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## BIBLICAL WORDS DESCRIBING MAN: BREATH, LIFE, SPIRIT

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The creation account in Gen 2.7 describes how God fashioned a clay model of man and breathed "the breath of life" into its nostrils. Thus the first human being was created. Man is a compound of matter and spirit. The matter is flesh, made of the soil of the earth; the spirit is the life-giving breath of God in him. At death the body turns back into soil, and the spirit returns to God, who gave it (Ec 12.7; see also Job 34.14-15).

The biblical writers, as a rule, view man as a whole, a unit which cannot be divided into separate parts, each with its own separate existence. This is especially true in the OT books. Man is not simply the sum of physical (flesh, body), spiritual (spirit, soul), and intellectual and emotional (mind, heart) parts. He can be described by any one of these qualities, but this does not imply that the others are separate entities. And in a given context a person's will, or intellect, or instinct, or desire, or passion, or any other emotion may be described as localized in the heart, the bowels, the spleen, the genital organs, the spirit, or the soul.

The problems caused by all of this for the translator are obvious. The least difficult task is to classify the Hebrew and Greek words and establish their meaning in the context of a given passage. The most difficult task is to make sure that the word or expression in the language of translation adequately represents the meaning of the biblical text without connotations not present in the biblical word. Just to take one example: the average reader of the RSV translation of Ps 23.3, "he restores my soul", misunderstands the psalmist's statement, since "soul" in English is not, in this context, an adequate translation of the Hebrew word *nephesh*.

The basic biblical vocabulary used to describe a human being includes the following words: flesh (Hebrew *bāsār*, Greek *sarx*), being, soul (Hebrew *nephesh*, Greek *psuchē*) breath, spirit (Hebrew *neshāmāh* and *ruach*, Greek *pnoē* and *pneuma*). There are other words, too, but these are probably the most important. As we will see, we must avoid the temptation to establish precise distinctions where none are intended by the biblical writers. With a considerable degree of freedom they used words interchangeably. So in poetry, especially, "breath" and "spirit", "heart" and "soul", and "spirit" and "soul", are used as parallel pairs of terms with essentially the same meanings.

In this article we will focus our attention only on the words for breath, life,

and spirit. Two Hebrew words (*neshāmāh* and *ruach*) and two Greek words (*pnoē* and *pneuma*) are used. We will consider each one separately, and we will try to list and classify the various shades of meaning for each word.

As already noticed, in the creation story in Gen 2.7 God breathes into the nostrils of the clay model life-giving breath; in Gen 6.17 living beings (animals and humans) are described as “flesh in which is the life-giving breath.” In Gen 2.7 the Hebrew word is *neshāmāh*: in 6.17 it is *ruach*. It is obvious that the two Hebrew words mean the same thing.

### Neshāmāh, “breath”

The first word (*neshāmāh*) appears only 27 times in the OT. It is used in a number of ways.

1. **God’s breath**, which gives life to human beings and animals: Gen 2.7. In Job 33.4 “the breath of the Almighty” is parallel to “the spirit of God”; similarly in Job 34.14.
2. This breath becomes **man’s own life’s breath**. In Is 42.5 “breath” and “spirit” are parallel, with the same meaning; the same is true in Job 27.3. (And see also Is 2.22.) In 1 Kg 17.17 the death of the son of the widow of Zarephath is described with the statement, “there was no breath in him.” In Dan 10.17 however, the same expression does not mean death, but rather loss of breath through amazement and fear: “I have no strength left, my breath is gone.”
3. So “breath” is **life** as such, or the life principle in all living beings, human and animal alike: see Gen 7.22, “the life-giving breath” (as in Gen 2.7) in the nostrils of all created beings. In Is 57.16 God promises to show mercy to his people, and not kill them, since he gave them spirit and made their breath. This is physical, mortal life that is being talked about, and a translation should reflect that meaning.
4. The word may stand for a **living being** as such, and not just the life principle. So in Jos 10.40 “all the breath” means “every living being” (see also Jos 11.11, 14; Dt 20.16; 1 Kg 15.29; Ps 150.6).
5. In some passages *neshāmāh* is not physical life as such, but **the capacity for feeling and knowing**, emotive and intellectual activity. So in Job 32.8 it is “the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty” that makes it possible for a person to know, to understand. In Job 26.4 Job replies to Bildad’s pious platitudes with the sarcastic question, “Who helped you say this, and whose breath came from you?” In light of the first line, the second line seems to mean, “Who inspired you to talk like this?” (GNB). In Pr 20.27 the statement is made: “the lamp of the Lord is a person’s *neshāmāh*”. It is uncertain what this means. Perhaps the best brief statement about it is in the footnote in the French TOB translation: “The meaning of this verse is unclear. It seems that the author understands “the life-giving breath” given by God to man, according to Gen 2.7 as a divine presence, which would be the light of conscience.” The phrase “the lamp of the Lord” may be understood to mean “the lamp that the Lord uses”. But it may also mean “the lamp that the Lord gives (to man)”, and this is the basis of the GNB translation: “The Lord gave us mind and conscience; we cannot hide from ourselves.”

The Hebrew word *neshāmāh*, then, means “breath”, in its literal sense of air which is exhaled. It is this breath of God which gives life to human beings and animals, and which becomes the life-sustaining force in them. Should God withdraw this breath, a person dies. In several passages it has the same meaning as *ruach*, “spirit”, and means “spirit” rather than “breath”. By extension, the word also means a living being. And in three passages the word refers to emotion, will and intellect.

### **Pnoē, “breath”**

The Greek word *pnoē* appears only twice in the NT, and only once does it mean “life-giving breath”: Acts 17.25. Paul, speaking to the Athenians, says that God gives all people “life and breath and everything else”.

### **Ruach, “wind, breath, spirit”**

The Hebrew word *ruach* appears some 378 times in the OT, and is used in a wide variety of ways. It may mean “wind” (Ps 104.4; Ex 10.13; 14.21; Ps 1.4; Job 21.18), “breath” (Job 4.9; 9.18), “life force” (Ps 146.4) or “spirit” (Zech 12.1). This variety is exhibited in Ezek 37.1-10, where the restoration of Israel is portrayed as skeletons being made into living beings by the action of the *ruach* which God commands Ezekiel to summon (see footnote to verse 9, in GNB).

The word can be used with almost exactly opposite meanings. For example, in Is 31.3 the prophet compares God with the Egyptian soldiers: they are only human beings and their horses are flesh, while God is *ruach*. Yet in Job 7.7 Job complains that he is only *ruach*, a mere breath, that soon disappears (see also Ps 78.39, where fleeting breath is parallel with mortal flesh).

1. The word can mean **God’s breath**, which gives life to human beings and animals. Is 57.16 states that God sends forth the spirit; he has made the life-giving breath (see also Is 42.5; Zech 12.1). In Num 16.22; 27.16 Yahweh is described as the God of the *ruachs* of “all flesh”. Here the sense is either that Yahweh controls all human beings or, more probably, that he gives life to all of them. In Job 27.3 “the spirit of God in my nostrils” in the first line is parallel to “my breath in me” in the second line. In Gen 6.3 God declares that his spirit will not remain in man forever, for he is flesh, that is a mortal being. There are different opinions about the meaning of the Hebrew verb, which occurs only here in the OT. If the majority of translations is followed, a translation of the text could be: “I will not let my life-giving breath (or, force) remain in human beings forever.”
2. The word also means **human breath**. In Job 9.18 Job complains that God won’t let him catch his breath, that is, God does not leave him alone. In 19.17 Job talks about his bad breath. In Jer 10.14; 51.17 idols are said to have no breath (or, life) in them: they are lifeless images.
3. So *ruach* is **life**, the life principle in all living beings. In Gen 7.22 all living beings are described as those who have “the living breath of spirit” in their nostrils. This compound phrase occurs only here, and may be translated “all living beings” or, as GNB does, “everything that breathed”. Job 12.10 states that in God’s hand is “the soul of every living being, the spirit of all

human flesh". The meaning is that God controls all living beings, he has the power of life and death over them. In Job 10.12 Job declares God's care for him: "your care has preserved my spirit". If God were to take back the spirit he gave to humankind, everyone would die and turn back into the soil from which they were formed (Job 34.14-15). The same is true of animal life: should God remove their spirit they would all die and turn back to soil (Ps 104.29).

4. The word is also used to refer to **the inner being**, the will, the intellect, the emotions. In Jg 15.19 the statement "his spirit returned (or, revived)" means simply "he recovered his strength"; see also 1 Sam 30.12. In Gen 45.27, however, the similar expression "his spirit lived", used of Jacob when he got the news about Joseph, means that he recovered from the initial shock (verse 26 "his heart fainted") at hearing that Joseph was alive. See also Is 57.15, where God promises to revive the spirit of the lowly, and the heart of the contrite. The opposite "my spirit faints" (Ps 77.3) describes distress and discouragement. In Is 19.3 the same feeling of distress and fear is expressed by "the spirit of the Egyptians will be emptied out" (GNB "I am going to . . . destroy their morale"). (See Job 17.1; 1 Kg 10.5; 2 Chr 9.4.)

The following emotions and impulses are described as centering in the human *ruach*, or of manifesting themselves there: anger (Jg 8.3; Job 15.13; Ec 10.4; 2 Chr 21.16; Is 25.4; Pr 29.11); distress (Gen 41.8; Dan 2.3); vexation (Gen 26.35; 1 Kg 21.5); enthusiasm (Ezra 1.5; Hag 1.14); pride and humility (Pr 16.18-19); desire (Is 26.9); jealousy (Num 5.14); deceit (Ps 32.2); courage (Jos 2.11; 5.1).

In some cases the word refers to a person's disposition: Ec 7.8, 9; Ezek 11.19; 18.31; 36.26 (all three passages in Ezekiel speak of "a new spirit"); Num 14.24. In Dt 2.30 it is said that God hardened King Sihon's spirit and made his heart obstinate (NEB "made him stubborn and obstinate"). In Ezek 13.3 the word means opinion or desire: foolish prophets follow their own spirit. In Ps. 51.10 "a willing spirit" means a willingness to obey God. In 1 Chr 28.9; Ps 77.6 the word is used to refer to the mind. In Pr 16.32 it means the will: "who rules his spirit is better than one who captures a city". The whole inner life seems to be what is meant in Job 6.4: "my spirit absorbs the poison of God's arrows". And "their spirit was not faithful to God" in Ps 78.8 means simply that they were not faithful to God. In 2 Chr 36.22 it is said that Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, that is, he prompted Cyrus to act (see also Jer 51.11; 1 Chr 5.26). The idea of motive or intention seems to be meant in Pr 16.2: "Yahweh weighs a person's spirit", that is, judges a person's motives (see also Is 29.24).

5. In some passages the word is used in the more specific sense of **God-given qualities** or abilities. Is 11.2 lists intelligence, knowledge and wisdom as given to the messianic king by Yahweh's spirit; see also Dt 34.9 (Joshua), and Ex 31.3 (Bezalel). In Num 27.18 Yahweh says of Joshua: "He has spirit in him"—this seems to indicate ability, capacity, skill. In Hos 9.7 it is said that the prophet is a "man of spirit", which seems to mean a man who is controlled by God's Spirit. Something of the same meaning is to be found in 2 Kg 2.9, where Elisha asks of Elijah a double share of his spirit; in 2.15 it is reported that the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.

### Some difficult passages

Some passages are difficult to understand, and it may be well to examine them separately from any classification.

In *Ps 31.5* the psalmist exclaims to God: "Into your hand I commit my spirit." The use of this passage by Jesus, as he was dying (Lk 23.46), may influence the translator to see here the same meaning. But the psalmist is not a dying man who entrusts his spirit to God. He is in trouble (verses 11-13), but he confidently expects the Lord to save him (verses 14-18), and he praises God for rescuing him (verses 19-22). So here the translation could be "I trust myself to your care." The French common language version has "I place myself in your hands, Lord", and the German common language version translates "I place myself completely in your hand."

The second line of *Ps 51.12* is translated by RSV "and uphold me with a willing spirit." By the normal rules of English usage, "a willing spirit" here is God's disposition, not the psalmist's. This is how the French common language version translates: "Sustain me with your generous spirit." Most translations, however, take "willing spirit" here to be the psalmist's own disposition, and translate "and grant me a willing spirit to uphold me" (NEB), or something similar. The German common language version has "Give me an obedient heart." Or else something like "and provide me with a willingness to obey you" may be used (so GNB "and make me willing to obey you").

In *Pr 1.23* the teacher says, "I will pour out my spirit to you"—which is parallel with the following "I will instruct you". This probably means "I will share my wisdom (or understanding) with you".

In *Mal 2.15* the word *ruach* appears twice. In its first occurrence, the Hebrew Masoretic text seems to read (as a statement), "and one does not (or, and no one does) and rest of spirit to him." The Hebrew word translated "(and) rest," by a change of vowels will mean "(and) flesh", which is what several translations do (JB, NEB, NIV, NAB, GNB). With this change, the text is variously translated: NEB, "Did not the one God make her, both flesh and spirit?" The New Jewish Version attempts to make sense of the Masoretic text: "Did not the One make (all), so that all remaining life-breath is His?" In these various translations the word *ruach* is taken to mean "life-giving spirit (or breath)."

The second appearance of the word is in the command, "and you (plural) take care of your spirit" (the same appears also in verse 16). On this reading of the text, "spirit" here probably stands for the person; so RSV "So take heed to yourselves."

### Pneuma, "wind, breath, spirit"

The word *pneuma* appears some 220 times in the NT, with the same wide variety of meanings that *ruach* has in the OT. The twofold sense of "spirit" and "wind" appears in John 3.5-8 (see RSV footnote). The word may mean God's Spirit, or a person's spirit (1 Cor 2.10-11), an evil spirit (Mt 8.16), the Devil (Eph 2.2), a ghost (Lk 24.37, 39), or a spirit that is not evil (Acts 23.9).

1. The word means **breath** in Rev 11.11, God's life-giving breath that entered the two dead witnesses and brought them back to life.

2. The word means **spirit**, the immaterial, invisible part of the human being which survives death. Man is composed of body (or, flesh) and spirit: the two define the complete self (2 Cor 7.1; 1 Cor 7.34).

In Rom 8.10 Paul writes, "But if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life (or, alive) because of righteousness" (see RSV). The reference to "the body" (that is "your bodies") seems to indicate that "the spirit" here means "your spirits", and this is how most translations understand it. It may be, however, that in this passage "spirit" means the Holy Spirit, as GNB takes it: "the Spirit is life for you". Without spirit the body is dead (Jas 2.26). At death the spirit departs: Mt 27.50, Jesus sent away his spirit; John 19.30, Jesus gave up his spirit. (The related verb "to breathe out, expire" is used in Mk 15.37, 39; Lk 23.46.) The dying Jesus prays (see Ps 31.5): "Father, into your hands I place my spirit" (Lk 23.46), and the dying Stephen prays, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7.59). In 1 Pet 3.18 it is written that "Christ was put to death physically ('in the flesh'), but made alive spiritually ('in the spirit')." The return to life of the daughter of Jairus is described: "her spirit returned" (Lk 8.55).

3. The word may stand for **the whole self**, as in the closing prayer, "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, my fellow believers" (Gal 6.18: see also Phil 4.23; 2 Tim 4.22; Philem 25).
4. The word is also used of **the center of human consciousness and feeling**: emotion, spiritual awareness, conscience, will. In 1 Cor 2.11 Paul compares the human spirit, the ability to know oneself, to the Spirit of God, who knows the working of God's mind and will. It is that same spirit in the believer which God's Spirit joins in testifying that believers are God's children (Rom 8.16).

In Mk 2.8, the statement that "Jesus knew in his spirit" means practically what we would mean by "he knew instinctively", that is, without being told. The saying quoted by Jesus, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26.41; Mk 14.38), means that a person's will, or intention, is stronger than a person's ability to carry it out. (This is similar to what Paul, in Rom 7.18 says about his own desire to do what is good.)

Just like *ruach* in the OT, *pneuma* in the NT is used to characterize a number of emotions: happiness (Lk 1.47); irritation or impatience: this is what "Jesus groaned in his spirit" (Mk 8.12) seems to mean; apprehension, distress: John 13.21 "Jesus was troubled in spirit" (GNB "deeply troubled"); distress or revulsion: Acts 17.16 reports that Paul's spirit was stirred up at the sight of all the idols in Athens. Translators use a variety of expressions in this verse: indignation, exasperation, distress, revulsion, anger. In the context, something like "he was upset" or "he was disturbed" may be the best translation. In John 11.33 the expression "Jesus . . . was deeply moved in spirit" (RSV) is a strange one in the context, for the Greek verb means, ordinarily, "to be angry". But there is nothing in this context to explain anger. The emotion seems to be that of distress, or worry. Some translate "deeply saddened", "deeply and visibly moved", "greatly disturbed".

The word is used of will, purpose, decision. In Acts 19.21 "Paul placed in his spirit" means "Paul decided (or, resolved)"; the modern idiom would be

"Paul made up his mind". Some, like RSV, take "in the spirit" here to mean "by the Holy Spirit", that is, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In Phil 1.27 "you stand firm in one spirit" means to have the same purpose, the same resolve, one common determination.

Meekness is expressed in 1 Cor 4.21; Gal 6.1; 1 Pet 3.4. Insensitivity, stupor, is what is meant by "a spirit of deep sleep" in Rom 11.8 (see Is 29.10). This is spiritual dullness, an inability to see God's activities or to hear God's word. "To give rest to the spirit" means to provide relief, to cheer up, to encourage (1 Cor 16.18; 2 Cor 7.13); the opposite "no rest for my spirit" (2 Cor 2.13) means no relief, no lessening of worry. In Eph 4.23 the command "be renewed in the spirit of your (plural) mind" is unusual; most, like GNB, take this to mean a spiritual and an intellectual reformation, effected by God. In 2 Tim 1.7 "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, and love, and self-discipline", the word acquires a distinctively religious shading. GNB takes the word to refer specifically to the Holy Spirit. But it may be better to read it as meaning a spiritual gift. When Paul, in Rom 1.9, says "I serve God in my spirit", the meaning may be "I offer God my spiritual service", or else, in a more general sense, "I serve God with all my heart" (GNB; also NIV, Barclay). In his discussion of the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14.13-19), Paul says that to pray or sing or praise God "in a tongue" involves not the mind but the spirit. What is said on such occasions is not the product of the mind, but comes from an intense spiritual experience that is expressed in ecstatic sounds which are not understood unless they are interpreted (verse 13). In this section, then, to pray in spirit, to sing in spirit (verse 15) and to praise God in spirit (verse 16) are manifestations of the spiritual gift of speaking in strange tongues (verses 13, 18-19). Most translations have, in verses 15-16, "I will pray with my spirit . . . I will sing with my spirit . . . you praise God with your spirit." (In 14.2 "he speaks secret truths by the spirit" may mean "by the power of the Spirit", as GNB translates it; but it could mean "he says mysterious things with his spirit".) In 14.32, when Paul writes "the spirits of (Christian) prophets must be under the control of the prophets" (see RSV), he is referring to the spiritual gift of prophecy, that is, of proclaiming God's message (verse 29-31). So "the spirits of prophets" should be translated "the gifts of prophecy" or "the gift of proclaiming God's message". Something of the same range of meaning is to be found in the use of the phrase "the spirit of prophecy" in Rev 19.10. The phrase "the testimony of Jesus" (RSV) refers to the content of Jesus' "testimony", that is, the message proclaimed by Jesus, or, as GNB translates, "the truth that Jesus revealed." So the concluding sentence of this verse means, "For the message of Jesus (or, the truth that Jesus revealed) is what inspires the (Christian) prophets." And in Rev 22.6 the phrase "the God of the spirits of the prophets" probably means "the God who inspires the (Christian) prophets" or "the God who gives his Spirit to the prophets" (see GNB). The same meaning of spiritual gifts is what is meant in 1 Th 5.19 "Do not quench the Spirit", specifically the spiritual gift of prophecy (verse 20). In Luke 1.80 it is written that John the Baptist "grew and became strong in spirit". Most take this to be a description of John's physical and spiritual

growth and development. In Luke 1.17 the angel tells Zechariah that Zechariah's son, John, will go ahead of the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah". This should not be translated in such a way as to imply that John was the reincarnation of Elijah. Here the phrase could be translated "with the same spiritual power that Elijah had" or else "with the same determination (or resolution) and power that Elijah had". Some take "spirit" here to mean God's Spirit, but this does not seem very likely.

### Some difficult passages

Again there are some difficult passages that are best dealt with apart from any classification.

In *Acts 18.25* Apollos is described as being "fervent in the spirit". This seems to be a way of saying that he was enthusiastic, had great fervor (see NIV, Barclay). The same expression (in plural form) is found also in Rom 12.11, as a command: "be fervent in the spirit". The meaning here could be the same as in Acts 18.25, and that is how GNB and Barclay translate. Others see here a more religious tone: "keep your spiritual fervor", or "in ardor of spirit".

In *Eph 1.17* the prayer is made that God will give the readers "a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him" (RSV). This may be a human quality, as NEB translates, "the spiritual powers of wisdom and vision". The Spanish common language version translates "spiritual wisdom to understand his revelation and to know him better". Others take the word here to mean the Holy Spirit. Barclay translates, "the Spirit to make you wise in heavenly things, and to reveal to you the full knowledge of himself" (see also GNB).

In *1 Tim 3.16* a creed is quoted, which expresses the Christian faith about Christ. The first two lines are: "He was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit". Some, like GNB, take "spirit" to be God's Spirit: "He was shown to be right by the Spirit" (also JB, NIV). But the parallelism with "in the flesh" in the first line seems to indicate that here the meaning (as in the similar "flesh . . . spirit" passage in 1 Pet 3.18) is "was shown to be right in his spiritual existence". So the Spanish common language version translates "he triumphed in his condition as spirit".

The passage quoted as scripture in *Jas 4.5* is difficult to understand. The form of the Greek is such that "the spirit" may be either the subject or the object of the verb "longs". Most translations take "the spirit" as the object of the verb, with God as the subject: "God longs jealously for (or, loves fiercely) the spirit he placed in us" (see RSV). The trouble is that this makes very little sense in the context. In any case, most translations take "spirit" to be the human spirit; only a few take it to mean the Holy Spirit.

In *1 Pet 4.6* the writer says that the gospel was preached to the dead so that "they may be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit". It is clear that "in the flesh" means physical existence, and "in the spirit" means spiritual existence (as in 1 Tim 3.16 above). But both the pair "according to men . . . according to God" and the two parallel clauses "may be judged . . . may live" are extremely difficult to understand. Most translations



take the first clause in a subordinate sense, meaning “although they had been judged, as all people are judged, in their physical existence” (or, “after being judged . . .”), and the second clause to be the principal one, “they may, in their spiritual existence, live as God lives (or, as God wants them to live)”.

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## TRANSLATING BREATH AND SPIRIT

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The first article in this issue, written by Dr. Bratcher, presents a very adequate and useful discussion of *neshāmāh* (“breath”) and *ruach* (“spirit”) as these terms are used in the Bible.

The purpose of this brief article is to discuss the ways in which these two terms are treated in recent translations of the Bible in Indonesian and Tagalog. The translations used for this purpose are (1) the *Terjemahan Baru* (TB), which is the Indonesian formal correspondence translation, published in 1974, (2) *Bahasa Indonesian Sehari-hari* (BIS), which is the Indonesian common language translation (the New Testament was published in 1978, and the whole Bible is to be published in 1983) and (3) the Tagalog Popular Version (TPV), published in 1980. The article will end with some suggestions in translating these terms.

### Neshāmāh, “breath”

It seems that biblical expressions connected with *neshāmāh* can be translated literally only in the following cases:

1. When *neshāmāh* means “breath” in a literal sense. Thus in Gen 27.7, it is easy enough to translate the expression that God breathed into the nostrils of the human clay model.
2. When *neshāmāh* is linked to tiredness, amazement, or fear. For example, in Daniel 10.17, “my breath is gone” is translated naturally in the TPV as “*halos hindi aku makahinga*” (I am almost unable to breathe.)
3. When *neshāmāh* is linked to death, or the loss of life. In 1 Kings 17.17, both the BIS and the TPV have “he died”, but it would be natural to retain the biblical expression here, as for example in Tagalog “*wala na siyang hininga*” (there is no breath in him *already*), or in Indonesian “*sudah habis* (or *hilang*) *nagasnya*” (his breath is finished/gone). It should be noted that such expressions are natural only when the person talked about has just died.

In other cases, translating *neshāmāh* as “breath” would simply be unnatural. The following are just two cases:

4. When *neshāmāh* refers to God giving life. Expressions like “he gives breath” or “he gives the breath of life” are simply not natural in these two