <i>[š]pn</i>       | <sup>d</sup> <i>ḥuršān ḥa-zi</i>                                | <i>Mt. Šapunu</i>           |
| 15     | <i>ktṛ</i>         | <sup>d</sup> <i>é-a</i>                                         | <i>Kotharu</i>              |
| 16     | <i>pdry</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>ḥé-bat</i>                                      | <i>Piduraya</i>             |
| 17     | <i>ʿtṛ</i>         | <sup>d</sup> <i>aš-ta-bi</i>                                    | <i>Athtaru</i>              |
| 18     | <i>ḡrm w[thmt]</i> | <sup>d</sup> <i>ḥuršānu</i> <sup>meš</sup> ù <i>a-mu-tu[m]</i>  | <i>Mountains-and-Valley</i> |
| 19     | <i>[a]ṯ[r]t</i>    | <sup>d</sup> <i>aš-ra-tum</i>                                   | <i>Athiratu</i>             |
| 20     | <i>ʾnt</i>         | <sup>d</sup> <i>a-na-tum</i>                                    | <i>Anatu</i>                |
| 21     | <i>špš</i>         | <sup>d</sup> <i>šamaš</i> (UTU)                                 | <i>Shapshu</i>              |
| 22     | <i>arṣy</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>al-la-tum</i>                                   | <i>Aršaya</i>               |
| 23     | <i>ušḥry</i>       | <sup>d</sup> <i>iš-ḥa-ra</i>                                    | <i>Ushḥaraya</i>            |
| 24     | <i>ʿtṛt</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>ištar</i> <sup>iš-tar</sup>                     | <i>Athtartu</i>             |
| 25     | <i>il tʿdr bʿl</i> | <sup>d</sup> <i>ilānu</i> <sup>meš</sup> <i>til-la-at dadad</i> | <i>Adad's helper-gods</i>   |
| 26     | <i>r[š]p</i>       | <sup>d</sup> <i>nergal</i>                                      | <i>Rashpu</i>               |
| 27     | <i>ddmš</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>dá-ad-mi-iš</i>                                 | <i>Dadmishu</i>             |
| 28     | <i>pḥr ilm</i>     | <sup>d</sup> <i>pu-ḥur ilāni</i> <sup>meš</sup>                 | <i>Assembly of gods</i>     |
| 29     | <i>ym</i>          | <sup>d</sup> <i>tāmtum</i> (A.AB.BA)                            | <i>Yammu</i>                |
| 30     | <i>uḡḥt</i>        | <sup>d</sup> <i>dug</i> BUR.ZI.NÍG.NA                           | the deified incense burner  |
| 31     | <i>knr</i>         | <sup>d</sup> <i>giš</i> <i>ki-na-rum</i>                        | Deified lyre                |
| 32     | <i>mlkm</i>        | <sup>d</sup> MA.LIK.MEŠ                                         | Mālikūma                    |
| 33     | <i>šlm</i>         | <sup>d</sup> <i>sa-li-mu</i>                                    | Shalīmu                     |

<List of gods in Canaanite (Ugaritic) polytheism>

12) Tsumura, *Was There a Cult of El in Ancient Canaan?*, 44-47.

When one thinks about “god” in the polytheistic context of Japanese religious practices, one should also carefully distinguish between god or gods 「神」, gods 「神々」, and (*Kami-sama*) the *collective* godhead (The Deity) *Kami-sama* 「神さま」.

When a Japanese says that he fears GOD (*Kami-wo osor-ete-iru*), he does not necessarily mean that he fears/reveres a specific god, but that he fears/reveres *Kami-sama* (GOD) in a collective sense, *the Deity*, just like “worshipping the Ancestor” (*Gosenzo-sama* ご先祖さま). He is not interested in indicating who and which god(s) or ancestor(s) he is worshipping, but is concerned with the divine being *as a whole* collectively as GOD (*kami-sama*).

Thus, the collective godhead *the Deity* such as the Canaanite *ʾIlū*, the Akkadian *Anu*, or the Japanese *Kami-sama* (GOD) may be a common and *universal* religious idea among the polytheistic religious people.

For example, in the Ugaritic greeting formula:

*yšlm lk ilm* (KTU 2.38:4) “May the gods/ the Deity protect you!”  
Cf. *ilānu* [*ana šulmāni*] *liššurūka* (RS 2.4:4, 2.6:5, etc.)

the word *ilm* can be explained either as [ʾilūma] (m. pl.) “gods” or as [ʾIlū-ma] (col. *ʾIlū* with the enclitic *ma*) “The Deity”. Moreover, it should be noted that this Ugaritic *ilm* certainly corresponds to the Akkadian DINGIR.MEŠ (= *ilānu*; lit. “gods”) in the similar phrases in RS 2.4:4, 2.6:5, etc.<sup>13)</sup> This Akkadian use of DINGIR.MEŠ in the Western Peripheral Akkadian (Amarna, Ugarit, etc.) has been noted as “singular *ilāni*,” which is often compared to the singular use of Hebrew *ʾēlōhīm*.<sup>14)</sup> However, one should also compare these phenomena

13) Tsumura, *Was There a Cult of El in Ancient Canaan?*, 76–77. See J. S. Burnett, *Reassessment of Biblical Elohim* (SBLDS 183; Atlanta: SBL, 2001), 7–24; M. S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, 2010), 55–56 n83.

of *ilm* and DINGIR.MEŠ with the Canaanite collective godhead *The Deity* (<sup>ʾ</sup>*Ilū*). The above cited greeting formula, therefore, should be translated in Japanese: *Kami-sama ga anata o o-mamori kudasaimasu yoo ni*.

Japanese Christians usually uses the term *Kami-sama* when they refer to the Creator God. When I visited the elderly pastor of a local church right after the 1995 Kobe earthquake, he said to me: *Kami-sama wa hontou-ni osoroshii o-kata-da* (God is truly a fearful Person). Of course, he was a believer who trusted on God, the Creator; he was not just afraid of the collective godhead *The Deity*. He was totally awe-struck before the power of God, who as the only and sovereign God, actually showed himself as a fearful God.

### 3. Fear of YHWH (*yir'at YHWH*) *Shu wo osoreru* (恐れる) *koto*

Then, what is the difference between “God fearing” (*kami wo osoreru koto*) and “Yahweh fearing” (*Shu wo osoreru koto*) in the Bible? The Hebrew phrase *yir'at ʾēlōhîm* appears 46 times. It is *not* used in Proverbs, but appears in Ecc four times. It appears also in Job 1:1. Also, the phrase *yr' + Elohim*: or “to fear the name of God, appears in fifteen verses (Accordance). – Gen 22:12, 42:18, Ex 18:21, and “to fear the name of God” 「御名を恐れる」 appears in Ps 61:5 [6], 66:16; Job 1:1, 8, 2:3; Ecc 7:18, 8:12, 13. It should be noted that “God” in Ecc 12:13 is referring to God as the Creator in its context (cf. 12:1 “Creator” *Souzou sha* 「創造者」).

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14) N. Na'aman, “On Gods and Scribal Traditions in the Amarna Letters,” *UF* 22 (1990), 255.

### 3.1. To fear the specific God Yahweh

There must be a reason why the phrase “Fear of God” *yir’at ’ēlōhīm* does not appear in Proverbs, while the phrase “Fear of Yahweh” *yir’at YHWH* appears fourteen times (1:7, 29, 2:5, 8:13, 9:10, 10:27, 14:26, 27, 15:16, 33, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17). It may be that Proverbs is a collection of sayings and aphorisms for teaching the covenant people how to behave as those who fear Yahweh in practical contexts. Moreover, it should be noted, “The fear of the LORD *yir’at YHWH* is the beginning of knowledge” appears at the beginning of Proverbs (1:7), while on the other hand, in the Book of Job (28:28; *’dny*; mss. YHWH) and Ps 111:10 it appears in the middle.

This theme of “Yahweh fearing” (*yir’at YHWH*) appears altogether seventy-nine times in the OT. Among these passages, Ps 25:12, 14, “The *friendship* of the Lord (*sôd YHWH*) is for those who fear him” (ESV), is particularly noteworthy. Such a saying is not found in other religious teachings. In usual human experience, if you are afraid of someone, your natural inclination is to avoid that person. However, Yahweh is the covenant God who has an intimate fellowship with his covenant people.

## 4. Conclusions

**“The fear of the LORD (*yir’at YHWH*) is the beginning of knowledge.”**

The relationship between human beings and their creator God in the Bible is designed to be an intimate one, because they are the image of God (*imago Dei*). Such an intimacy is unthinkable elsewhere in the ANE. For example, in the Babylonian tradition, the human beings are made as the serv-

ants/slaves of the gods in place of the lower class of divine beings, and so are to provide food for them and to do work such as digging canals,<sup>15)</sup> The unique personal relationship of human beings with Yahweh was intended at the time of creation, and such a positive aspect of Yahweh fearing cannot be found in any polytheistic religion.

The Book of Proverbs places the theme of YHWH-fearing in 1:7, at the very beginning of the book, as well as in 31:30, at the very end of the book, “a woman who fears the Lord” (*ʾiššāh yirʾat YHWH*), for *Deity*-fearing is *not* a condition for human beings to get salvation. Proverbs is simply showing them how to live in this world as the ones who fear YHWH. On the other hand, however, Ecclesiastes places the theme of God-fearing at the very end of the book. After speaking of the vanity of the life without God, it concludes that all we need is to know God and fear Him. The book concludes in 12:13 thus:

The end of the matter; all has been heard.  
Fear God and keep his commandments,  
for this is the whole duty of man (*or* the duty of all mankind).

Book of Job places this theme at the mid-point of the book, namely 28:28, called the chapter of Wisdom:

Behold, the fear of the Lord (*ʾdny*), that is wisdom,  
and to turn away from evil is understanding.

Thus, each of the Wisdom books place the main theme of God-Yahweh fearing at the crucial point of the book. In the biblical religion, therefore, to fear Yahweh the creator God

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15) See Benjamin R. Foster, “Atra-Hasis (1.130),” Hallo, *The Context of Scripture*, 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 450–53.

as well as the covenant God and to keep his commandment is the “whole duty of man.”

**<Keywords>**

Fear of God, Fear of YHWH, Japanese Bible translation, Biblical Hebrew, Religious terminology

**<주제어>**

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<Excursus> \*kpr 「贖う」 (to atone) or 「宥める」 (to appease)?

During our translation work for the *ShinKaiyaku 2017*, we were shocked to find that in the history of Japanese Bible translation since the Meiji Era (from 1868), three Hebrew verbs which are key terms for the doctrine of redemption 「贖罪論」, that is, \*g'l (to redeem, avenge) 「贖う、償う」, \*pdh (to redeem, release) 「贖い出す、解放する」, and \*kpr (Pi. to cover, to make atonement, to appease) 「なだめる」「覆う」, have been treated as synonymous and translated as “to redeem” *aganau* 「贖」「あがなう」.

|           | *g'l Lev 25:30, etc. | *pdh Lev 19:20 | *kpr (pi.) Lev 1:4, 4:20 | <i>kapporet</i> |
|-----------|----------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| [文語訳]     | 贖う                   | 贖い出す           | 贖罪(aganai)               | 贖罪所             |
| [口語訳]     | あがなう、買いもどす           | あがなう           | あがない                     | 贖罪所             |
| [新改訳]     | 贖う、買い戻す              | 贖う             | 贖う                       | 贖いのふた           |
| [新共同訳]    | 贖う、買い戻す              | 金を支払う          | 罪を贖う                     | 贖いの座            |
| [新改訳2017] | 贖う、買い戻す              | 贖う             | 宥め                       | 宥めの蓋            |
| [協会共同訳]   | 贖う、買い戻す              | 身請け金を支払う       | 贖い                       | 贖いの座            |

The *ShinKaiyaku 2017* committee decided to translate \*kpr (pi.), as distinct from the other two verbs, as “to appease” (*nadameru* 「宥める」). This concept presupposes the existence of God’s anger toward sin and supports the doctrine of the substitutional atonement by Jesus Christ on the cross. Thus the use of the *kanji* characters in Japanese Bible translation certainly gives a great impact on the understanding of the doctrine of redemption, for better and for worse.

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<Abstract>

## The Difference between God-Fearing and YHWH-Fearing:

On translating *yir'at 'ēlōhîm*

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This paper examines the conceptual and translational differences between “fear of God” (*yir'at 'ēlōhîm*) and “fear of YHWH” (*yir'at YHWH*) in biblical Hebrew and their renderings in Japanese Bible translations. The author analyzes the semantic range of “fear” in Japanese religious contexts, examining the distinct characters used for fear (恐 vs. 畏) and their theological implications. The study explores how polytheistic concepts like “the Deity” in ancient Canaan parallel similar concepts in Japanese religious thought. Through comparison with Ugaritic and other ancient Near Eastern sources, the paper demonstrates that “fear of YHWH” specifically relates to covenant relationships, while “fear of God/Elohim” often functions in broader contexts. The study concludes that modern Japanese Bible translations must carefully distinguish these concepts to maintain the theological nuances present in the Hebrew text, particularly in wisdom literature where the positioning of these phrases plays a significant structural role.

<초록>

## 신을 두려워함과 여호와를 두려워함의 차이:

*yir'at 'ēlōhîm*번역에 관하여

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본 논문은 성서 히브리어에서 "하나님 경외"(*yir'at 'ēlōhîm*)와 "여호와 경외"(*yir'at YHWH*)의 개념적, 번역적 차이를 검토하고 일본어 성경 번역에서의 표현 방식을 분석한다. 저자는 일본어 종교적 맥락에서 "두려움"의 의미 범위를 분석하며, 두려움을 나타내는 서로 다른 한자(恐 vs. 畏)와 그 신학적 함의를 조사한다. 연구는 고대 가나안의 "신성"과 같은 다신교적 개념이 일본 종교 사상의 유사한 개념과 어떻게 병행되는지 탐구한다. 우가릿어 및 기타 고대 근동 자료와의 비교를 통해, "여호와 경외"는 특별히 언약 관계와 관련되는 반면, "하나님/엘로힘 경외"는 보다 넓은 맥락에서 기능함을 보여준다. 연구는 현대 일본어 성경 번역이 히브리어 본문에 존재하는 신학적 뉘앙스를 유지하기 위해 이러한 개념을 신중하게 구별해야 한다고 결론짓는다. 특히 지혜 문학에서 이러한 구절의 위치가 중요한 구조적 역할을 하는 점을 강조한다.

