

Emerging Scholars Enrich Teaching and Scholarship

“Asei l’chah rav; k’nei l’chah chaver – get yourself a teacher; acquire for yourself a friend.”

Pirkei Avot 1:6.

Our tradition teaches that we must actively pursue mentors in our lives, surrounding ourselves with teachers, rabbis, and leaders from whom we can learn and grow. The new full-time, ranked faculty appointments to HUC-JIR this year, including **Dr. Sharon Koren, Dr. Joshua Holo, Dr. Steven M. Cohen, Dr. Yehoyada Amir, Dr. Jason Kalman, Dr. Haim Rechnitzer, and Dr. Aaron Panken**, embody the College-Institute’s dedication to *“asei l’chah rav.”* More than ever before, HUC-JIR now attracts and retains top emerging scholars who will develop their careers here, contributing to



Dr. Sharon Koren, Assistant Professor of Medieval Jewish Culture at HUC-JIR/New York.

the academic and spiritual lives of students and to the vibrancy of the institution at large.

We are honored to welcome these eminent scholars as faculty members of the HUC-JIR community. Their individual strengths increase our capacity to serve, educate, and inspire future generations of educators, rabbis, cantors, Jewish communal professionals, and scholars and to contribute to the ongoing transmission of Jewish scholarship.

“The excitement in the classroom at HUC-JIR is palpable,” says **Dr. Sharon Koren**, newly appointed Assistant Professor of Medieval Jewish Culture at HUC-JIR/New York. Dr. Koren is known for her work in medieval Jewish mysticism and women’s spirituality. Her doctoral dissertation, written at Yale University, explores the reasons for women’s exclusion from Kabbalistic speculation. Dr. Koren has been a guest lecturer at HUC-JIR since 2001, and taught previously at the University of Pennsylvania and Boston College.

“Teaching at HUC,” she states, “is truly my dream job. HUC-JIR differs from secular universities because what I teach here has ramifications outside the classroom. Students are on a spiritual quest; they are excited about Judaism in a unique way.”

Dr. Koren’s work on the nexus between medieval natural philosophy, Kabbalah, and gender perceptions, will soon appear in her article, “Kabbalistic Physiology,” in the forthcoming *AJS Review*.

Dr. Joshua Holo, formerly of The Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies at The Graduate Theological Union and Lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, was recently appointed Associate Professor of Jewish History and Director of the Jerome H. Louchheim School of Judaic Studies at HUC-JIR/ Los Angeles. Dr. Holo, a scholar of medieval Jewish history who received his Ph.D. from the University of



Chicago, was recently awarded the Koret Foundation Jewish Studies Publications program subsidy for his forthcoming book, *Byzantine Jewry in the Mediterranean Economy* (Cambridge University Press), examining the Jews’ economic and juridical engagement with other communities and the wider Byzantine world.

Dr. Holo recalls that he was “attracted to HUC-JIR/Los Angeles by the vibrant and collegial setting, in which my colleagues are pursuing fascinating paths of research of the highest caliber.” Since joining the faculty, he has found the campus and the Louchheim School, which annually provides Jewish studies courses to over 600 undergraduate students of all faiths and ethnicities at the University of Southern California, to be “the kind of environment that encourages scholarly ambition and human warmth.” Dr. Holo encourages excellence among his own students, challenging them to reconsider preconceived notions of Judaism, and, by extension, to question other concepts that inform their worldview.

Dr. Steven M. Cohen, a sociologist of American Jewry, was appointed Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy at HUC-JIR/New York. Dr. Cohen, who has published widely since earning his Ph.D. in Sociology at Columbia University in 1974, divides his time between New York and Jerusalem, where he has served as Professor at

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Dr. Steven M. Cohen, Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy, HUC-JIR/New York.

The Melton Centre for Jewish Education at The Hebrew University since 1992. Prior to that he taught at Queens College, CUNY, and held visiting professorships at Yale University and The Jewish Theological Seminary.

Dr. Cohen is well known for his 2000 book, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in the United States*, co-authored with Arnold Eisen. He has authored and edited more than a dozen books and countless articles exploring patterns of Jewish identity and community in the U.S. and elsewhere. Some titles include: "Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experiences" (with Charles Liebman), "Religious Stability and Ethnic Decline: Emerging Patterns of Jewish Identity in the United States," and "De-Constructing the Outreach-Inreach Debate."

His research has a strong policy orientation. He serves as the Research Director of the Florence G. Heller/JCCA Research Center, and Consultant to the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies. His current research on behalf of the College-Institute's Strategic Planning Committee illuminates the lives and

impact of HUC-JIR students and alumni, through a survey assessing their views on their experiences at HUC-JIR, as well as a survey of over 5,000 Reform Movement lay leaders and their views of HUC-JIR alumni. Dr. Cohen seeks to work "where I can most contribute to the discourse of the Jewish community," and finds "HUC-JIR to be a platform where some of the most complex and significant Jewish conversations are taking place."

For **Dr. Haim Rechnitzer**, J '03, the recently appointed Assistant Professor of Jewish Religious Thought at HUC-JIR/Cincinnati, the move to the College-Institute from his background in the Israeli academic arena was inspired by the desire to fuse academic inquiry with existentialist yearnings and commitment to Jewish education. While working toward his Ph.D. in the field of Modern Jewish Thought at The Hebrew University, he was ordained as an Israeli Reform rabbi at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem, beginning



Dr. Haim Rechnitzer, Assistant Professor of Jewish Religious Thought, HUC-JIR/Cincinnati.

a life-long grappling with the interplay between academia and his rabbinical role as a spiritual leader and educator.

Dr. Rechnitzer lauds the HUC-JIR community as a forum for the exchange of ideas where literary exegesis stands side-by-side with moral and personal interpretation. "Here we don't think here that scholarly thinking is compromised by adding the spiritual dimension," he says. "At HUC-JIR, study is not confined only to

research; it is about living and teaching and learning." He is now part of what he calls a "unique faculty," in that "once we establish the scholarly meaning of a text we can also ask – what does it mean for us?" In his experience at other institutions, these kinds of questions were not welcomed. "We are teaching texts that are demanding to be thought about as an option for life," he asserts, "but to only discuss the scholarly implications of philosophic and literary Jewish texts is to do an injustice to the texts and to our tradition."

The recipient of the Lakritz



Dr. Jason Kalman, Assistant Professor of Classical Hebrew Literature and Interpretation, HUC-JIR/Cincinnati.

Award in Jewish Studies, Dr. Rechnitzer's published essays will soon appear in the compilations *The Young Leo Strauss* (The University of Wisconsin Press); *Jewish Political Theology* (Van-Leer Institute, Jerusalem); and *Jewish Thought Towards Jewish Education* (Melton Institute, The Hebrew University). In his current research he grapples with the relationships between liberalism and the liberal state, and contemporary Jewish theologies and the challenges of secularism.

Dr. Jason Kalman joined HUC-JIR/Cincinnati in July as Assistant Professor of Classical Hebrew Literature and Interpretation. Dr. Kalman received his Ph.D. from the Department of Jewish Studies at McGill University, and is a research fellow affiliated with the University of the Free State, South Africa. He specializes in the history of Jewish biblical exegesis, and his specific

research interests include rabbinic anti-Christian polemic, medieval intellectual history as reflected in biblical commentary, and biblical interpretation after the Holocaust.

Dr. Kalman cites the “illustrious history of HUC-JIR” as his primary motivation for seeking an appointment here. “The College-Institute’s faculty has for a century and continues today to set the standard of excellence” in Jewish academia, he says. “Anywhere that these extraordinary scholars would choose to associate, I want to be.”

Dr. Kalman’s research “has benefited greatly from the abundant resources available”

at the Klau Library and at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati. He asserts that “the library stands out as one of the best research institutions that can be found anywhere.” Dr. Kalman will publish several papers this year, including “Writing Between The Lines: The Impact of Rabbinic Letter Writing on the Transmission of the Text of the Hebrew Bible,” to appear in R. Byrne, ed., *Reading and Writing in Ancient Israel*.



Dr. Yehoyada Amir, Associate Professor of Jewish Thought, HUC-JIR/Jerusalem.

HUC-JIR’s scholarship in Israel has been strengthened by the appointment of **Dr. Yehoyada Amir**, J ’04, as Associate Professor of Jewish Thought. Dr. Amir received his Ph.D. in Jewish Thought from The Hebrew University, and was ordained at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem, where he has served as Director of the Israel Rabbinical Program since 2000. He was previously Head of the Department of Jewish Culture and the Holocaust Teaching Center at Beit Berl College, and Head of the Center for Advanced Studies of the Institute of Jewish Studies at The Hebrew University.

Dr. Amir believes that “Reform Judaism has a special relevance and significance for Israeli

Jewish society, where being Jewish has a holistic nature.” As Director of the Israel Rabbinical Program, he is “devoted to HUC-JIR’s mission that Israeli Reform rabbis can and should take a central part in shaping the kind of Judaism that will lead Israeli society in the 21st century.”

Dr. Amir’s work reflects a deep engagement with the land of Israel. His article “Land, Nature and Person – Striking Roots in Eretz-Israel’s Landscape in A.D. Gordon’s Thought” (Hebrew), will soon appear in the compilation *Eretz Israel in 20th Century Jewish*

Thought. Dr. Amir was honored with the Golda Meir Fellowship of The Hebrew University and recently received a grant from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture for his book, *Reason out of Faith – The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*.

While he is deeply committed to his engagement in academic research, Amir insists that “academic life alone cannot suffice. HUC-JIR imparts the spiritual and social leadership that will translate that which we understand as our Judaism into the real terms of our lives. Here I have the privilege to train young men and women in Israel to do this job.”

Rabbi Aaron Panken, N ’91, who has taught Rabbinic and Second Temple Literature at HUC-JIR/New York since 1995, and has served as Dean of the New York School since 1998, was recently appointed Adjunct Assistant Professor of Rabbinic Literature on the Blended Track. An alumnus of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship, he earned his doctorate in Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University, where his research focused on legal change in Talmudic and Midrashic Literature. His book, *The Rhetoric of Innovation: Self-Conscious Halakhic Change in Rabbinic Literature*, was recently published by University Press of America.



Dr. Aaron Panken, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Rabbinic Literature, HUC-JIR/New York.

Dr. Panken’s recent appointment solidifies his relationship with HUC-JIR, which he says was born “out of a strong commitment to Reform Judaism.”

He finds inspiration in “the ever growing excitement of teaching and learning in a community with high intellectual standards and a diverse and fascinating pluralistic team of faculty, with students and alumni who actually serve the Jewish community in a deeper and more meaningful way than one might find in any university setting.”

Even outside HUC-JIR’s walls, Rabbi Panken’s passion for the Jewish community is paramount. He currently serves on the faculty of the Wexner Foundation, and as a member of the Birthright Israel Education Committee, the International Council of the New Israel Fund, the Rabbinical Placement Commission, the CCAR Ethics Committee, and in a variety of other leadership roles. He finds the work of the College-Institute to be integrally linked to the future of the larger Jewish world: “In general, HUC-JIR greatly enhances the global Progressive Jewish future; but in particular, I feel good knowing that it will help my children and grandchildren to live thoughtful, committed Jewish lives.”