



A Note of Remembrance in Honor of Edwin David Lawson (December 23, 1923–July 3, 2021)

“There are three different crowns—The crown of Torah, the crown of the priesthood and the crown of royalty, but the best crown is that of a good name.” (The Wisdom of the Fathers 4:13)

It is with a sad heart that I write this note upon the passing of my dear friend, the eminent onomastician Edwin David Lawson, beloved by all who knew him.

It was around 1990 when I approached the late educator, Avraham Stahl, to discuss the idea of creating a center for the study of Jewish onomastics. His first reaction was that I should speak to Ed Lawson, who “knows everything about the science of onomastics and who had done so much to raise the academic standards of the field.” Ed readily gave his support and identified with the project. We became fast friends, talking on the phone and corresponding frequently. I even enjoyed Ed and Irene’s hospitality on a visit to their home in Fredonia. An added surprise bond was our shared birthdate—December 23rd. Ed became my mentor (*rebbe*) in onomastic matters. It was an amazing experience to accompany him at international conferences organized by ICOS and the American Names Society and see how he was greeted by senior scholars and young academicians whom he would encourage in their research.

Before we met, Ed already had several publications on contemporary Jewish onomastics. These studies dating from 1975 grew out of his visits to Israel and his interest in the political, cultural, and demographic issues of the day. He wrote on the choice of Jewish and Palestinian Arabic personal and surnames. This was a natural extension of his work on the psychological aspects of name preferences. From 1994, he began researching names in the Jewish communities from the former Soviet Union coming from Central Asia, Georgia, and the Baltics. He graciously invited other scholars, some of whom were beginners, to share his enthusiasm and join him in his research.

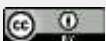
While Ed was mostly interested in contemporary Jewish names, he now and again returned to the stories of the Patriarchs, especially to that of Jacob and his sons. This may have been motivated by his own Hebrew name *Asher* and by his maternal family name *Cooper*, which is derived from the diminutive *Koppel* < *Jacob*. Then again, Ed loved to teach the Biblical stories at the university level and to adult education classes for their psychological insights and their onomastic details.

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Ed's most significant publications in Jewish onomastics are his annotated bibliographies. The first one appeared as "Some Jewish Personal Names: An Annotated Bibliography" in Volume I of *These Are the Names* and includes over 300 publications (Lawson 1997). The second, "Some Jewish Personal Names 2: An Annotated Bibliography," appeared in volume 4 and featured over 600 additional entries (Lawson 2003).

Ed attended several biennial conferences on Jewish names that we organized. He always presented a paper and asked to end the gathering with an appreciation and an insightful summary statement of what we had heard. Even more, Ed encouraged and invited European and American scholars to share their work if it touched upon Jewish, Biblical, or related Near Eastern onomastics.

In recognizing his contribution to this new field of Jewish studies, we dedicated the Fifth International Conference on Jewish Names to honor Ed's 78th (Hebrew: *oz* 'strength') birthday. The conference was held on August 13, 2001 in conjunction with the 13th World Congress of Jewish Studies on the Mt. Scopus Campus of The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel.¹ Subsequently, in his honor, we published a jubilee 4th volume of *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics* with tributes from three close friends: Donald Lance, Edward Callary, and Andre Lapierre.²

Ed will be long remembered by many younger scholars whom he encouraged and to whom he gave sound advice, launching them on an academic career in onomastics.

May his memory be a blessing.

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Notes

¹ In light of Ed's academic interests, the noted sociologist Stanley Lieberson presented his paper "Jewish Names and the Names of Jews," exploring the changing trends in name-giving among American Jewry.

² His good friend (who wasn't?) Donald Lance wrote about the Bible's influence on American toponymy, specifically in Missouri. Reflecting Ed's worldwide influence, there were other colleagues who sent their best wishes: Andrea Brill (Germany), Rella Israly Cohn (USA), Valentina Ferreira (Portugal), Margarit Frank (Sweden), Johanna Kolleta (Greece), Bill Nicolaison (Scotland), Anita Novinsky (Brazil), Grant Smith (USA), and Nelly Weiss (Switzerland).

References

- Lawson, Edwin D. 1997. "Some Jewish Personal Names: An Annotated Bibliography." In *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics*, vol. 1, edited by Aaron Demsky, Joseph Reif, and Joseph Tabory, 83–149. Ramat-Gan: Illan University Press.
- Lawson, Edwin D. 2003. "Some Jewish Personal Names 2: An Annotated Bibliography." In *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics*, vol. 4, edited by Aaron Demsky, 175–335. Ramat-Gan: Illan University Press.

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