As I look over these pages, I find myself filled with excitement. Whether it’s new commentaries on the writings of earlier centuries, original books on topics such as history and ethics, or groundbreaking projects such as the forthcoming revision of our iconic Bible translation, *The JPS Tanakh: Gender-Sensitive Edition*, The Jewish Publication Society is proud to publish works that bring the diverse voices of the Jewish tradition, past and present, to conversations at the heart of contemporary life.

This is my first message as JPS Director: I spent the past decade at the University of Colorado Boulder, where I directed the Jewish Studies program. As thankful as I am for my time as a tenured professor and university administrator, I’m thrilled to now be part of JPS’s work of allowing Jewish sources to speak in an ever-changing world. I welcome you to our community of learning, and I invite you to reach out to me at the number or email below so that we can build JPS’s future together.

With best wishes,

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Night of Beginnings is a groundbreaking new haggadah for the Passover seder from acclaimed poet, translator, and liturgist Marcia Falk, beautifully designed and illustrated with original color drawings by the author.

Unlike both traditional and new haggadahs, which do not contain a full recounting of the biblical story, Night of Beginnings presents the Exodus narrative in its entirety, providing a direct connection to the ancient origins of the holiday. This retelling highlights the actions of its female characters, including Moshe’s sister, Miriam; Pharaoh’s daughter, who adopts the baby Moshe; and the midwives Shifrah and Pu’ah, who save the Hebrew male infants. Falk’s revolutionary new blessings, in Hebrew and English, replace the traditional, patriarchal seder blessings, and her kavanot—meditative directions for prayer—introduce a genre new to the seder ritual. Poems, psalms, and songs are arranged to give structural coherence to the haggadah. A new commentary raises interpretive questions and invites us to bring personal reflections into the discussion.

Like the author’s widely acclaimed previous prayer books, The Book of Blessings and The Days Between, Falk’s poetic blessings for the seder envision the divine as a Greater Whole of which we are an inseparable part. The inclusive language of Falk’s blessings makes room for women to find and use their voices more full-throatedly than they were able to do with the male-centered prayers inherited from the early rabbis. Men, too, will encounter here a spiritually moving and thought-provoking experience.

Marcia Falk is a poet, translator, liturgist, and artist known widely for her groundbreaking prayer books The Book of Blessings and The Days Between, which re-create Hebrew and English prayer from an inclusive, nonpatriarchal perspective. Falk is also the creator of a volume combining her art and poetry, Inner East: Illuminated Poems and Blessings, and other books of poetry and translation, including a now-classic translation of the Song of Songs.
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Rabbi Barry L. Schwartz is the director and editor in chief emeritus of The Jewish Publication Society and the spiritual leader of Congregation Adas Emuno in Leonia, New Jersey. He is the author of books for adults, teens, and children, including Path of the Prophets: The Ethics-Driven Life (JPS, 2018) and Judaism’s Great Debates: Timeless Controversies from Abraham to Herzl (JPS, 2012).

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Fredric Brandfon is the former chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Stockton University in New Jersey and founder of the Department of Religious Studies at the College of Charleston in South Carolina. He has published numerous articles on Roman and Italian Jewish history.

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Brandfon begins by examining the Arch of Titus and the Jewish catacombs as touchstones, painting a picture of a Jewish community remaining Jewish over centuries. Papal processions and the humiliating races at Carnival time exemplify Jewish interactions with the predominant Catholic powers in medieval and Renaissance Rome. The Roman Ghetto, the forcible conversion of Jews, emancipation from the ghetto in light of Italian nationalism, the horrors of fascism and the Nazi occupation in Rome, the Second Vatican Council proclamation absolving Jews of murdering Christ, and the celebration of Israel’s birth at the Arch of Titus are interwoven with Jewish stories of daily life through the centuries. Intimate Strangers takes us on a compelling sweep of two thousand years of history through the present successes and dilemmas of Roman Jews in postwar Europe.
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Rabbi Marla J. Feldman is the executive director of Women of Reform Judaism. She has published numerous articles about the role of women in Jewish life and social justice issues and her modern midrashim have appeared in several collections. She is the author of Reform Movement action manuals, including Speak Truth to Power.

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Frederick E. Greenspahn is the Gimelstob Eminent Scholar of Judaic Studies emeritus at Florida Atlantic University and former professor of religious and Judaic studies at the University of Denver. He has written and edited sixteen books, including An Introduction to Aramaic; When Brothers Dwell Together; The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible; and Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew. He is editor of the New York University Press series Jewish Studies in the Twenty-First Century.

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Adele Berlin is Robert H. Smith Professor of Biblical Studies Emerita at the University of Maryland. She is the author of several books, including Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative, The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelistism, and The JPS Bible Commentary: Esther (JPS, 2001). She is coeditor (with Marc Brettler) of The Jewish Study Bible. Avigdor Shinan is Yitzhak Becker Professor Emeritus of Jewish Studies at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of numerous books, including (with Yair Zakovitch) From Gods to God: How the Bible Debunked, Suppressed, or Changed Ancient Myths and Legends (JPS, 2012). Benjamin D. Sommer is a professor of Bible and Ancient Semitic languages at Jewish Theological Seminary and senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute. He is the author of Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition and The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel, among other works.

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