

Editors' Foreword

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In late June 2014, sixteen scholars from around the globe gathered at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies in the bucolic Yarnton Manor in the Oxfordshire countryside, for the first (now annual) Oxford Summer Institute on Modern and Contemporary Judaism. The goal of this inaugural event was to facilitate in-depth engagement with the contributions of Rabbi Dr. Irving “Yitz” Greenberg, concentrating particularly on the historical ramifications of his theological and public stances. Consideration was given to his lifelong and complex encounter with the Modern Orthodox stream of American Judaism and the extent to which his teachings functioned as “the road not taken.” Toward these aims, each of the participants prepared a first draft of a research study that was distributed in advance. These papers then served as the springboards for the seminar sessions.

This auspicious gathering was most certainly characterized by deep appreciation for Greenberg’s original outlook, which is predicated on his profound dedication to God, Torah, the Jewish people, and humanity. But this was by no means gratuitous homage or naive esteem. On the contrary, those in attendance understood that the most genuine form of admiration for a thinker and leader of his stature—especially one who continues to produce path-breaking writings and speak out publicly—is to examine rigorously and critically his ideas and legacy.

Others might have found it overwhelming, if not discouraging, to experience the depth and array of piercing analysis to which Greenberg’s positions and works were subjected. The appreciative manner in which Yitz—and his wife Blu—listened to their counterparts, and in parallel the gentle assertiveness with which he challenged points that were raised, was decisive in facilitating healthy and candid discourse.

This volume brings together updated versions of many of the papers that were first presented at the Oxford Summer Institute. In the interim, each

was revised in response to the dynamic deliberations that took place and new materials that have subsequently appeared, as well as the critical comments of anonymous readers who evaluated them for their academic quality. We are confident that the creative process that was nurtured has resulted in a substantive contribution to research on the religious, historical, and social trajectories of contemporary Judaism, and, similarly will engender fresh thinking on crucial theological and ideological postures that will ultimately enrich Jewish life.

Greenberg, as detailed in his own contribution to this volume, grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home in the Borough Park section of Brooklyn. He was educated in Orthodox Jewish schools that provided both religious and secular studies and encouraged integration into American life, and subsequently in a more traditionalist-oriented advanced yeshiva, where he gained rabbinical ordination. In 1959, while completing his Harvard University PhD in American history, he was appointed a full-time faculty member at Yeshiva College (Yeshiva University), the banner institution of the burgeoning “Modern Orthodox” camp within American Jewry. A few years later, he accepted the position of rabbi of the Riverdale Jewish Center, a synagogue in an area of New York that had only recently attracted Orthodox Jews. Over the course of the 1960s his reputation soared as a dynamic academic, communal rabbi, public activist, and creative educator intent on advancing an expansive approach to Orthodox Jewish engagement with contemporary intellectual and cultural trends. Subsequently, his progressive alienation from the increasingly more conservative directions of the Modern Orthodox sector was given concrete expression, when he simultaneously resigned from Yeshiva University and the Riverdale Jewish Center rabbinate in 1972. Henceforth, his public career focused on spreading Jewish knowledge and enhancing identification of the broader American Jewish population with their heritage. Here, too, his efforts met with considerable excitement and wide support. Some referred to him as “the rabbi of American Jewry.” He also emerged as a groundbreaking post-Holocaust theologian. While Greenberg remained a committed Orthodox Jew, outside his local community his formal public role within mainstream late twentieth and early twenty-first century Orthodox life was relatively limited.

Greenberg’s interests span a broad range of concerns. He introduced one of the earliest university courses on the Holocaust and served as executive director of the United States Holocaust Commission, which in turn recommended the establishment of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

in the nation's capital. He was the founding dean of Salanter Akiba Riverdale Academy, commonly known as SAR Academy, in Riverdale, New York, the progressive Modern Orthodox day school predicated on the "open classroom" approach. He has written widely on the challenges posed by Jewish power as well as those of new medical technologies, and joined his wife Blu as one of the original champions of Orthodox feminism. He has also long been a major voice advocating enhanced dialogue with Christian leaders, while his covenantal theology—which emerged as a theological response to the Holocaust—elevates humanity to that of a partner in God's creation, which means that humanity must take responsibility for both universal and particularistic betterment.

Notwithstanding the unparalleled degree of enthusiasm Greenberg elicited in the 1960s at Yeshiva University, at Yavneh (the Orthodox collegiate association), and at his own Modern Orthodox congregation, his enormous personal impact upon communal leaders who diligently pursued his lectures and writings, and the inspiration that many have drawn from his ideas, as far as the trajectory of Modern Orthodox Judaism was concerned, his was "the road not taken." The Oxford Summer Institute was dedicated to examining this circumstance in order to provide fresh insight both into the place of Greenberg in the social and intellectual history of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Judaism, and the specific evolution of its Modern Orthodox subtrend.

The scholars gathered at Oxford explored this issue and related questions through a series of papers focused on Greenberg's intellectual interests and activities. The contributions themselves fell under two discrete rubrics: analysis of subjects central to his interests and theology, and the historical unfolding and contemporary manifestation of Modern Orthodoxy.

The volume opens with a personal statement by Greenberg on his journey within American Orthodoxy from childhood onward. The ensuing section is entitled "Law and Theology." Steven Katz analyzes the core components of Greenberg's covenantal theology, which, in his view, presents fundamental challenges to the believing Modern Orthodox Jew. Alan Jotkowitz explores Greenberg's views on questions of medical ethics and demonstrates how covenantal ethics may help professionals navigate the different and often conflicting directions suggested by technology, research, and the human needs of health care. Darren Kleinberg roots Greenberg's religious pluralism within his theology of covenant and Holocaust, which enables Greenberg to engage positively diverse religious systems, both Jewish and non-Jewish. In his contribution, James Kugel explicates that which he considers to be the core understandings of revelation that are identifiable within foundational

Jewish thought. Building upon the work of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook on the *Akedah* story (biblical binding of Isaac), Tamar Ross puts forward a view of revelation that is more fluid and dynamic than the concept of submission embraced by other Orthodox thinkers such as Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Ross suggests that her approach offers a potential avenue for strengthening the philosophical foundations of some of Greenberg's central perceptions. Marc Shapiro explores Greenberg's wholehearted embrace of the concept of revelation extending to other faiths, particularly Christianity, and compares Greenberg's interfaith work with contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers and theologians. Shapiro suggests that the notion of multiple covenants, shared in various degrees by Greenberg, Eugene Korn, Shlomo Riskin, and Jonathan Sacks, poses problems for traditional claims of revelation as containing absolute truth. Miri Freud-Kandel, also concentrating on approaches to revelation, analyzes the implications of modern biblical scholarship for contemporary Orthodox views of *Torah min hashamayim*. She traces the evolution of this question from the Louis Jacobs controversy in Britain in the 1960s to the growth of *TheTorah.com* in the twenty-first century.

The third section, "Past and Present," begins with Alan Brill's exploration of the taxonomy of the nomenclature "Modern Orthodoxy," and its evolution into a religious movement, comparing it with currents in contemporary Christianity. Jack Wertheimer reflects on the sustaining power of Modern Orthodoxy and raises concerns about its future survival, especially given defections to its left and the specter of Haredization on its right. Samuel Heilman considers changes in the Orthodox rabbinate, noting that had Greenberg's model been followed by more successors in the pulpit rabbinate, they may well have posed a formidable alternative to the predominant Orthodox drift rightward. Sylvia Barack-Fishman contextualizes Greenberg's views on sexuality within the overall courtship and dating patterns of contemporary Orthodox Jews. Finally, Adam Ferziger's essay closes the volume by reconsidering, in light of later developments, the debate between Greenberg and Rabbi Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein that arose in the spring of 1966. Ferziger posits that by evaluating ideas articulated subsequently by Lichtenstein as well as his students, it emerges that numerous approaches first deemed radical when broached by Greenberg, in time gained traction within Lichtenstein's milieu. To be sure, he does not ignore the significant distinctions between the two figures that existed in the 1960s, nor those that grew even stronger in later years. Ferziger's essay, as such, serves both as a retrospective on changing currents within Orthodoxy and a statement

to the fact that Greenberg's views, although clearly representing "the road not taken," continue to have resonance within the Orthodox spectrum.

Beyond the individual essays, the volume covers many of Greenberg's multifold interests and contributions to Jewish intellectual life. The initial gathering was held some eight months after the release of the 2013 Pew Survey of American Jewry. Its findings suggested that the Modern Orthodox make up one-third of the Orthodox population but just three percent of American Jews. While indicating demographic weaknesses within Modern Orthodoxy, notable signs of creativity were considered during the course of the Oxford Summer Institute. The development of new rabbinical seminaries, including those ordaining women rabbis, the phenomena of Partnership Minyanim, and new approaches to biblical scholarship, among others, clearly challenge some of Orthodoxy's long-held boundaries, yet they also indicate vibrant efforts to address some of the issues that Greenberg first raised. Indeed, the more recent 2017 Nishma study of Modern Orthodoxy identified a constituency thirsting for fresh thinking on critical issues. In this light, the current volume offers readers the opportunity to examine in-depth the trenchant and candid efforts of one of the most thoughtful and earnest voices to emerge from within American Orthodoxy to address the theological and moral concerns that characterize our times.

Many individuals coalesced to make this volume possible. We thank all of the participants at the inaugural Oxford Summer Institute on Modern and Contemporary Judaism, including Arye Edrei, Zev Farber, Michael Fishbane, Melissa Raphael, and Margie Tolstoy, who each prepared learned and thought-provoking presentations and contributed profoundly to cultivating the seminar's energy and novel discourse. That event, and the entire framework that has developed since, could not have come to fruition without the support and guidance of Professor Martin Goodman, former president of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, University of Oxford, and its outstanding staff. We thank Professor Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, who began serving as president in the fall of 2018, for her encouragement during the final stages. We are grateful to the authors whose essays are contained in this volume, who all took the time to research and write their original papers and then later revised them, for their dedication and patience. We also commend the anonymous reviewers, who took their mandate quite seriously by offering both sharp criticisms and, when they thought it fruitful, helpful directions for improvement to each of the contributors.

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Our most profound appreciation, of course, is to Yitz Greenberg, who has dedicated his life to engaging core ideals and experiences of Jews and Judaism with profound scholarship, deep-seated morality, and religious commitment—and a passionate desire to advance the world toward a better place.

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1 The Targum Shlishi Foundation sponsors the website Rabbiirvinggreenberg.com, which includes a comprehensive bibliography and accessible copies of most of Greenberg's writings, as well as other relevant documents and records. This website has served as an invaluable resource for many of the authors of this volume.