

(continued from page 1)

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

our four campuses to translate a knowledge of the Jewish past into a modern idiom that will address Jews today. Meaningful models for Jewish life thereby emerge and our hope is that these patterns will direct Jews in the present and illuminate our people and all humanity as Jews and non-Jews move toward the future.

This issue of the *Chronicle* celebrates our faculty both old and new. We promote and nurture the mission of the College-Institute through our teachers and their initiatives. This journal therefore displays their work and describes their promise. We highlight our many new centers of applied learning and scholarship and the initiatives these centers have advanced. Indeed, these persons and programs demonstrate that HUC-JIR regards with the utmost seriousness its obligation to serve as a present-day link in a venerable chain of Jewish tradition. We trust that the College-Institute will prove a worthy successor to the sages and institutions that have preceded us, and we hope that what is described in

these pages illustrates that Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion remains ever responsive to the challenges of the day.

The challenges we face are particularly evident in Israel's struggle for peace. Our Jerusalem School symbolizes our unflagging commitment to the Jewish State and the enduring links that bind the Jewish people throughout the world. We are proud of our Jerusalem campus, its students and faculty, academic programs and resources, and community outreach. We express our solidarity with the 63 stateside first-year students spending their Year-in-Israel during these trying days. As you will read in Evan Moffic's moving piece in this issue, the involvement of our students with the Jewish people, in Israel and elsewhere, is a necessary element of their preparation for Jewish leadership roles. While mindful of the safety and security concerns that are necessary to protect our students and faculty as they pursue their educational goals, we affirm that the continuation of our Israel programs demonstrates our fidelity

to the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

Ours is surely an age that is distinct from that of Rav Sherira. However, his spirit and that of his academy remain vital, and the College-Institute constantly strives to preserve and advance the legacy bequeathed us by the Babylonian sage and his school. It is a model of a living Judaism that HUC-JIR and its staff and students champion today.

I hope you enjoy the pages of this edition of the *Chronicle*, and that the descriptions contained within its covers inspire you to join us as partners in the millennial-old enterprise of the Jewish people. We can surely inspire the present and I am confident that we can together move positively and creatively into the future.

*L'shanah tovah tikateivu v'reihateimu* – may you and your loved ones as well as all Israel, the United States, and all the world be written and inscribed for a year of peace, safety, health, and goodness.

Rabbi David Ellenson



▲ Dr. Ellenson and first-year rabbinical, cantor, and education students in the Year-in-Israel Program, HUC-JIR/Jerusalem