Tehillah le-Moshe

Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg

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For nearly fifty years, Professor Moshe Greenberg has had an important impact on biblical scholarship through the content of his research, his teaching, and as a model of engaged scholarship. Moshe has summed up his lifelong goals as a scholar in the introduction to his Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought (224). They are:

I.

- To be true to the task of the classical Jewish Bible scholar: to enhance the Bible in the eyes of the faith/cultural community by (a) seeking to set forth existential values embedded in biblical narratives, laws and rituals; (b) pointing to the continuities and transformations of the biblical materials in later Jewish creativity. At the same time . . . to be true to the task of the critical scholar in (a) using historical, linguistic, and comparative methods that seek to understand the Bible in its ancient context; (b) presenting and dealing with material uncongenial to my predilections; (c) reviewing the goals and reflecting on the assumptions underlying the procedures of criticism (224, p. xv).

These goals mirror Moshe's ideal for Jewish biblical scholarship as consisting of academic-professional scholarship accompanied by

- Humility—that is, an openness to the new and the innovative, and to continuing debate that entails modesty and lack of dogmatism.
- Respect for the text, expressed in a systematic search for its "troth," in the universal-human sense as well as the particularistically Jewish; for the wealth of meanings, past and present, contained in it; and for its art of expression.
- Finally, and most important, a sense of responsibility toward a community whose members, the scholars' brethren, await their disclosure to them of the Scriptural message (224, p. 7).

Moshe has devoted most of his scholarly attention to the phenomenology of biblical religion and law, the theory and practice of interpreting biblical...
texts, and the role of the Bible in Jewish thought (224, p. xv). His studies in the area of biblical religion include his magisterial survey of Israelite religion in the monarchic period (135), his article on prayer ("T'fillah") in the "Enqv-
dipadah Miqra' th (154), and other essays on prayer and on the book of Job. In his study on the refinement of the conception of prayer in the Bible (121), he traces the development of petition and praise away from their roots in the conception that the deity literally needs to be informed of the plight of the worshiper and propitiated by flattery into "a vehicle of humility, an expression of un-selfsufficiency, which in biblical thought, is the proper stance of humans before God." Thus, "in its highest reaches, biblical prayer remains still the embodiment of the awareness of creaturehood, as much a contrast to theurgic incantation as to the self-centeredness of human-centered modernism" (224, p. 104).

In his monograph on biblical prose prayers (156), Moshe shows that these prayers reflect the piety of commoners, illustrating the popular conception of God as redresser of wrongs, constant, reliable, trustworthy, and fair. He reasons that the frequency of spontaneous prayer must have sustained a constant sense of God's presence and strengthened the egalitarian tendency of Israelite religion that led to the establishment of the synagogue. The fact that prayer was conceived as analogous to a social transaction between persons fostered an emphasis on sincerity and content, rather than formulation, and may lie at the root of the classical-prophetic view of worship as a gesture whose acceptance depends on the worshiper's adherence to the values of God.

In his "Reflections on Job's Theology" (140), Moshe observes that Job's experience of God's inexplicable enmity could not wipe out his knowledge of God's benignity gained from his earlier experience, and hence he became confused instead of simply rejecting God. Accordingly, the fact that the Bible retains Job as well as Proverbs reflects the capacity of the religious sensibility to affirm both experiences:

One can see in individual as in collective life a moral causality (which the religious regard as divinely maintained ...: evil recoils upon the evildoers ... goodness brings blessings. At the same time, the manifestation of this causality can be so erratic or so delayed as to cast doubt on its validity as the single key to the destiny of people and nations. . . . No single key unlocks the mystery of destiny ... but, for all that, the sober believer does not endorse nihilism. Wisdom, Torah, and Prophets continue to represent for him one aspect of causality in events which he can confirm in his own private experience. But one aspect only. The other stands beyond his moral judgment, though it is still under God: namely, the mysterious or preordained decree of God, toward which the proper attitude is "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him (Job 15.15, qeyd") (224, pp. 332-33).

The area of biblical law is well illuminated by Moshe's seminal studies of the postulates and social policies underlying biblical law. In his early study, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law" (22), he argued that "the law [is] the expression of underlying postulates or values of culture" (224, p. 27) and that differences between biblical and ancient Near Eastern laws were not reflections of different stages of social development but of different underlying legal and religious principles. In "Biblical Attitudes toward Power" (202), he analyzed various economic, social, political, and religious laws in the Torah and showed that their thrust was to disperse authority and prestige throughout society and prevent the monopolization of prestige and political and economic power by narrow elite groups.

In his commentaries on the books of Exodus (70) and Ezekiel (157), and earlier studies leading up to them, Moshe has developed and exemplified his "holistic" method of exegesis. This method is beautifully explicated in the introduction to his commentary on Ezekiel. While building on the source-critical achievements of earlier scholarship, the holistic method redirects attention from the texts' "hypothetically reconstructed elements" to the biblical books as integral wholes, as the products of thoughtful and artistic design conveying messages of their own. "Details of this art ... and design disclose themselves to the patient and receptive reader who divests himself of preconceptions regarding what an ancient prophet should have said and how he should have said it" (157, p. 26).

With this approach, Moshe has recalled scholarly attention to the "received text [which] is the only historically attested datum; it alone has had demonstrable effects; it alone is the undoubted product of Israelite creativity" (70, pp. 4-5). As Moshe showed, since midrashic and later precritical Jewish exegesis operated on the assumption of unitary authorship, they have many insights to offer the holistic commentator.

The recognition of the value of traditional Jewish sources for the holistic method is manifest in Moshe's recourse to postbiblical sources in explicating the biblical text and aspects of ancient Israelite culture. In his early study of Hebrew sigall and Akkadian sigillu (3), he found the key to the meaning of both words in the Rabbincic Hebrew verb siggel. In other studies, he found that the release of the accidental killer from the city of refuge upon the death of the high priest is best clarified by the talmudic explanation that the priest's death constitutes a vicarious expiation of life by life (18); and he explained Ezekiel's dumbness (17) and Rachel's theft of Laban's terefim on the basis of striking parallels from Second Temple times found in Josephus.

On the other hand, Moshe has remained true to his early recognition that the Bible is best understood in light of its ancient Near Eastern context as well as later Jewish tradition. Beginning with his doctoral work on the Hapiru through the study of biblical law in the light of ancient Near Eastern law, and now throughout his commentary on Ezekiel, Moshe has consistently shown how careful comparative use of the rich trove of texts and artifacts from the

1. This approach was already anticipated in "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law" (22; see 224, pp. 26-27).
ancient Near East can recover the lost meaning of a Hebrew phrase or bring into sharp focus a uniquely Israelite idea.

Moshe's studies of Jewish thought include a masterful survey of the intellectual achievements of medieval Jewish exegesis as well as investigations of rabbinic reflections on defying illegal orders (77), bijblijden (224, pp. 63–74), and attitudes toward members of other religions (96, 228). He argues that a Scripture-based religion can and must avoid fundamentalism by being selective and critical in its reliance on tradition and by re-prioritizing values (see esp. 173, pp. 11–27, 49–67; 228, pp. 23–35). In his study of “Jewish Conceptions of the Human Factor in Biblical Prophecy” (196), Moshe shows that from the Talmud to the Renaissance, classical Jewish exegetes and thinkers who never doubted the divine inspiration and authorship of the Torah and other prophetic writings nevertheless acknowledged the literary evidence of human shaping of the text. They did so despite

- the great temptation to absolutize the authority of Scripture and silence the incessant challenges to its integrity and validity by categorically asserting that all is simply divine dictation. To modern Jewish critics they are a model of reverence toward the source of religion that does not entail blindness to the complexity of that source or the adoption of false beliefs of that complexity. The tradition of honest and sober reasoning, accommodating articles of faith to (literary) facts, stands the critics in good stead as they confront a wave of simplistic dogmatic piety that seeks to impose itself on the entire community, stifling curiosity and independence of judgment (224, p. 410).

Underlying all of Moshe's scholarly contributions is the premise that scholarship is never to be viewed as an end in itself. Rather, it is a mirror of humanity's various intellectual and spiritual achievements, societal values, and cultural pursuits, and remains incomplete and diminished unless it informs and enlightens the present reality. Moshe's most intimate and meaningful reality has always been Jewish peoplehood—a fact that not only determined his choice of academic study but that also was the decisive element in his settling in Israel. And yet his reality has never been parochial, for it encompasses all of mankind. Most telling of the humanistic outlook of his Jewish scholarship and identity is his statement in a public debate in the 1980s concerning a proposed cut in support of Israeli universities by the Ministry of Education. Departments of ancient Near Eastern studies were singled out as a luxury too expensive to maintain in a time of retrenchment. In defense of Assyriology, Moshe wrote:

Contextual study of the Bible and Talmud (and even more so, our later literature whose dependence upon its surroundings is well known)—that is, inte-

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on the chairing of committees and departments, and on the art of teaching, but also on the art of living in all of its complexities. All who have spoken with Moshe can attest that even the most casual conversation with him is a personally edifying experience.

To be sure, Moshe's educational mission has never been confined to his students and acquaintances but has always extended to the public at large. His commitment to bringing the results of scholarship to the public has taken many forms: from penning popular articles in American Jewish newspapers and magazines to participating in the Jewish Publication Society's committee for translating The Writings (Ketuvim) (1966-82) and serving as the Encyclopaedia Judaica's division editor for Law and Society in the Bible (1968-71); from preparing studies such as Understanding Exodus (1969) to assist educators in developing curricula based on the best of traditional and modern scholarship to publishing articles and lectures on teaching the Bible in schools (a subject to which no academic biblical scholar has devoted so much attention); from his efforts in his own Department of Bible at Hebrew University to train high school Bible teachers and his role as advisor to the Ministry of Education to his teaching at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and at the Seminary for Judaic Studies in Jerusalem.

III

The experiences that Moshe has drawn upon in shaping his approach to scholarship are many and profound. Most formative was the nurturing influence of his parents and the home environment in which he was raised. He was born in Philadelphia on July 10, 1928 (22 Tamuz, 5688), to Rabbi Simon and Betty (Davis) Greenberg, who served the Conservative congregation Har Zion Temple. Their younger son, Daniel, was born in 1934. The Greenbergs' choice of Hebrew names for their sons in the English-speaking diaspora and their decision to raise them in a Hebrew-speaking home (each parent having spent time in Palestine to master spoken Hebrew) contributed greatly to Moshe's strong sense of Jewish identity. Rabbi and Mrs. Greenberg's passion for Judaic studies, Zionism, the Hebrew language, Jewish education, the ethical dimension of Judaism, and the harmony between Judaism and American democratic ideals were successfully transmitted to Moshe, and this passion formed the cornerstone of the commitments that would later manifest themselves in his activities and writings. Moshe's brother thinks of him as combining their father's philosophical depth and willingness to reexamine old conclusions with their mother's constant striving for excellence.

Moshe also benefited from the tutelage of excellent teachers who also served as advisors and mentors at important junctures in his life. The first of them was Samuel Leib Blank, a Hebrew author from Bessarabia living in Philadelphia.
besides Speiser, there were Zellig S. Harris in Hebrew linguistics, S. N. Kramer in Semitic, and Georgio Levi Della Vida in Arabic. Speiser's description of
the programs of study opened new horizons before Moshe's eyes and he was
captivated. He registered in the department and so returned to his Hebrew roots.
Speiser became Moshe's primary instructor. Moshe would later cite him as one of
"the two men who most profoundly shaped my understanding of the
work of Kaufmann the writer... His pedagogy tempered rigorous
discipline with unstinting consideration for his students, and set a standard for
lifelong emulation" (157, p. ix).

Moshe's other scholarly model was the Hebrew University's Prof. Yehuekel
Kaufmann. Kaufmann's tutelage was via his writings. While an undergraduate
at Penn, Moshe came upon the first volume of Kaufmann's Töldot ha-
Emunot ha-Yisre'el in his father's library. He was enthralled by Kaufmann's
conceptual, critical, and polemical power. When he realized that Kaufmann's
work was unknown to the non-Hebrew world of biblical scholarship, he de-
cided to make it known, starting with Speiser. He wrote his senior thesis on
Kaufmann's treatment of the history of the Israelite priesthood, showing the
superiority of Kaufmann's views over the views of others. Eventually, with
Speiser's prodding and aided by Mr. Blank's earlier lessons in conciseness, he
published a condensed version of his thesis as an article in The Journal of the
American Oriental Society in 1950 (1). This was Moshe's first scholarly article
and the first appearance of Kaufmann's views in English.

Moshe sent a letter with an offprint of the article to Kaufmann in Jerusa-
lem and thus began a correspondence that continued until Kaufmann's death in
1963.3 Kaufmann expressed the hope that all of his Töldot would be trans-
lated into English. Moshe accepted the challenge, convinced that Kaufmann
had advanced biblical scholarship but that as long as non-Hebrew-reading
scholars were unfamiliar with the totality of his views and their rationale it
would be necessary to present them repeatedly. He began by translating Kauf-
mann's article "The Bible and Mythological Polytheism" for the Journal of Bib-
lical Literature (2) and his chapter "The Biblical Age" for Leo W. Schwarz's
Great Ages and Ideas of the Jewish People (11) and eventually published his
English abridgement of the first seven volumes of Töldot as The Religion of
Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile, in 1960 (21).4 When
Moshe finally met Kaufmann in person in 1954, he was struck by the contrast
between the intellectual power and polemical sharpness of Kaufmann the writer
and his personal humility.

In 1949, Moshe received his B.A. from Pennsylvania (he was elected to
Phi Beta Kappa a year earlier) and married his high-school sweetheart, Evelyn
Gelber. He continued in the Department of Oriental Studies as a doctoral stu-
dent, working closely with Speiser. He devoted his dissertation to the subject of
the Hapiru (or Habiru), combining his interests in Bible, Assyriology, and
Semitics. His fellow students included the Assyriologist J. J. Finkelstein, with
whom Moshe would later edit a volume of Speiser's essays.

Since Moshe's studies at Penn covered the Bible only in the context of the
ancient Near East, he decided in 1950 to enroll simultaneously at the Jewish
Theological Seminary of America (where his father was then professor of edu-
cation and would later become Vice-Chancellor) in New York, so as to satisfy
the other half of his ambition, to study what later developed out of the Bible:
the impression that it made on Jewish and world culture. The Chancellor of JTS,
Louis Finkelstein, had foreseen that the post-World War II wave of sympathy
for Judaism would lead to the establishment of chairs in Judaica in American
universities. To prepare scholars qualified to occupy them, he created a pro-
gram of special studies for students who were engaged in doctoral programs in
pertinent fields at other institutions. At JTS they would receive intensive train-
ing in classical Judaica and be exempt from practical rabbinical courses. Moshe
and his fellow students (Arthur Hyman, Fritz Rothschild, David Winston, and
Arthur Cohen) studied Bible with H. L. Ginsberg, liturgy with Shalom Spiegel,
Jewish thought with A. J. Heschel, and Talmud with Shraga Abramson and
Saul Lieberman.

Moshe completed both programs in 1954, receiving his Ph.D. from Penn
and rabbinical ordination from JTS. The Seminary offered him a stipend for post-doctoral research in Talmud, and Speiser offered him an appointment at the University of Pennsylvania to teach Hebrew of all periods. Drawn to the
learning of languages, Moshe chose Penn, and thus his academic career began.
As the first Jewish biblical scholar appointed to a position in a secular univer-
sity after World War II, his appointment was an important milestone in the
development of Jewish Studies in American universities and in the realiza-
tion of Louis Finkelstein's vision.

In the summer of 1954, Moshe visited Israel for the first time. He was in-
vited to lecture in Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv about the Hapiru and the Hebrews
and was astonished by the huge crowds that attended; he recognized for the first
time the difference between the community of those interested in the Bible
and its world in Israel and the community in America. The experiences of that
summer planted the seed that eventuated, sixteen years later, in the Greenbergs'
settling in Israel and Moshe's joining the faculty of the Hebrew University.

Moshe recalls his years on the faculty at Penn (1954-70), especially the
first decade, as a period of "professional maturation and widening of horizons
in the exotic and peaceful hothouse of the Oriental Studies Department." He
taught Hebrew language, Bible and biblical history, epigraphy, courses in

3. Highlights of the correspondence are presented in Moshe's lecture "Yehuekel Kaufmann:
Personal Impressions" (211, pp. 4-6).
4. Moshe describes the procedures he followed in abridging Töldot in the preface to his En-
glish abridgement, The Religion of Israel (21).
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Judaica such as "<i>aggadah</i>" and tannaitic texts, and Jewish history. He begun to publish articles, worked on his translation of Kaufmann, and wrote his innovative biblical Hebrew textbook, <i>Introduction to Hebrew</i>, that was published in 1965 (38). He edited the Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series from 1959 to 1966. The department attracted increasing numbers of graduate students, and Moshe exercised a profound personal as well as scholarly influence on many of them. The department's weekly faculty seminar on "Interconnections of Oriental Civilizations" and the Philadelphia Oriental Club, drawing together scholars of the Near East, India, and the Far East were an ongoing stimulus to intellectual breadth. Speiser fostered an atmosphere of intellectual independence to such an extent that when Moshe presented a paper dissenting from one of Speiser's cherished theories, it never occurred to Moshe to suppress his disagreement, and Speiser proudly cited this to students as a testimony to the freedom of expression that characterized the department (224, p. 270, note).

Recognition came to Moshe quickly. He became a full professor by 1961. The same year he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and served as a visiting lecturer at the Hebrew University, where he found the intellectual collegiality to be both stimulating and rewarding. In 1965 he succeeded Speiser as A. M. Ellis Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages and Literatures. In the next few years, he served as Visiting Professor of Bible once a week at JTS (1966–70), was elected to membership in the Biblical Colloquium, and was elected a Fellow of the American Academy for Jewish Research. In 1968, he was a recipient of the Danforth Foundation's E. H. Harbison Award for Gifted Teaching, an award based on the teacher's concern for the student as an individual and his grasp of the art of teaching; it was presented to him in Washington, D.C., where the recipients were also received at the White House by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Following Speiser's death in 1965, Moshe became increasingly involved in academic leadership and public affairs. He became the chairman of the department and the first director of Penn's Near East Center. He lectured and published articles, based on Jewish primary sources, addressing the great issues of the day: civil rights and the Vietnam War. He soon realized that his feelings of independence to such an extent that when Moshe presented a paper dissenting from one of Speiser's cherished theories, it never occurred to Moshe to suppress his disagreement, and Speiser proudly cited this to students as a testimony to the freedom of expression that characterized the department (224, p. 270, note).

In recognition of his distinguished contributions to Jewish Studies when he was in the United States, he has expressed himself forthrightly on burning public issues in Israel, always careful to base his positions on his scholarly understanding of Jewish values.

In his most far-reaching undertaking, since 1985, Moshe has been coediting (with Shmuel Aḥijah) <i>Miqra' <i>Le-Yisra'el</i></i>, an Israeli commentary series on the Bible conceived in response to the fact that, for all of its distinction in modern biblical scholarship, Israel had rarely produced fully modern commentaries. <i>Miqra' <i>Le-Yisra'el</i></i> is designed to fill that lacuna by presenting scholars, teachers, educated readers, and high school and university students with a Hebrew commentary, written in an accessible style, that draws on all of the resources of modern biblical scholarship in addition to traditional Jewish sources and also presents the Bible's reverberations in later Jewish and general culture.

Alongside all of his public service, Moshe's scholarship has continued unabated and has continued to attract admiration and recognition. The first part of his commentary on Ezekiel in the Anchor Bible series was published in 1983 (157) and received the Biblical Archeology Society Publication Award for "the best commentary on a book of the Old Testament." Moshe received an honorary degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 1986, was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1987, and spent a year as a Fellow at the Hebrew University's Institute of Advanced Studies in 1988–89. He served as visiting professor at Berkeley (1981–82), Yale (1986–87), and the Russian State University of the Humanities (Moscow, 1991). In 1994, the State of Israel awarded him the Israel Prize in Bible, the highest prize awarded in Israel in recognition of personal achievement and public service. In recognition of his distinguished contributions to Jewish Studies when he was a member of the Penn faculty and since then, he was awarded a Moses
Aaron Dropsie Fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Judaic Studies in 1994–95, and an honorary degree in 1996. In 1996, he was also awarded the Hebrew University's Samuel Rothberg Prize for Jewish Education, a prize that his father had received many years earlier. A Hebrew collection of his essays, On the Bible and Judaism, edited by Avraham Shapira, was published in 1984 (167), and an English collection, Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought, was published in 1995 (224) by the Jewish Publication Society in its prestigious Scholar of Distinction Series.

IV

On a personal level, in addition to his parents’ influence, the most profound influence in Moshe’s life has been his lifelong companion and soulmate, Evy, and the wonderful family that they created. From the very outset of Moshe's academic life, Evy has been ever present as a sounding board, advisor, comforter, and constant source of encouragement. With her, he has shared his hopes and dreams, his frustrations and doubts, his joys and successes. Evy has devoted her life to Moshe and the accomplishment of his scholarly mission, sparing him many responsibilities so that his work could continue unabated. Over the years, she has graciously opened home and heart to Moshe's many students and colleagues, encouraging the meeting in their home of study groups and learning circles in which she often actively participates. Their sons, Joel, Raphael, and Eitan (born in 1955, 1958, and 1962, respectively) have always been a source of delight and wonder to their parents. Together Moshe and Evy created an environment for their family that would imbue their children with the values and ideals that they both hold dear. Evy supported Moshe's desire to raise their children speaking Hebrew and shared his exhilaration at living as a family in Israel. As their children grew, Moshe took an active role in their intellectual development, always learning with them and from them. Even when they were young, he considered their opinions seriously, and their insightful comments were always appreciated. Upon moving to Israel, as with every immigrant generation, the children began to take a more active part in educating Moshe and Evy about Israeli life. Through them they vicariously “grew up” in Israel, appreciating the forces and influences that shape Israeli youth, thus gaining insight and perspective on the nature of Israeli society. They are rightfully proud of the accomplishments of Joel, the journalist, Rafi, the archaeologist, and Eitan, the musician, and grateful for all they have shared with them.

V

In June of 1996, Moshe retired from full-time teaching at the Hebrew University. He continues to teach there and at the Seminary for Judaic Studies part-time. The second part of his commentary on Ezekiel (232), covering chapters 21–37, has just appeared in August, 1997, and he is now at work on the final volume. His retirement will also allow him vigorously to pursue his important editorial work on Miqra’i Tisra’el.

One appropriate way to characterize Moshe Greenberg’s achievements would be to point out how well what he has written about Yehezkel Kaufmann applies to him: he has “elevated the discussion of biblical thought above ecclesiastical dogma and partisanship into the realm of the eternally significant ideas” (224, pp. 187–88). Further, he “embodies a passionate commitment to grand ideas, combining the philosopher’s power of analysis and generalization with the attention to detail of the philological exegete. His life-work is a demonstration that the study of ancient texts does not necessitate losing contact with the vital currents of the spirit and the intellect” (157, p. ix). To this we may add the following statement from the citation accompanying Moshe’s Israel Prize: Moshe’s “superb studies show that personal engagement, when controlled by a rigorous ability to criticize one’s own theories, not only does not compromise scholarly research but, on the contrary, fructifies it.”

As Moshe continues to complete his current projects and to undertake new ones, we join together with all of his students, colleagues, friends, and admirers in wishing him many more years of scholarly creativity in good health and happiness, surrounded by all of his loved ones.

7. In addition to the sources cited, parts of the preceding are based on Moshe’s autobiographical reflections at the Hebrew University’s reception honoring him on the occasion of his retirement, June 6, 1996, an information kindly provided by Daniel and Hanna Greenberg, Judah Goldin, Shalom M. Paul, Emanuel Tov, and Yair Zakovitch, and on remarks Moshe has made to the editors over the years.