The root מַלְטָה (malṭa) may be attested in the noun מַלְטָה (malṭa) 'mortar, cement' (DBB:572) and from this Tur-Sinai has proposed that the verb מַלְטָה (malṭa) should be translated ‘to stick’ (1957:301). He draws a comparison with the Syr noun mlt’, an Arb noun malṭa and an Arb verb malṭa ‘to join (with cement)’. This would then provide a semantic parallelism with the verb מַלְטָה in the first half of the verse, as noted by Doederlein, who
suggests that Job’s teeth would have fallen out had they not been held in place by the skin (1779:29). Tur-Sinai interprets the verse, “I cleave to the skin of my teeth (with my tongue) as if by means of cement, so that I am no longer able to speak”. The problem with such an interpretation is that Job is able to continue speaking and his mouth does not appear to be stuck together. Also מַלְט only appears once in the OT (Jr 43.9) and in that instance it may mean ‘loamy soil’ rather than ‘cement’ (HAL:558; Kutsch 1982:476). Habel finds the interpretation of מַלְט as meaning ‘to stick’ appealing (1985:292), but concedes that the allusion to escape in the prologue (Jb 1.15–18) makes it more likely that the meaning ‘to escape’ should be retained in 19.20 (although the prose and verse sections may derive from different sources).

B.3 Another alternative interpretation of Jb 19.20 is that the root of מַלְט here means ‘to gnaw’: so Driver, comparing Symmachus ‘I was pulling up my skin with my teeth’ and finding a basis for ‘gnaw’ in the mention of teeth and the possible Arb cognate maraṭa ‘to pluck out hair, to gnaw’. This would then also be cognate with Akk marātu ‘to rub’, Syr mraṭ ‘to pluck out’, Eth malaṭa ‘to pluck out hair’ (Driver 1955:80; BHS; cf. NEB ‘and I gnaw my under-lip with my teeth’). Driver considers the interchange of the letters l and r as a frequent feature in the Semitic languages; he also cited for comparison Tennyson’s line: ‘gnaws now his under, now his upper lip’, expressing acute or harassed perturbation.

2. Formal Characteristics
A.1 [See מַלְט niphal]

3. Syntagmatics
A.1 The subject of the verb מַלְט hitpael is ‘sparks of fire’ (Jb 41.11). The speaker at Jb 19.20 (Job) is the subject.
A.2 The verb מַלְט hitpael is connected to the syntagm בְּעוֹר שִּנָּי (Jb 19.20).

4. Versions
a. LXX and Minor Greek Versions: διαρριπτέω (Jb 41.11); ἐγκαταλείπω (Theodotion Jb 19.20); ἐχω passive (?Jb 19.20); ἐκτίλλω (Symmachus Jb 19.20); σῴζω (Aquila Jb 19.20).

b. Peshitta: πλτ (Jb 19.20); mthļyn (Jb 41.11);

c. Targum: אשת (root שאר: Jb 19.20); מַשַּׁתַּבֵּךְ (Jb 41.11); רָצֶה (Qum Tg XXXVI 5 = Jb 41.11).

d. Vulgate: derelinquo (Jb 19.20); accensae (? Jb 41.[10]11);

A.1 The LXX to Jb 19.20 renders מַלְט hitpael by the verb ἐχω and reads ‘my bones’ as part of the second half of the verse, resulting in the peculiar translation ‘and my bones are contained in teeth’. Aquila (ἐσώθην ‘I am saved’) and Theodotion (ἐγκαταλείπθην ἀπό ‘I am left as a remnant from’; cf. Tg, Vg) appear to render the Hebrew more accurately. The verb ἐγκαταλείπω (187x LXX) can denote being left behind as a remnant (e.g. Is 1.8; cf. the noun ἐγκατάλειμμα ‘remnant’) and this suggests a connection with the meaning of מַלְט.
A.2 Symmachus translates Jb 19.20 as ἐξέτιλλον τὸ δέρμα μου ὀδούσιν ἐμοῖς ‘and I stripped bare my skin with my teeth’. He, therefore, appears to render the verb by the meaning ‘to make bare’, as have some modern scholars (see Root and Comparative...
Material B.1). Clines (1989:432) invites comparison with the Phoenician inscription of Kilamuwa (Torrey 1915–17:365; cf. Dahood 1960:404–405) and notes the imagery of eating one’s flesh in Jb 19.22; Is 49.26 and Jr 19.9. Clines adds, however, that it is extremely doubtful whether hunger is the theme of the verse here.

A.3 The verb רטט ‘to shake’ in the Qumran targum to Job is also found in the same text at col. XXXIII 2 on Jb 39.21 and probably has the meaning here of ‘to leap’, ‘bondir’ (van der Ploeg & van der Woude 1971:82).

5. Lexical/Semantic Field(s)

A.1 [See נצל].

A.2 מֵלַט hitpael is found in parallelism with the verb מַלְטָא (Job 41.11).

6. Exegesis

A.1 In a similar manner to the hiphil of מֵלַט being restricted to the book of Isaiah and a Qumran text modelled on Isaiah (IQH XI 9), so the hitpael is restricted to the one book, Job. Perhaps these particular verbal forms were rare and were preferred by these authors for their poetic style. The hitpael does, nevertheless, appear in RH (unlike the hiphil) with the meaning ‘to be saved, escape’ (Yalqut to Dt 854; Jastrow:789).

A.2 The interpretation of the meaning of the hitpael stem in the case of מֵלַט is difficult. At Jb 19.20 it may be simply passive, ‘I have been delivered with the skin of my teeth’, although a reflexive nuance, ‘I have got myself away…’, is also possible (cf. JM:§ 53 i). At Jb 41.11 it probably has the sense of the Greek Middle (as with όρος in Ex 32.3) ‘to bring oneself into safety’. It has been argued that the hitpael may have a durative sense in some instances (Speiser 1955:118–21), and although this sense is possible for the cases of מֵלַט it is not necessary.

A.3 The interpretation of מֵלַט hitpael at Jb 41.11 is not problematic. It denotes the ‘escape’ of sparks from the jaws of Leviathan (BDB:572; HAL:558 – ‘hervorsprühen’). The verb, therefore, may denote a movement out or away from something. It has perhaps been chosen as a more vivid and poetical term, used as it is as the second member in parallelism with the more prosaic יבֵיא. Alternatively, as seems to be the case with the niphal מֵלַט, which always comes second after the verbs נָס (1Sm 19.10; 30.17) and ברך ‘to flee’ (1Sm 19.12, 18; 22.20), as well as הָלַךְ (1Sm 22.1), מֵלַט hitpael at Jb 41.11 may denote a more completed action ‘to reach safety’ following the more general lexeme denoting movement (away from).

A.4 Jb 19.20 is a difficult verse to interpret, and the problems have led to the many different rendering of the verb מֵלַט hitpael. It is problematic that Job should in this verse be concerned about his physical welfare when he has been speaking of his isolation from his fellow human-beings. In particular to say that he has escaped does not appear to be consistent with his experiences at this point. Since the teeth are one of the few parts of the body without skin, it is likely that some irony is intended in this verse (Clines 1989:450). The interpretation offered by Clines seems to be the most reasonable (1989:452; other interpretations are given by him on p. 431). Job has suffered to such an extent that the only thing he has ‘escaped’ from is death itself, which in his condition is hardly an escape at all (a Pyrrhic victory). He has been delivered ‘with (= ז) the skin of his teeth’, but since his teeth have no skin, he implies that he has escaped with nothing (perhaps using the image of having been flayed alive).

A.5 BDB (572) renders the verb מֵלַט hitpael at Jb 19.20 by ‘to escape’. Its interpretation of the verse is that only Job’s gums are left unattacked by leprosy.

7. Conclusion
The verb נָלֵט hitpael denotes a movement out of something. It may be used specifically of ‘escaping’ (Jb 19.20), but also perhaps more generally of ‘coming out’ (Jb 41.11), if the verb is not used as a particularisation of the movement outwards. There may be some reflexive force in the choice of the hitpael in each instance, although it may be significant that the hitpael of נָלֵט is to be found in only one book. It does, however, appear in RH.

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