



Blessing for the Inauguration of Rabbi David Ellenson

RABBI LAURA J. GELLER

Senior Rabbi, Temple Emanuel, Beverly Hills, California

THERE IS A STORY in the Talmud that makes me think of David. It is about a man who was traveling through the desert, tired and thirsty. All of a sudden he came upon an oasis with a beautiful shade tree laden with fruit, nestled next to a refreshing stream. He rested under the tree, ate the fruit and drank the water. When it was time for him to continue his journey, he turned to the tree: "O tree, how can I bless you? Shall I say: 'May your fruit be sweet?' It is already sweet. Shall I say: 'May your shade be restful?' It already is restful. Shall I say: 'May there be a stream running along your side?' There already is a stream. O tree, how can I bless you? All I can say is: 'May all your saplings be like you.'"

David, how can we bless you? Shall we say: 'May you be a passionate, respected scholar?' You already are. Shall we say: 'May you be the kind of teacher who changes the lives of your students?' You already are – astounding all of us who have ever learned with you, as you lecture without a note, ask questions that make us think, model what it means to be passionate about a text and compassionate about those who have been your teachers. We have learned as much from your tears as you teach about the courage and decency of Leo Baeck as we have learned from the many books we have read with you. When Abraham Joshua Heschel said that what we need are not more textbooks but text persons, he was speaking of teachers like you.

Shall we say: 'May you be a worthy successor to the presidents who have come before you, progressive enlightened visionaries who created and shaped an institution that has trained spiritual leaders and teachers for the challenges of contemporary Jewish life?' You already are. You have the strength to make tough decisions. You have the integrity to stand for the best values of Jewish tradition. You have the courage to keep Zionism at the center of our focus. And you care about Jewish persons as much as you

care about the Jewish people. All the alumni of HUC-JIR are proud beyond words to have you as our eighth president.

Shall we say: 'Even though you have this important position, may you never lose your sense of humor?' It isn't likely – after all, with all your serious scholarship, Azriel Hildesheimer is hardly a household name and you still laugh at Michael Marmor's quip that the presidency has gone from Kaufmann Kohler to Diet Cola.

So David, how can we bless you? All we can say is: 'May all your saplings be like you.'

All your saplings – not only Jackie's and your wonderful children, Ruthie and Robert, Micah, Hannah, Nomi and Rafi, but all of us – the generations of students, colleagues, and friends who have been blessed by you. And may the next generation of rabbis, educators, cantors, communal professionals, and scholars be renewed in the shade of your compassion, nourished by the fruit of your leadership, and sustained by the water of your Torah.



*Rabbi Laura J. Geller, '76, Senior Rabbi,
Temple Emanuel, Beverly Hills, California*