

# Dr. David Ellenson

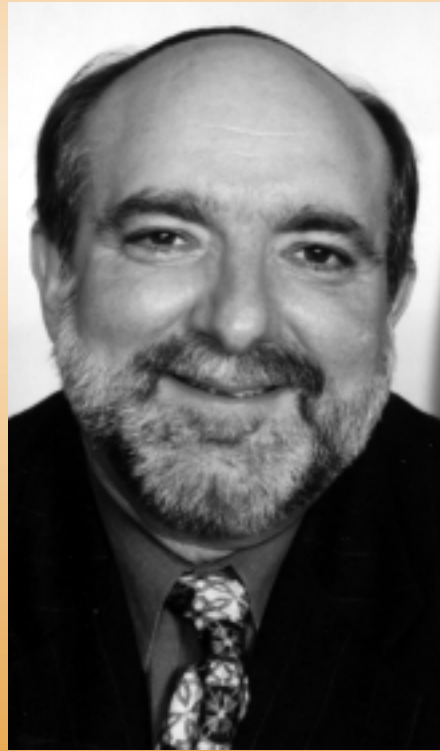
## 8th President of HUC-JIR

The Board of Governors of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) has unanimously elected Dr. David Ellenson to serve as the new President. The announcement was made by Burton Lehman, Chair of HUC-JIR's Board of Governors.

As President, Dr. Ellenson serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the College-Institute – the four-campus, international university which is the academic and professional leadership development center of Reform Judaism. Dr. Ellenson, who was ordained at HUC-JIR in 1977, is the 8<sup>th</sup> President in its 125 year-long history, and succeeds Dr. Norman J. Cohen, Acting President and Provost.

“We are proud that Dr. Ellenson has accepted our invitation and welcome his presidency with great enthusiasm,” stated Mr. Lehman. “Dr. Ellenson is a distinguished rabbi and scholar, dedicated teacher, and committed leader of the Reform Movement. Associated with HUC-JIR for nearly 30 years, Dr. Ellenson is a beloved teacher and mentor to generations of HUC-JIR students. He is internationally recognized for his publications and research in the area of Jewish religious thought, ethics, and modern Jewish history. His exemplary leadership and passionate commitment to Reform Judaism and the Jewish people worldwide will inspire HUC-JIR's growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In selecting this eminent rabbi and scholar as President for this institution, we are proud to demonstrate the excellence of HUC-JIR's intellectual and religious mission.”

“I am greatly honored to be called to serve as the President of HUC-JIR and pledge to advance the definition and fulfillment of its sacred mission. The College-Institute is a precious intellectual and religious resource for the ongoing life of the Reform Movement and the Jewish people. I hope to inspire



others to aid in the cooperative task of building and sustaining this institution as a source for good and blessing in the world,” stated Dr. Ellenson.

Dr. Ellenson is the I.H. and Anna Grancell Professor of Jewish Religious Thought at HUC-JIR in Los Angeles. A member of HUC-JIR's faculty since 1979, he has served as Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor of Jewish Religious Thought. From 1981-1997, he also held the post of Director of the Jerome H. Louchheim School of Judaic Studies. Dr. Ellenson received his Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1981 and was ordained a rabbi at HUC-JIR's New York School in 1977. He holds masters degrees from Columbia, HUC-JIR, and the University of Virginia. He received his bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary in Virginia in 1969.

Dr. Ellenson is a Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute of Jerusalem and a Fellow and Lecturer in the Institute of Advanced Studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He has served as Visiting Professor of History at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Lady Davis Visiting Professor of Humanities in the Department of Jewish Thought at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Visiting Professor in the Center for Jewish Studies and a member of the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department at the University of California, Los Angeles (1986-97), and Blaustein Scholar at the Jerusalem Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies. He regularly serves as a faculty member of the Wexner Heritage Foundation.

Dr. Ellenson has published and lectured extensively on diverse topics in modern Jewish history, ethics, and thought. He is the author of *Tradition in Transition: Orthodoxy, Halakhah and the Boundaries of Modern Jewish Identity* (1989), *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy* (1990) (nominated for the National Jewish Book Council's Award for outstanding book in Jewish History, 1990), and *Between Tradition and Culture: The Dialectics of Jewish Religion and Identity in the Modern World* (1994).

His work describes the writings of Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist leaders in Europe, the United States, and Israel during the last two centuries and employs a sociological approach to illuminate the history and development of modern Jewish religious denominationalism. His application of this method has allowed him to emphasize the interplay between Jewish religious tradition and modern society in unique ways, and has prompted him to write and lecture on topics ranging from early Reform and Orthodoxy in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany and conversion to Judaism at the beginning of

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the 1900s to the problems of medical ethics in present-day America.

Along with Dr. Stanley Chyet, Dr. Ellenson co-edited *Bits of Honey: Essays for Samson H. Levey* (1993), and is the author of the commentary entitled “How the Modern Prayerbook Evolved” in the acclaimed Five Volume Series on the Jewish Prayerbook, *Minhag Ami – My People’s Prayerbook* edited by Dr. Lawrence Hoffman. He is currently writing *The Way Into the Varieties of Jewishness* (Jewish Lights) and is at work on another book-length collection of his essays for HUC Press.

He has written over 200 articles and reviews in diverse academic and religious journals and books, including *The Hebrew Union College Annual*, *The Journal of American Academy of Religion*, *Religious Studies Review*, *The Year Book of the Leo Baeck Institute*, *Journal of Religion*, *Modern Judaism*, *The Jewish Book Annual*, *The CCAR Journal*, *Conservative Judaism*, *The Reconstructionist*, and *Tradition*. His academic lectures have been delivered at such institutions as Charles University in Prague, Ben Gurion and Bar Ilan Universities in Israel, Haverford College, Harvard, Yale, Brown, and the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Dr. Ellenson is a member of several professional and academic societies, including the Association for Jewish Studies, the American Academy of Religion, the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the Southern California Board of Rabbis, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. He has served as a pulpit rabbi in Port Washington, New York, and Keene, New Hampshire, and has worked at several summer camps of the Reform and Conservative movements.

Born in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1947, Dr. Ellenson was raised in Newport News, Virginia. He is married to Rabbi Jacqueline Koch Ellenson, ordained at HUC-JIR in New York in 1983 and Rabbinical Chaplain at the Harvard-Westlake School in Los Angeles. They are the parents of Ruth (married to Robert Guffey-Ellenson), Micah, Hannah, Naomi, and Raphael.

# PRESIDENT'S Message

As I write these words to you, we have sustained the tragic loss of innocent lives through abominable acts of terrorism. Words fail to convey the devastation that overwhelms all of us. In the face of terror and destruction, we look for consolation and hope from our faith and heritage. We rededicate ourselves to the continuity of our Jewish values that uphold the sanctity of human life, as well as the preciousness of family and community.

One of the most remarkable books in Jewish tradition, which affirms our hopes for the future, is entitled *Iggeret Rav Sherira Gaon* (The Letter of Rabbi Sherira Gaon). Written in the tenth century by the head of the leading rabbinic academy in Babylonia, this epistle outlined the *shalshelet ha-kabbalah* (the chain of tradition) that marked the Jewish people from time immemorial. In the pages of this work, Rav Sherira details the names and places of each link (*huliyah*) in that chain, and he indicates precisely who had preserved and extended Judaism throughout history up until his own day.

While present-day historians debate the precise claims put forth by Rav Sherira from a critical perspective, the most noteworthy lesson I derive from this Jewish classic is that this Babylonian sage did not view himself or his academy in an isolated fashion. Instead, he regarded himself and his institution as integral parts of a religious-intellectual tradition that extended back to Sinai. The roots provided by the great Jewish academies of the past anchored Rav Sherira and his school in the present.

At the same time, Rav Sherira did not allow the weight of the past to prevent either himself or his academy from avoiding their contemporary responsibility to meet the challenges of their age. Rav Sherira understood that he and his disciples were required to add their own voices and understandings to Jewish tradition if Judaism was to remain vital. In so doing, he knew that he stood in a line of great Torah scholars who had graced and creatively led our people before him. He knew from their examples that Judaism had to display a fidelity toward the past if it was to be deemed authentic. However, Rav Sherira recognized, as had his predecessors, that it was equally imperative that Judaism be vibrant and responsive to the needs of the present moment.

We today are called upon to follow the example set by Rav Sherira. Like the medieval Babylonian sage, we must comprehend the task of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion as twofold. We are called upon no less than our progenitors to be anchored in the past of our people. However, while we constantly strive to preserve the legacy of the past, we must not shirk our responsibility to translate its values into guideposts for the future.

Our aim at HUC-JIR is to make our seminary a fitting successor to an ethos of applied Jewish learning embodied by scholars such as Rav Sherira. The College-Institute is committed to the study of Torah. At the same time, HUC-JIR is open to modern-day religious trends and intellectual currents. This dual commitment permits the faculty and the students trained within the walls of