

Preface

Many scholars are honored with a celebratory volume in their honor; few receive this honor twice over. In our humble opinion, our father, Michael Fishbane, is most worthy of a second volume and much more to honor what has been (and which we pray will continue to be) a truly extraordinary career. Fourteen years ago, our father was the recipient of his first Festschrift, a volume edited by two former students, Deborah Green and Laura Lieber. The present volume is therefore the second Festschrift to honor our father's legacy, and yet it differs from its predecessor in two important respects. The first volume honored our father as an outstanding scholar and appropriately included contributions from senior colleagues in the field, only three of whom studied directly with our father. This volume, for its part, seeks to celebrate his remarkable legacy as a teacher and mentor, and the wide-ranging scholarship that has emerged from his mentoring. As a result, it solicited articles from former doctoral students and a few individuals who studied with him in less formal settings. In recognition of our father's unique contributions as a teacher, scholar, and theologian both in academia and in the broader community, its contributions consist of traditional scholarship as well as some modern applications by student practitioners whose work has been profoundly impacted by the teaching and writings of our father.

As a scholar who has spent his entire career in university life and leadership, our father has always been something of an anomaly in the world of academia.

In the example he set for exacting standards both in writing and in the classroom and in his visionary role as builder of an academic program of Jewish studies at the University of Chicago, our father has earned the reputation of a consummate scholar. And yet, in at least three ways, his proclivities have always been more capacious than the institutions he inhabited. First, in a world of ever-increasing specialization, his scholarly interests have been far too broad for any single field of study, shifting and expanding considerably over the course of his career—from Bible to Midrash to Kabbalah to Piyyut to Jewish thought and theology—each one not replacing the other but encompassing and enhancing one another in the process. This is a broad vision and practice of Jewish Studies and scholarship as a vocation that our father learned and consciously adapted from his own formative teachers at Brandeis University—particularly Professors Nahum Glatzer, Alexander Altmann, and Nahum Sarna. In turn, this *Festschrift* spans multiple disciplines, from Bible and biblical exegesis to rabbinic tradition to medieval, early modern, and modern Jewish thought and literature. The scope of this volume captures but a glimpse of our father’s capaciousness not only as a scholar but as a mentor of students across many disciplines.

Second, despite the often introverted demands of university life, our father’s scholarly vision has frequently led him beyond the halls of academia. His insatiable drive to teach led him to connect to students and readers across diverse backgrounds and commitments. In addition to his purely academic writings, he invested much effort to reach a broader public and have a meaningful impact on individuals and communities beyond the university. He used the medium of biblical commentary to stimulate his fellow Jews with innovative volumes on the *Haftarot* and Song of Songs, whose glosses are both historically grounded and oriented to the quest for religious meaning in the modern reader, works which also deeply reflect our father’s own spiritual and theological creativity, his powerful insight in contributing to contemporary Jewish thought. And his two volumes of contemplative Jewish theology, aimed at an intellectually sophisticated yet disenchanted postmodern society, have ignited a dynamic discussion on the cultivation of the inner life. Their considerable impact both within and beyond the Jewish community continues to take shape as of this publication. His dual commitment to academia and the public is well represented in the contributions included in this volume.

Finally, despite the professional and hierarchical role of scholarly mentorship, his dedication to the full scope of his students’ lives is too sincere and personal to be purely academic. Each and every one of his doctoral students knows the depths of his care and the lengths to which he is prepared to go to help them reach their own potential. And each of them can give many anecdotes of how

they were personally touched by the kindness and devotion of their mentor. Our father was and continues to be invested in their total growth as human beings in and out of the classroom. The result of this fierce devotion to his students is that the affection is mutual. The articles in this volume are a beautiful witness to this reciprocal care. Each expression of affection and gratitude in the articles that follow reflect the unique relationship our father cultivated with his dear students over the years.

As each of us has grown in our own developments as scholars and teachers, we are deeply aware of the tremendous debt that we owe to our father (together with our brilliant and caring mother!) in our respective formations as academics, as Jews, and as human beings. We are blessed as sons to have been nourished from the well of wisdom and learning in our father as well as from an overflowing well of love. As each of us has grown and learned to fly in our own ways, we have both been sustained by our father's guidance and devotion through the years—the learning he shared with us, the support he provided as we found our own footing, and the generosity of spirit to allow us the strength and independence to become scholars and teachers in our own unique ways. Eighty is a birthday imbued with reverence in the Jewish tradition; it is known as the age of *gevurot*, of strength, an age that already shines with the blessings of a long life. In the spirit of how our father has found both scholarly and personal meaning in the Jewish mystical tradition, it is also the mystery of seventy plus ten. Seventy faces of Torah that reflect a life filled with learning, manifold creativity, and teaching, imbued with the vitality of the ten rivers of divine light, the ten dimensions of divine Oneness. According to the kabbalists, these ten *sefirot*, found in God as in the human being, are first and foremost flooded with the light of *raḥamim*, of love, compassion, and empathy. The *gevurot* that are attained at eighty are simultaneously softened with the love of a compassionate and caring heart. The age of *gevurot* for our father is a state of strength and fullness that shines with the gentle and loving light of *raḥamim* and *hesed*, a life experience of balance, energy, and health that we pray will continue for many years to come.

As both his sons and his students, not only in our areas of research but also in the school of life and character, it is a privilege to wish our father great pride and satisfaction, *naḥat ruah*, at the many students he has raised and nurtured—the scholarship and teaching that has been a defining feature of his life for more than fifty years. May blessing and joy only increase.

—Eitan P. Fishbane and Elisha Russ-Fishbane

