

Moshe Ahrend – Teacher, Scholar, Thinker

Gabriel H. Cohen

This essay was written in memory and in honor of Professor Moshe Ahrend, an accomplished educator, esteemed scholar, and exemplary Jew. Following a brief biographical sketch, the author seeks to portray some aspects of Moshe Ahrend's world of thought, focusing on issues of Jewish education so central to his life's work. Citations from Ahrend's writings serve as a frame of reference, enabling the author to reflect on, examine, and compare the ideals Ahrend conceived and developed with those he embodied personally in his own life's work. This essay delineates three central figures or aspects of identity: the educator, the scholar, and the thinker. One of Ahrend's major concerns was to define the tasks and responsibilities of Jewish educators; this led him to develop his own unique Jewish pedagogical method, emphasizing the essential connection between intellect and emotion, enthusiasm, and love for Torah. A second aspect of Ahrend's achievement is his contribution to Bible scholarship and to medieval Bible commentary in particular. Ahrend stressed the importance of integrating academic issues central to Bible studies into the school framework, and of dealing openly with the inherent tension between faith and scholarship, as well as the role of both in Bible interpretation. In characterizing Ahrend's thought, the author notes his ever-present concern for contemporary social and educational topics, with attention not only to theoretical pedagogical questions but to practical solutions as well. Ahrend's personal qualities of humility and tolerance, combined with his broad horizons of knowledge, made him a true model of the Jewish religious-educational ideal.