

Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, z”l

EULOGY BY RABBI DAVID ELLENSON

For me, and for the nearly 2,000 rabbis, cantors, educators, communal professionals, and scholars trained during his tenure as HUC-JIR President, no rabbi commanded greater respect and awe than our Teacher and Rabbi – Alfred Gottschalk, whose life and accomplishments were legendary. His deepest commitments were to humanity, the Jewish people, and the State of Israel. What events prompted his fierce devotion to these values?

Twenty years ago, he delivered a powerful, culminating address at a conference of Jewish, German Protestant, and Catholic theologians in Augsburg, Germany, on the theme of “*Versöhnung* – Atonement and Reconciliation.” Speaking in German, he unapologetically said that as a Professor of Bible and Jewish Thought and President of the oldest and most venerable rabbinical seminary in North America, his German should have been sophisticated and fluent, not the German of a nine-year-old boy. In a voice marked by the pent up sadness, humiliation, and fury of fifty years, he recalled the day when a Nazi policeman entered his Oberwesel elementary school classroom and declared, “All Jewish children – raus!” – and repeated that word three times, in ascending, deafening volume. His primal accusation revealed the motivation for his life’s work on behalf of the Jewish people and humanity.

His words to our students each year on the day before Ordination provided another glimpse of the primary trope for understanding the shape and direction of his life. He vividly described Kristallnacht on November 9-10, 1938. The morning after the desecration



Former President (1971-1996)

Chancellor (1996-2000)

Chancellor Emeritus

**Emeritus Distinguished Professor
of Bible and Jewish Thought**

**John and Marianne Slade Professor Emeritus
of Jewish Intellectual History**

of his town’s synagogue, this eight-year-old child watched his grandfather wade into the stream of freezing water running past the building in order to rescue the torn fragments of the Torah scrolls and prayer books. His grandfather told him that it was his obligation to protect and piece together the Torah. This narrative provided the framework for his lifelong devotion to the preservation and regeneration of Jewish life and learning.

In 1939, a month before World War II

began, miraculous exit visas brought him and his mother on one of the last ships to leave Hamburg to New York, where they joined his father, who had escaped Nazi arrest on his eighth birthday, fled down the Rhine to Holland, and eventually found safety in the U.S. A graduate of Boys High School and Brooklyn College, he was inspired by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise and his synagogue’s clergy as a fifteen-year-old to designate the rabbinate as his calling. His studies at HUC-JIR in New York culminated in Ordination in Cincinnati in 1957, when HUC-JIR President Dr. Nelson Glueck charged him as Dean with the development of HUC-JIR’s fledgling Los Angeles School. His vision transformed it from its modest beginnings on the Appian Way in the Hollywood Hills to a dynamic campus adjacent to the University of Southern California (USC) with a rabbinical program, the Jewish Studies program for USC, the Skirball Museum, and pioneering programs in communal service and Jewish education to serve the second largest Jewish population center in America and *klal Yisrael*. Ahad Haam, the great cultural Zionist and subject of his Ph.D. from USC, remained the lifelong focus of his writing and thought.

These accomplishments led to his appointment as HUC-JIR President upon the death of his mentor, Dr. Glueck. From 1971 to 1996, he championed the exponential growth of HUC-JIR’s programs, enrollment, and campuses and was the catalyst for key milestones: the ordination of the first women rabbis in America (1972) and Israel (1992), the first woman cantor in America (1975), and the



Personal Reflections by Dr. Alfred Gottschalk

first Reform rabbi in Israel (1980). HUC-JIR's Graduate School in Cincinnati, in which he took such pride, thrived as a center of advanced academic study for Jewish and Christian students alike and produced some of HUC-JIR's leading faculty. Emulating HUC-JIR's vital partnership with USC, he expanded and relocated the New York campus adjacent to NYU. His love of Israel guided his vision for a dramatically enlarged Jerusalem campus as the center for Reform Judaism there. The establishment of the rabbinical program for Israeli students (1975) and the required first year of study in Israel for all stateside rabbinical, cantorial, and education students transformed the Reform Movement's Zionist stance and ensured that vital links between American Jewry and the State of Israel would thrive.

The friend and confidant of countless political and religious leaders of all faiths throughout the world, he served on President Carter's Commission on the Holocaust (1979), which first charted the course for memorializing the Holocaust through the creation of a national museum and center for academic research. He was appointed by Presidents Carter, Reagan and Clinton to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, where he founded and chaired the Academic and Education Committees, and served on the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Committee on Conscience. He served as President of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York (2000-2003), where he initiated and planned the sixty-thousand square foot Robert M. Morgenthau Wing, while serving as HUC-JIR Chancellor (1996-2000), and continued to serve as a Senior Fellow and Trustee.

The righteous even in death live on in their words and deeds. *Y'hi zichro baruch* – may the memory of Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk continue to bless us all.



(From left) Dr. Alfred Gottschalk ordaining Rabbi Sally Priesand as the first woman rabbi in America; teaching students; and meeting with Prime Minister Golda Meir.

As a child of the generation of the Holocaust and as one who witnessed the onset of the destruction of European Jewry, I knew that I would devote myself to rebuilding Jewish life. This has been the key motivation of my life, and my work to advance HUC-JIR as a successor to the great centers of learning destroyed during the Shoah has enabled me to contribute to the regeneration of the Jewish people.

I have truly been fulfilled by my almost sixty years of association with HUC-JIR, as it has flourished as the academic center of Reform Judaism, nourished generations of spiritual and professional leaders, and fostered a liberal Judaism, consonant with modernity, in which the traditions, ethical values, and prophetic message of our faith have meaning in the present and for the future.

From the outset, it has been my intention to transform the institution into a place of warmth and creativity with academic freedom – to give students the freedom to express their Judaism fully, provide faculty the opportunity to experiment with new course offerings, and to establish a climate of free inquiry in which all members of our community could find maximum expression in the service of our Reform Movement.

My mission has been to be proactive, to anticipate the emerging needs of the Reform Movement and the Jewish people. My goals have been to develop new programs and venues that would embrace a generation whose roots are tenuous, who are “appreciative” Jews rather than committed Jews, who superficially choose between things they “like” or “dislike” in Judaism but who lack a grounding in text, practice, and belief.

HUC-JIR is a complex institution, born out of the *wissenschaft* tradition, the *yeshiva* heritage where we “learn to teach,” and professional concerns to impart skills and “learn to do.” Between our classical Jewish studies, engagement with modernity, and concern for continuity, our greatest challenge has been to bring all of this together into a vibrant future.

It has been my privilege to encourage women to become Jewish spiritual and professional leaders and to enable them to enjoy full equality in the service of God. I look upon the ordination of Sally Priesand in 1972 as the first

woman rabbi in America, investiture of Barbara Ostfeld in 1975 as the first woman cantor, and Naamah Kelman as the first woman rabbi in Israel as historic turning points in the Jewish religion.

Over the years, I have taken pride in the enlarged numbers and enhanced quality of students admitted to all of our programs. I have sought to strengthen our faculty through the appointment of brilliant young scholars distinguished for both their scholarship and their commitment to the life of the Jewish mind.

I have supported the strengthening of HUC-JIR's text-based core curriculum by innovations addressing the emerging needs of the Reform Movement. New initiatives have included the growth of practical skills training, mentorship programs, chaplaincy and CPE training, the enrichment of students' spiritual lives and leadership skills, and the application of new technologies towards classical Jewish studies. The goal has always been to strive for academic excellence and cherish the qualities of humaneness and integrity within an environment grounded by reason, faith, and trust.

The future of Reform Jewry and Jewish life in America, Israel, and worldwide depends on the leadership HUC-JIR prepares today. The pressing issues of Jewish literacy and communal participation are central to the maintenance of Jewish consciousness. The universal teachings of Judaism possess great relevance – our traditions of ethics and social justice can inspire *tikkun olam*, the mending of our world.

I am thankful to all those who have been my partners — my friends and colleagues in all the arms of the Reform Movement, our alumni, my administration, deans and directors, staff, faculty, students, and Governors and Overseers who have contributed so much. I am grateful to my children Marc and Rachel and their families, for their unfailing support, my helpmate Deanna Gottschalk, for her devotion, love, and profound belief in HUC-JIR and its great work, and her dear children Andrew and Charles and their families. The blessing that best expresses my gratitude for these fulfilling, meaningful years is: “I thank you, O God, in that you have set my portion among those who study Torah.” ■

EULOGY BY RABBI DAVID M. POSNER,
Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York:

For Rabbi Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, the Holy One had a special purpose and a unique providence. The very day that he was born, March 7, 1930, was *erev Shabbat Zachor*, the Sabbath of Remembrance preceding the festival of Purim.

I know of no one more deserving or better suited to be born on the eve of the Sabbath that includes the commandment “to remember.” Of all of Fred’s outstanding attributes, it was his dedication to the memory of the entire sweep of Jewish history and to the full scope of Jewish civilization that was the most distinguishing aspect of his life. Whether it was the history of the Holocaust or the history of Zionism; all of the personalities whom he encountered in his wonderful career; all of the teachers and luminaries long gone who inspired him; all of the events in which he participated – what tied them and Fred’s life all together was his passion for the word *Zachor*, remember. And so, for Fred, the *Torah* portion of his birth was his destiny.

When Fred became the president of HUC-JIR in 1971, he was all of forty-one. Never in his wildest dreams could he have imagined that he was going to hold that position longer than any of his predecessors ever did and lead the College-Institute into years of tremendous innovation and expansion. For Fred, no task was too difficult; no effort was too exhausting. I know of no other person who was so capable of building from the bottom up. And if it happened that a bottom didn’t actually exist, then Fred knew how to create one. He didn’t just need students to start a program. All Fred ever needed was a vision. He would create the vision, and then everything else would fall into place.

He was one of the bravest people I ever knew. He had many lives – and watching

Fred over the years was like witnessing the wanderings and the struggles and the challenges of the Jewish people and of Jewish history. He went wherever and whenever the Holy One demanded.

Zecher Tsaddik livrocho, the memory of the righteous is a blessing.

EULOGY BY RABBI LEWIS KAMRASS,
Plum Street Temple, Cincinnati:

When I first met Dr. Alfred Gottschalk nearly thirty years ago as a twenty-year-old rabbinical student, I was struck by three physical characteristics that were a mirror of his character and his soul.

The first trait I noticed was his commanding presence. We marveled at his unmatched ability as an orator, who spoke with deep substance on so many topics, and without a note. It was always a joy to watch his great mind at work, and witness his capacity to tell a story, to teach, to inspire, to inform, to challenge. The man and the message were one, true extensions of one another; there was genuineness to what we heard in his words, and saw in his deeds. Fred’s commanding presence could also be seen in his high expectations. He could be demanding of others, just as he was of himself, but he was always good to his word, and did not let people down. Beneath that physical strength was an indomitable strength of will that enabled him to weather all of life’s challenges and even its tragedies, as well as to feel such gratitude for life’s blessings.

The second characteristic was his wide, embracing smile that was shaped by warmth and caring, and revealed a genuineness of soul that drew people to him. There was never pretense with Fred, for he was a man truly at home with all people because he was always comfortable with himself. When that smile widened into laughter, with his keen wit and

sense of humor, he reminded us that even a seriousness of purpose was never justification for taking oneself too seriously. It also taught us of his joy for life, his ability to smile at life’s unfairness and its limitations, because there was always even more for which to feel grateful.

And the third characteristic was Fred’s piercing, clear blue eyes. He saw the future with vision, with clarity of imagination and of purpose that contributed, in part, to his confident leadership. He led HUC-JIR at a time when the Jewish world was undergoing unimaginable transformation, and yet Fred could always see into that distant horizon that others could not fathom, and then lead people to new horizons. Fred also saw deeply and confidently into the future with people and with relationships, as revealed in his great gift of seeing potential in students, in young scholars, and in colleagues, whose potential he would foster with a rare combination of genuine support and honesty. Yes, he built an international institution with four campuses, but he also shaped a world-class faculty, and two generations of students and colleagues by identifying potential and believing in people.

Alfred Gottschalk was called to a life of purpose and a destiny of meaning at an early age. May the blessing of what he did and what he taught us continue to imbue our lives with meaning, and help to shape Fred’s enduring legacy. ■

(From left) Dr. Alfred Gottschalk at the dedication of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum with President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton; meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres; dedicating the memorial to his grandparents in the Jewish cemetery of Oberwesel, Germany; and with his wife Deanna in Jerusalem.

