Preface

The seventeen articles comprising this volume present a kaleidoscope of topics and approaches dealing with the rich world of study and knowledge in Jewish thought. Some of the papers focus on the process of canonization, be it of biblical or of kabbalistic literature (Avigdor Hurowitz, Boaz Huss). Others deal with issues touching upon rabbinic literature in late antiquity (Marc Hirshman, Martin Jaffee, Joseph Dan) and in the Middle Ages (Ephraim Kanarfoogel, David Novak). The study of philosophy and the manner in which philosophic notions are presented in Jewish treatises is the theme of a number of articles (Sara Klein-Braslavy, Howard Kreisel, Colette Sirat and Marc Geoffoy). Also discussed is the question of the influence of non-Jewish thought on two of the most important twentieth century rabbinic thinkers (Jonathan Garb, Alan Brill), as is the issue of the relationship between Jewish scholarship and Jewish continuity as seen by one of the academic giants of the modern period (Charles Manekin). Several scholars deal with aspects of Jewish learning in contemporary times (Shulamit Valler, Tamar Ross, Eliezer Segal). Opening the volume is an essay by David Berger who was asked to voice his personal reflections on the value he attaches to the academic study of Judaism. A forthcoming Hebrew volume on Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought contains fourteen additional articles shedding further light on these and other facets of the subject, including a number of studies pertaining to Jewish mysticism and to the history of the Jewish book.

The present volume together with the Hebrew one are not designed to treat the theme of study and knowledge in Jewish thought in a systematic manner or deal with most of the issues involved. Rather they provide a sample of the multifarious aspects of this subject, one that stands at the core of Judaism. These volumes also reflect the diversity of approaches in Jewish scholarship today: some of the articles are of a critical historical nature, others are more philosophical in their approach, while yet others are sociologically orientated. It is not coincidental that these volumes are in Hebrew and English - the two
dominant languages of Jewish scholarship and creativity, or study and knowledge, in the contemporary world.

Both volumes grew out of an international conference on 'Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought' organized by the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought and hosted by Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, June 2004. I was privileged to chair the organizing committee, consisting of Dr. Boaz Huss, Prof. Zeev Gries and Prof. Gerald Blidstein, the last deserves special credit for suggesting the topic of the conference. The real work of preparing the conference was done by Mr. Aaron Deutch with the assistance of the administrative staff of the Goldstein-Goren Department of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University. To all of them I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks. I would also like to thank those assisting me in the production of this volume: Mrs. Judith H. Seeligmann, who took its literary editing upon herself, and Prof. Daniel Sivan, the director of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, who prepared it for publication.

These volumes are dedicated to the memory of Mr. Avram Goldstein-Goren who has recently passed away at the age of 100, and whose generosity made the establishment of the international center for Jewish thought at Ben-Gurion University which bears his name possible.

Howard Kreisel