

Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project

The first and only comprehensive Aramaic lexicon, covering all dialects and periods of pre-modern Aramaic, is being prepared by an international team of scholars at the world center of Aramaic lexicography studies headquartered at HUC-JIR/Cincinnati. Professor Stephen A. Kaufman (HUC-JIR/Cincinnati) and Professor Joseph A. Fitzmyer (Catholic University of America, emeritus) are the editors of The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon; Professor Michael Sokoloff (Bar Ilan University) is the associate editor; Dr. Jerome Lund (HUC-JIR/Cincinnati) is the Senior Research Scholar.

Dr. Jerome A. Lund and Prof. Bezalel Porten, *Aramaic Documents from Egypt: A Key-Word-in-Context Concordance* (Eisenbrauns). A key-word-in-context concordance of legal, epistolary, and administrative Aramaic documents from ancient Egypt (mainly from the Persian period) as published in *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (B. Porten and A. Yardeni, ed.).

Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*, Second Edition (Bar Ilan University Press and The Johns Hopkins University Press). A dictionary for students and scholars of the Palestinian Talmud, the Palestinian Targum, and the Palestinian Midrashim.

Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Bar Ilan University Press and The Johns Hopkins University Press). The first dictionary ever to be devoted exclusively to this dialect of Aramaic, intended for students and scholars of the Babylonian Talmud and the Geonic literature.

Rabbi Howard L. Apothaker, *Sifra, Dibbura deSinai: Rhetorical Formulae, Literary Structures, and Legal Traditions* (HUC Press). A study of the rhetorical structures and legal contents of a unit of the Midrash Sifra, this book is a revision of Rabbi Apothaker's HUC-JIR doctoral dissertation.

Dr. Isa Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation: Organizational Strategies for Revitalizing Synagogue Life* (Jewish Lights Publishing). A guide for revitalizing congregations of all denominations and sizes based on Founding Director Dr. Aron's twelve years of experience with the Experiment in Congregational Education [see excerpt on page 13].

Rabbi Carole B. Balin, consulting ed., for **Sondra Leiman**, *The Atlas of Great Jewish Communities: A Voyage Through History* (UAHC Press). A history for young people from the 1st century through modern day Israel which introduces prominent Jews through history as well as leading Jewish communities throughout the world.

Dr. Avraham Biran and Rachel Ben-Dov, *DAN II, Chronicle of the Excavations and the Late Bronze Age "Mycenaean" Tomb* (Annual of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, HUC-JIR). Biran describes the excavations carried out from 1993 to 1999; Ben-Dov presents a detailed description and analysis of the 3400-year-old tomb and its opulent remains – ceramics, weapons, metal vessels, glass, jewelry, ivory, and human and animal bones.

Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz, *Studies in the Meaning of Judaism* (Jewish Publication Society). This JPS Scholar of Distinction volume presents 33 essays by Dr. Borowitz which explore his views on Jewish theology, education, history, law, ethics, and religious dialogue over the past 50 years.

Dr. Eric Caplan, *From Ideology to Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism* (HUC Press). An examination of Reconstructionist interpretation and adaptation of traditional Jewish liturgy and the creation of new prayers to express its changing ideology.

Dr. Martin A. Cohen, *The Canonization of a Myth: Portugal's "Jewish Problem" and the Assembly of Tomar (1629)* (HUC Press). Based on manuscript material from the Portuguese archives, this monograph shows how the right-wing in Portugal sought to label as a secret Jew any and all people who were striving to modernize their country.

William Cutter and David C. Jacobson, eds., *History and Literature: New Readings of Jewish Texts in Honor of Arnold J. Band* (Brown University Judaica Series). Bringing together forty major interpreters of classical and modern texts and including important articles by **David Ellenson**, **William Cutter**, **Michael Meyer**, **Stanley Nash**, and **Ezra Spicehandler**.

Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed., *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, Vol. 6, "*Tachanun and Concluding Prayers*" (Jewish Lights Publishing). This volume presents traditional liturgy with a new translation as well as commentaries by respected scholars from all movements of Judaism on the liturgy, its history, and its meaning. Contributors include **Dr. David Ellenson**, **Dr. Alyssa Gray**, **Dr. Joel M. Hoffman**, **Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman**, and **Rabbi Lawrence Kushner**.

Dr. Leonard S. Kravitz and Dr. Kerry M. Olitzky, ed. and trans., *Mishlei: A Modern Commentary on Proverbs* (UAHC Press). A contemporary, gender-sensitive translation of the book of Proverbs with commentary which incorporates classical and modern critical scholarship.

Dr. Rina R. Lapidus, *Between Snow and Desert Heat: Russian Influences on Hebrew Literature, 1870-1970* (HUC Press). An analysis of the influence of Russian prose and poetry on Hebrew literature through an examination of textual parallels in nine case studies.

Rabbi Robert N. Levine, *There Is No Messiah...and You're It: The Stunning Transformation of Judaism's Most Provocative Idea* (Jewish Lights Publishing). A presentation of the messianic vision and false messiahs throughout history, which is then challenged

with the belief that each person should act now according to messianic ideals rather than wait for the coming of the messiah.

Rabbi Yehoram Mazor, Rabbi David Ariel-Joel, and Rabbi Maya Leibovich ed., *Barukh She'asani Isha?* [Blessed for Creating Me a Woman?] (Yediot Acharonot Publishers). An exploration by prominent scholars and lecturers in Judaic studies of various aspects of Jewish Womanhood throughout the ages.

Rabbi Yehoram Mazor, Rabbi David Ariel-Joel, and Rabbi Maya Leibovich ed., *Milchemet Gog Umagog* [The War Before the Messianic Era] (Yediot Acharonot Publishers). Analysis by prominent Israeli scholars of Apocalyptic Messianic beliefs from biblical times until recent Zionist ideology with reflections on "the final war between Good and Evil."

Dr. Ellis Rivkin, *The Unity Principal: The Shaping of Jewish History* (Behrman House). An exploration of how monotheism has enabled Jews throughout history to adapt themselves, their communities, and their vision of the Covenant, whenever they were confronted by new circumstances or historical forces, to ensure Jewish survival and vitality.

Jean Bloch Rosensaft, ed., *Thirty Pieces / Thirty Years: Sculpture by Ann Sperry* (Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, New York). An exhibition catalogue with essays by **Laura Kruger**, **Dr. Norman J. Cohen**, and **Pepe Karmel**.

Dr. Gary P. Zola, ed., and **Dr. Fred Krome**, managing ed., *The American Jewish Archives Journal*, Vol. LIV, No. 1 (The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives). Highlights from this volume include articles on American Jewish philanthropist Felix Warburg's attitude toward the Palestinian Arabs in the aftermath of the 1929 riots; the Independent Order of True Sisters, a 19th century American Jewish women's organization; and the edited and annotated collection of letters from Rebecca Aaronson Brickner to her husband Rabbi Barnett Brickner written from Palestine in the early 1930s.

Biblical Ambiguities

DAVID H. AARON

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The idioms to be considered are most often very simple, as far as syntax is concerned. Many are predicate nominatives or nominative phrases with a simple verb, for example: *God said, God is King, God is a rock, God is an army, God is creator*. Despite syntactic simplicity, some idioms involve more abstract concepts, such as when God *regrets* that he had made humans on earth (Gen 6:6)³ or when God reflects (via Jeremiah) that it was he who (physically) *smote* the children of Judah because of their religious waywardness (Jer 2:30), or when God *commands* laws (e.g., Exod 21-24), or when God *declares* (via the prophet) that he never *demand*ed sacrifice (Isa 1:12-14; Jer 7:21-22; Amos 5:21-23).⁴ Just how we categorize and then interpret these phrases – and the many hundreds of others that are spoken by or about God in the Tanakh – will determine how we write the history of Israelite God-belief. (pages 1-2)

One generation's solutions to the unknown become another generation's source of uncertainty, just as one generation's literalisms became another's metaphors. The tolerance for uncertainty constantly shifts with an era's preferences. There is no progression from concrete to abstract, literal to metaphorical, plurality of meaning to singularity of meaning. All of these are natural by-products of the human struggle to make sense. When researching the development of a given religion, we can distinguish the mystic from the straightforward pietist just as much on the basis of their semantic theory as by the outward structures of their beliefs and practices. These theories may never be articulated, but they are always operative. Thus, as we seek to decipher the distinct approaches to meaning that are at the foundations of religious texts and practices, we need to be forever cognizant not only of how ideologies understand the creation of meaning, but also, how they cope with the inevitable ambiguities. (page 199)

³ See Fretheim 1984 on God's change of mind.

⁴ There is much scholarly literature on the question of whether these phrases are to be taken as literal statements or hyperbolic ones. See, for instance, Kaiser 1983, 24-33.

The Self-Renewing Congregation: Organizational Strategies for Revitalizing Congregational Life

ISA ARON

(continued from page 25)

Each of these dual capacities is discussed in a separate chapter of the book. In each case, I explain why both of these seemingly opposite capacities are critical for synagogues to cultivate. Drawing on organizational theory and research from the worlds of business, education, and government, and on selected Jewish texts, I explore what each capacity entails. Drawing on sociological studies of religious organizations, and on my own decade-long experience working with synagogues, I offer examples of the problems which arise when these capacities are absent and the benefits that accrue when they are present. Developing these capacities, and balancing one against the other, is no easy matter, and each chapter includes exercises designed to help a synagogue committee or task force understand and practice the capacity in question. It also includes text study guides that can serve as spring-boards for discussion. Finally, each chapter includes a real-life case study of a synagogue's efforts to develop the capacity in question.

Framing these four chapters, which form the core of this book, are introductory and concluding chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the recent history of American synagogues, and explains why, at this juncture, it is critical that they develop the capacity to become self-renewing. At the end of the book, chapter 7 deals with two kinds of synergy – between the four capacities discussed in this book, and between the congregation as a whole and the individuals within it.

¹see, for example, Thomas Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).