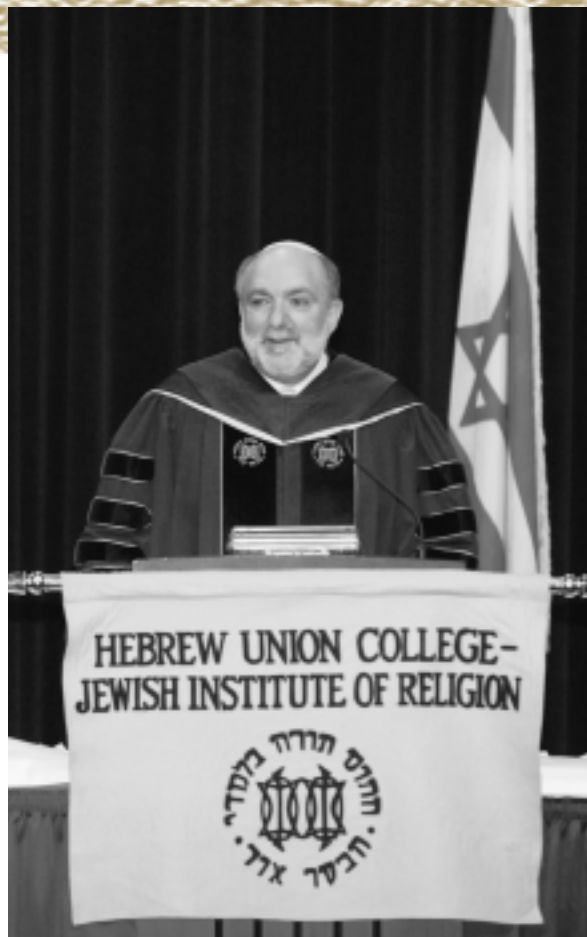


President's Message

In his 1857 prayer book, “*Minhag America – The American Custom*,” Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise amended the first paragraph of the *Amidah*, the prayer *par excellence* in Jewish tradition, to read, “*V’zocher brit avot* – O God, Who remembers the **Covenant** (*brit*) made with our ancestors,” in lieu of the more familiar, “*V’zocher hasdei avot* – O God, Who remembers the **loving deeds** of our ancestors.”

Rabbi Wise was of course not opposed to the fact that our ancestors had on many occasions performed wondrous and good deeds. However, he was uncomfortable with the rabbinic doctrine of “*Zechut avot* (Merit of our Ancestors),” as he felt that it was not appropriate that we rest upon the merits of the deeds performed by others – even our mothers and our fathers. Rather, Rabbi Wise desired that God and the Jewish people recall that a Covenant was established with our ancestors and that we Jews today, no less than our ancestors in generations past, are called to covenantal responsibility by God, Who asks that we serve as *shutafin* (partners) with the Divine in the tasks that are required to mend the world. This vision of Covenant lies at the very heart of Jewish religious tradition and this notion provides for an ideal of freedom and responsibility that animates the educational endeavors we undertake at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.



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As we educate students at the College-Institute, we hope that they will come to internalize the memories imposed by Jewish history, and that these future religious and communal leaders and teachers will affirm the Jewish story as their own. We hope that the knowledge that they will acquire at HUC-JIR will transform them into people who will be worthy of the covenantal tradition that all of us have inherited, and that all of us ultimately are called upon to transmit. Our students bear great responsibility to that chain of tradition that began at Sinai. At the same time, we would be remiss if we taught that fidelity to the past absolves them of responsibility in the present. The notion of Covenant requires that they be mindful of both past and present. It also demands that they understand that theirs is a responsibility that extends into the future as well.

This is the task of the College-Institute, and as you read these pages of *The Chronicle* I hope that you will have a sense of the vitality that is present on our campuses as HUC-JIR attempts to remain true to the teachings of Rabbi Wise and seeks to fulfill in so many ways its ongoing mandate to educate students in a tradition of covenantal duty.

Rabbi David Ellenson
November 2007 *Kislev* 5768