

A Tribute to Professor Moshe Greenberg, זכרונו לברכה

The sad news of the passing of Professor Moshe Greenberg on Shabbat, May 15 (2 Sivan), 2010, in Jerusalem, has just reached us. This tribute, by the least of his students, was written some ten years ago, when he was awarded the Jewish Cultural Achievement Award in Scholarship by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. Professor Greenberg, already ill and in no condition to attend the ceremonies at the Harmonie Club in New York, asked that I accept the award on his behalf. Similarly, the National Foundation for Jewish Culture asked that I present the award to Professor Greenberg (in absentia) – with appropriate remarks – at the ceremony.

תהי נפשו צרורה בצרור החיים
ויהי זכרו ברוך

National Foundation for Jewish Culture Awards Ceremony

Sunday, May 21, 2000 at the Harmonie Club, New York City

Award Presented to Professor Moshe Greenberg

Presentation of Award:

I. Distinguished Honorees, Members of the Board and Administration of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, Friends:

On the one hand, it is a singular honor for me to make this presentation on behalf of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture; on the other hand, I stand here in fear and trepidation for nothing I say can do justice to the full stature and true merit of מורי ורבי Professor Moshe Greenberg. My task is made easier, perhaps, by the fact that Moshe Greenberg has been the recipient of numerous awards – even before this one – and having viewed what the presenters said on some of those occasions, I discovered that they too fell short of the mark. At worst, I am just one more in a long succession of failures.

- II. Among the many awards and honors that have come Moshe's way, I shall mention only the following:
1. In 1961, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.
 2. In 1965, he succeeded E.A. Speiser as A.M. Ellis Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages and Literatures at the University of Pennsylvania.
 3. Shortly thereafter he was elected a Fellow of the American Academy for Jewish Research.
 4. In 1968, he was awarded the Danforth Foundation's E.H. Harbison Award for Gifted Teaching.
 5. In 1983, he received the Biblical Archaeology Society Award for "the best commentary on a book of the Old Testament."
 6. In 1987, he was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
 7. He has been awarded honorary degrees from the Jewish Theological Seminary and from the University of Pennsylvania.
 8. In 1995, he was designated a Jewish Publication Society Scholar of Distinction, and a collection of studies by Moshe, entitled *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought*, was published by JPS that year.
 9. In 1996, he was awarded the Hebrew University's Samuel Rothberg Prize for Jewish Education.
 10. In 1997, a Festschrift entitled *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* was presented to Moshe. It was edited by Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler, and Jeffrey H. Tigay. I mention their names, for they are all distinguished scholars in their own right, and they are all disciples of Moshe Greenberg. Indeed, they are representative of an even larger number of such disciples.

11. I have saved for last what is perhaps the most prestigious award he has won – that is, until this evening, of course. In 1994, he was awarded the Israel prize in Bible, the highest prize awarded by the State of Israel, in recognition of personal achievement and public service.

III. In terms of publications, I shall only mention books authored or edited by Moshe. The titles reflect his wide range of interest and the variety of areas he has contributed to in the last 50 years.

1. *The Hab/piru*, 1955.
2. *The Religion Of Israel*, 1960. This was Moshe's translation and abridgement of Yehezkel Kaufmann's magisterial תולדות האמונה הישראלית.
3. *Introduction the Hebrew*, 1965.
4. *Understanding Exodus*, 1969.
5. *Biblical Prose and Prayer*, 1983.
6. על המקרא ועל היהדות, 1984.
7. הסגולה והכוח, 1985.
8. Anchor Bible: *Ezekiel*, vol. 1, 1983; vol. 2, 1997.
9. From 1966-1982, Moshe served on the JPS committee for the translation of *The Writings* (כתובים). This publication, a twentieth century classic, doubtless will continue to be published and read throughout the twenty-first century as well.
10. Since 1985, Moshe is co-editor of מקרא לישראל, a commentary on the Bible series in modern Hebrew, addressed to scholars, teachers, and educated readers in Israel.

IV. Those are some of the basic facts from Moshe's curriculum vitae. The facts, of course, need to be assessed. Alas, one has to be Moshe Greenberg in order to properly assess Moshe Greenberg. Nonetheless, **פטור בלא כלום אי**, **אפשר**, so I shall continue to speak – once again in fear and trepidation – and draw wherever possible from Moshe's own programmatic statements about his work.

Moshe's almost 250 publications represent his **תורה שבכתב**. But no less significant is his **תורה שבעל פה**. For more than he has written he has said. Thousands sat at his feet, not only in the classroom, but in lecture halls, synagogues, adult education centers, and even (better: especially) in his own home.

Moshe has revolutionized the study of Bible among Jews. Traditionally, Jews viewed the Bible almost exclusively through rabbinic lenses. Throughout history, Jews also contemporized the Bible. **תנ"ך** was read in the light of the best and worthiest in contemporary thought. Mystics read the Bible as a repository of mystical teaching; rationalists read it as a repository of rationalist thinking. All Jews read the Bible as a living Bible, impacting on everyday thought and practice. Modern Bible criticism, largely a Protestant enterprise, did not address the Jewish faith community at large. It was an academic discipline reserved mostly for a peer group of scholars. Moreover, its concerns tended to be historical, antiquarian, and unrelated to the concerns of the living faith community.

Moshe created a new agenda. He proved that one could edit **מקרא לישראל** and contribute to the Anchor Bible as well. As a traditional reader of the Bible, he devoted his life to contemporizing the Bible. He did so by extrapolating from the Bible and from its Jewish commentators values that continue to resonate in our time. His conclusions were never contrived; this was not **מדרש**. He arrived at his conclusions by applying rigorous philological method, and by engaging in painstaking historical and comparative research. Moshe's landmark study, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," first published in 1960, typifies this approach. Moshe enhanced biblical study among members of the Jewish faith – and cultural – communities, especially in modern Israel. At the same time, precisely because his method was immaculate, he contributed to the modern critical study of the Bible. He expanded its horizons by bringing to bear on it his mastery of the Hebrew language, as well as his mastery of classical, medieval, and modern Hebrew literature. Many a Protestant scholar learned to appreciate through Moshe the contribution of a R. Joseph Qara, Rashbam, R. Eliezer of Beaugency, Arnold B. Ehrlich, and Yehezkel Kaufmann.

Aside from his scholarly accomplishments, Moshe is a gifted and dedicated teacher. I can attest to the excellence of his teaching for I am among the many fortunate students who were privileged to sit at his feet. I recall, as a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, literally running to Moshe's lectures. It was a privilege to hear him lecture and to learn from him. I did not want to miss a word. My classmates felt the same way. I have now been teaching graduate students for some 30 years. No one runs to hear my lectures. Unabashedly, I often tell my graduate students that I was a better student than they are: I came on time, I came prepared, and I never missed a session. As the insult begins to sink in, I smile and explain to them quite truthfully that the reason I was a better student was entirely due to the fact that I had a better teacher, מורי ורבי Professor Moshe Greenberg.

I would be remiss if I didn't say a word about Moshe's intellectual honesty. Here, an anecdote will suffice. Some 35 years ago, I was a guest at Moshe and Evelyn's home in Lower Merion, Pennsylvania, when their youngest son, Eitan, caught a splinter on his knee. He was perhaps four years old at the time. After dipping the tweezers in an antiseptic, Moshe gently explained to Eitan what was about to happen. As I never heard a father say before, Moshe said: "Now Eitan this will surely hurt, but not very much." Moshe's honesty when addressing a four year old son left an indelible impression on me. Unfortunately, it didn't help Moshe. After the successful operation, Eitan cried and exclaimed: "Abba, you said it wouldn't hurt much, but it hurt a lot!"

For his scholarship, teaching, and impact on Jewish culture, the NFJC presents its Jewish Cultural Achievement Award in Scholarship to Professor Moshe Greenberg.

Acceptance of Award:

Moshe regrets that due to ill health he could not join us this evening. It is a sample of his humility that he has allowed me to present and accept this reward on his behalf. I cannot state with certainty what he would have said had he been present this evening. But he surely would have expressed his gratitude

to the NFJC and to its committees for having selected him for the award. Then, knowing his deep sense of humility, I suspect he would have cited a passage from the writings of Samuel Ha-Nagid, the famed eleventh century rabbinic scholar, poet, and Vizier of Granada.

בעת יענו עמך שבחך בפיהם
תנה לבך למלתם

ואם יהללוך באשר אין בך
שקוד עד תהי צדק תהלתם

When your colleagues praise you,
listen to their words of praise,

Should they praise you for qualities you lack,
strive to improve yourself, in order to justify their words of praise.

Let me assure you, in closing, that we have praised Moshe for qualities he possesses in abundance, and even then, we have said no more than מקצת שבחו. May he be blessed with many more years of good health, happiness, and continued scholarly productivity.