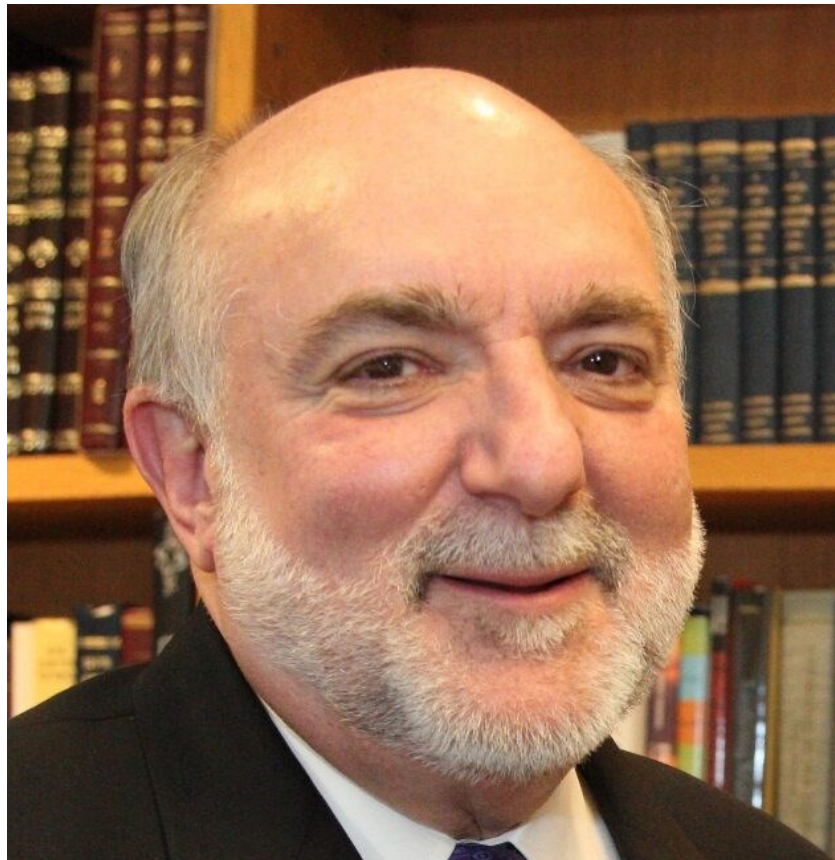




# Remembering

## Rabbi David Ellenson, Ph.D.

renowned educator, scholar, leader, and friend



“It is impossible to overstate David’s importance to the Jewish People, Reform Judaism, and to Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in particular. His scholarship and depth of knowledge were world-renowned, and his humility, warmth, generosity of spirit, and deep concern for each individual inspired all of us who had the privilege to know him. I feel blessed to have had him as a friend and mentor, and will miss him dearly.”

- President Andrew Rehfeld, Ph.D.

My heart is with the entire Ellenson family...Rabbi Ellenson was the mensch of all mensches, the true definition of mensch. He was a true rabbi's rabbi; he was an amazing friend and teacher. David was the purest of anyone I have ever known. I will carry his memories with me forever.

- Rabbi Erin Boxt '12

David Ellenson was my teacher, mentor and friend. I will never forget the lessons I learned from him during my years in the school of Jewish communal service. Over 30 years later, I remain in this field due in no small measure to David's guidance and love for Judaism and his students. He left an indelible mark on all who were privileged to know him.

נפלה עטרת ראשנו.

יהי זכרו ברוך.

- Alan Ronkin MAJCS/MPA '91

David was my favorite professor while at HUC. I'm sure many others will share their impressions of him as a mensch which I wholeheartedly share.

One memory that's stuck with me over the years was at the conclusion of one of his classes, literally the final class many of us would ever take at HUC, David paused and began to recite Kaddish D'Rabbanan. This is one of those moments I will never forget because it was acknowledging the people that had influenced him in his teaching and I also think that David was symbolically welcoming all of us in as colleagues at the conclusion of our HUC studies.

It had to be a pretty cool moment to stick with me over 33 years.

- Steven Lipman '90

A great man. My condolences to the entire family.

- Robert French

David's scholarship and erudition were as renowned as his humility, but one description has come up repeatedly in every person's posted responses to this terrible loss: David was a mensch among mensches. For someone of his stature as a leader, a teacher, and a talmid chacham to elicit so many extraordinary tributes that name these qualities, of course, but highlight more than anything the kindness he exuded, his huge and infinite menschlichkeit -- it is just extraordinary. We were no more than acquaintances, sharing dear mutual friends, yet I knew from my few interactions with David that he was a giant of kindness. We should all be so lucky -- no, not lucky -- we should all strive to live our lives such that we will be remembered the same way. This Chanukah, the world has lost a beautiful light. I keep finding myself thinking, "Ah -- we have lost a lamed-vavnik." If not David, then who? My deepest condolences to his entire family. HaMakom yinachem et'chem. David blessed the world with his life of exemplary, truly loving service, and his memory will forever be a blessing.

- Laura Gold

Neil and I are so saddened to hear this news. David was an extraordinary teacher, leader, and friend. I will never forget the amazing classes I had with him at HUC LA. In addition to his great leadership, he was one of the kindest, most wonderful human beings I have ever met. If you look up the word "mensch" in the dictionary, there should be a picture of him. So sorry for this terrible loss for all of the family and for the Jewish people. Sending lots of love.

- Leslie & Neil Silverstein

David was one of the kindest people you would ever meet, absolutely brilliant, but so humble. I am glad I got to know him and work with him more directly when he stepped in after Aaron, z"l, passed away. His memory is a blessing. I also enjoyed wishing him a happy birthday every November.

- Naomi Rabeeya, Senior Manager of Donor Stewardship

Dear Jackie, Micah and family,

Susie and I send hugs of comfort to you. There are only two or three Lamid-Vavniks among the 36 righteous who we have had the honor of knowing. David is at the top of the list. Within a few months of arriving in Los Angeles nearly 50 years ago, everyone told us about this phenomenal scholar and teacher at HUC-LA. When Stuart Kelman and I brought the CAJE conference to the West Coast in 1978, David was a featured teacher. Then, I had the opportunity to invite David to teach at our conferences on Jewish family education, David eagerly agreed. When researching Relational Judaism, I asked David for an interview about fundraising which I'm proud of have in the book. Upon becoming Chancellor of the College-Institute, he enthusiastically championed the Synagogue 2000/3000 project Larry Hoffman and I directed. I'll never forget his words of greeting at an S2K conference in Westchester. "What a wonderful time in our Jewish community when we are finally crossing the denominational divide. Ron's daughter Havi is one of our students at HUC-JIR and our son Micah is one of Ron's students at the University of Judaism!" A kind, sweet, compassionate, and wonderful human being, David's physical presence will be sorely missed, but his spirit, his scholarship, his smile and his soul will live on forever.

With love, Ronnie and Susie Wolfson

David grew up with my paternal family in Newport News and was acquainted with my late uncle Bert Aaron who greatly admired him. I always was so proud that a Newport News landsman rose to be such a titan of the American Jewish community and was always honored when he remembered our shared connection there including when he spoke at the dedication of Aaron chair in Judaica Studies at Christopher Newport University a few years back. He was a role model to me as a Rabbi and a scholar and our American Jewish community is infinitely better for all he did for it. His memory will be a blessing forever and always!

- Rabbi Scott Aaron '98

He was a friend and a colleague. His memory is a blessing for us all.

- Ira Robinson

As the first light of Hanukkah is lit tonight, I will be thinking of a light that has gone from this world. My teacher, Rabbi David Ellenson, Ph.D. died. He was truly brilliant, yet what stood out was his kindness, which speaks volumes if you knew just how brilliant he was.

I remember the circumstances that lead him to become head of HUC. It was a difficult time for the seminary. We experienced a loss of faith in leadership. Rabbi Ellenson said that leadership is not a privilege. It is earned. He was the only one to speak in that manner at the time. Most of us were just stunned and sad. I realized soon, it was not just critique; it was him growing and readying himself to step up. What made him great was that he made that work look natural and effortless.

I am not much a fan of a lecture but, I could listen to him talk endlessly. His knowledge was encyclopedic and his wisdom even greater. Everyone in Los Angeles will remember him with jeans and a diet coke, and tears whenever he taught about Leo Baeck (without notes, for Baeck or just about anything). When he left LA to lead the school, it was a bitter day for HUC-LA, but a sweet day for HUC.

The timing of his becoming president while I was a student meant I ended up being the very last of his students he ever ordained. I remember well his words as he laid his hands on my shoulders for ordination. It was a transition for him as well. He would always be a teacher, but his legacy at HUC would now be fully invested as the helm.

I know my recollection will be one of thousands. My tears among the many who will mourn him. My life one of countless lives who were affected by him. I do not imagine I will ever encounter another leader like him. So I will light my light tonight in his honor. His memory will always be a blessing.

- Idit Solomon

The shock and the sadness are inextricably linked. David was a terrific person in every way that I knew him. We shared a Southern background and Reform Judaism too. That base burgeoned when he taught at Brandeis, though we actually had met in the Negev. He was great fun to be with -- lively, engaging, obviously well-informed and thoughtful and intelligent. He exuded a charm and a humor that are sorely missed in this world at this time. Even if and when the world becomes more tranquil, David will still be missed.

- Stephen Whitfield

Long before I came to HUC, I knew of Dr. Ellenson both by his work and his friendship with Paula Hyman. His scholarship on Hildesheim was essential to my work on 19th century Jews and I was a fan of his scholarship. Also, Paula had high standards for who qualified as a close friend so this was enough to recommend him to me as a mensch.

My time at HUC was not easy at all. But whenever things got difficult I knew that despite being President and having so much to do, he would make time to really hear what I had to say. He was an inspiration for what a rabbi should be and could be; a scholar and a caring and gracious individual.

He made space for me at HUC and helped me on to the next steps of my journey.

I have a photo of the day of my ordination, of me with him, Paula and Judith Plaskow. It sits in my office and I see it every day. I am so fortunate to have counted him among my teachers.

I send you all love and strength in this difficult time for as great as the loss is for all of us, nothing compares to what you, who knew him best and who he loved most must feel.

In peace,  
Rabbi Ruth Abusch-Magder '06

### המקום ינחם

I remember staying at your home in LA many years ago and asking David z"l, "How could somebody as nice as you become president of HUC-JIR?" Maybe this is also a tribute to HUC-JIR, but first and foremost to David's menschlichkeit. Nice guys don't always finish last. I know his memory will be for you a blessing.

- Rabbi Arik Ascherman '89

David was someone who lit up a room without trying - just by being himself. He was kind and generous of thought . He was the embodiment of a Reform and liberal Judaism - I feel honored to have known him and send deep condolences to Jackie and to the entire family.

- Jo-Ann Mort

It is with big dismay that I just read about the sudden death of our dear Rabbi David Ellenson. Our deepest condolences to the family and the whole HUC's community. As our HUC president said, The Jewish people has lost a giant. May you be consoled with the loving memories of all who had the privilege of knowing David, and May his memory be for a blessing!

- Esther '03 and Uzy Blachman

As I am shocked and deeply saddened to hear about David's death, I feel that a great tear has opened in the Universe. David was such a special soul and intellect that no one and nothing can take his place. His tender spirit and perceptive mind made him a favorite with students and friends alike. I am so gratified that I could fall into both of those categories after so many years. I really loved seeing David and will miss him terribly.

- Cheri Ellowitz, RJE '82

David's shoulders were strong enough to hold us all and, now we share our shoulders. I miss this gentle rabbi and leader of us all.

- Sunny Romer, RJE '76

Like so many of our friends and colleagues I am stunned and devastated by David's passing. It is truly unfathomable that such a bright, radiant light would be taken from this world at a moment when we need it most. I am sending all of my love to every single one of you in the Ellenson tribe - you who have loved, supported, nurtured and raised up so many of us clergy. I will always think of Micah, Sara, Lily and Rose as our forever Seattle family - we miss them dearly and are grateful for the impact they continue to make on our lives.

Sending my sincere condolences and heartfelt blessings of comfort to you all.

With love,  
Rabbi Jaelyn Fromer Cohen '12, '14 (and Josh, Avi & Sidney)

My main interaction with David was at the LA Campus in my first year of study stateside. I arrived in LA and soon after, David, as a faculty member, invited me out to lunch. I was flattered, excited and of course, accepted. It was a little intimidating meeting someone of his stature, but he was so deft at putting us new students at ease with his warm, friendly manner.

We went over to the USC campus-- I think to their food court (it was a long time ago so I don't remember the details)-- and after we got our food, we sat down and I think the first thing he asked me was: "So, how are you doing spiritually?"

I nearly choked on my food. How am I doing spiritually?!? No one had ever asked me that before in my life! I remember thinking... 'Ah, we are surely in LA!' (I grew up in Boston and particularly, in a family that was very Jewish, very cerebrally. No one used the word "spiritually" or had any idea -so it seemed- what that was.)

I think I asked a few clarifying questions to get a sense of what he was looking for and he just kept insisting he wanted to know how I was.... spiritually. He was wonderful like that-- getting you to move out of your comfort zone but in a kind, gentle, persistent way.

I'm not sure what I said but the question alone, and my difficulty answering it, stuck with me through the years as I tried to hone in on what that could mean for me. Today, I go twice a year for week-long silent retreats through IJS and Or HaLev and practice mindfulness meditation daily.

It was David with his simple question that launched me on that life-changing path! He was an amazing teacher and mentor. May his memory be a blessing for you, as it has been for me and for so many.  
Yehi Zichro Baruch

- Rabbi Efrat Zarren-Zohar '92

As long standing members of The Community Synagogue in Port Washington, NY, we had the privilege of hearing Rabbi Ellison speak on many occasions. As a special guest to honor our clergy or for a significant moment for Israel and the Jewish people, Rabbi Ellison always spoke with such knowledge and compassion. His gentle manner and wise words will always be remembered by those lucky enough to be in his presence. And because he was not only a colleague, but a friend to our rabbi, Irwin Zeplovitz, his loss is felt keenly by our congregation. May he rest in peace and may his memory always be a blessing.

- Ann and Fred Axelrod



I was devastated to hear the news of David Ellenson's death. Through tears, I have been looking through the many emails that David sent me over the years. So many of them were unsolicited notes to congratulate me on a promotion, publication, award, or mention in the press. One that stood out is a note from when he and his son Rafi attended a talk I gave in the NYU linguistics department in 2015. He cc'd a few other HUC leaders on that email, and one of them responded, "We are all verklempt from naches." Characteristically, David replied, "If you're all verklempt and there are enough tears, it shows my enduring legacy!! :)"

Some memories that stand out:

- David's graduation and ordination addresses, during which he inevitably referred to HUC students/alumni as "klei kodesh" and during which he inevitably cried
- Many meetings, especially during the 2008 financial crisis, involving budget charts and Diet Coke
- A thank you note he wrote me for a thank you note I wrote him after my first sabbatical
- A hilarious speech he gave at a Wexner institute about buying suits to prepare for his new presidential role
- Many individual conversations at HUC events in which he was so present (even when others were swirling around us) and asked about my family, my work, and my well being
- Brief email exchanges over the last several years in which his love for his children and grandchildren was on display.

I strive to emulate David's brilliant scholarship, his steadfast leadership, and, especially, his *mentshlichkayt*. *Zichrono livracha*.

- Sarah Bunin Benor, Ph.D., Vice Provost; Director, Jewish Language Project; Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies and Linguistics

What a special, special man.  
Such a deep loss for all who knew and loved him.  
I send condolences to all.

- Nancy Katz

A light has gone out, but David's good deeds will live after him. May his memory be a blessing.

- Rabbi Loraine Heller '90

1. David and I were two of a class of less than ten studying with Fritz Bamberger back in the late 70's on W68th St. It was a privilege simply to listen to David and Fritz -What an inspiring display of humility and erudition.

2. Members of North Shore Congregation Israel spoke of his Scholar in Residence visit for years. Even more important was the "after party." After havdalah, , my wife and I invited at least 20 area colleagues to our home for drinks, dinner, and schmooze. David's loving heart enabled him to have a moment with every colleague - a laugh, a joke, a reminiscence about the NY School or the class of 1977 year in Israel. Somehow he had an authentic connection with everyone. Real mentches do that.

3. In 2010, David ordained both my daughter and daughter in law Rabbis in Israel. We all cried the wonderful tears that a moment of love, Torah, and hope can prompt. His gentle words of commitment inspired us so.

The Mason Family remembers David with love and respect and we pray that the Ellenson Family will be strengthened by the blessing of memory.

- Rabbi Steve Mason '78, '96

I first met David as a 19 year old when he was a rabbinic intern at Wilshire Blvd Temple. He was leading HhDay services. My brother and I assisted and read Torah. On Kol Nidre after a 100 degree LA day we were holding Torahs. Sweat was dripping down all of our heads. In between services went back into a room, and David took off his robe, and while we were wearing suits and ties, he was wearing shorts. A lesson learned

Years later, when I was installed as the NATA President, David flew to Minneapolis to handle the installation. When I created a leadership program for future board members each year, David would fly up from LA and teach the session on the history of Reform Judaism.

We had a lifelong friendship and I loved his Virginia accent both in Hebrew and English. A teacher, a friend and a mensch.

- Gary S Cohn

David was a smiling scholar who imparted his wisdom with joy and love. I felt enriched in his presence, always.

- Rabbi Jonathan Miller '82

I was privileged to study with David at a summer Kallah in Santa Cruz, California quite a number of years ago. It was such a joy to meet him and learn from him. From that brief encounter, I felt like I had been in the presence of a great man, a lover of Judaism, and a kind, patient teacher. I have never forgotten that joyful experience. May his memory be for a blessing.

- Jan Rose

I mourn the premature death of my colleague and friend David Ellenson. He was a special scholar, teacher, and human being. Among the leaders of HUC-JIR, he was exceptional with a real vision of Jewish life, Jewish history, and the Jewish future. How the College flourished under his leadership and how many of his students and colleagues were enriched by his presence! He also stayed connected to the academic world where he was trained. I will never forget his appearance at my retirement party from Penn's Katz Center. His genuine support meant a lot to me as it did to countless others.

- Rabbi David Ruderman '71

As we kindle the first Chanukah candle, I sense that a light has gone out in the Jewish community. Yet, David Ellenson's impact on those who knew him will continue to shine brightly. While I never studied with him at HUC, being only a couple years younger than him, I treasure finally having had the opportunity to learn from him during several summers through the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. I am honored to have called him a friend. David Ellenson was a wonderful blend of scholar, teacher and a true mensch.

My heartfelt condolences are extended to Jackie and the entire family.

- Rabbi Garson Herzfeld '79

David was a smiling scholar who imparted his wisdom with joy and love. I felt enriched in his presence, always.

- Rabbi Jonathan Miller '82

We are deeply saddened by the news of David's untimely death. We know that as recently as last evening, David was doing "his thing", honoring an academic colleague, Rabbi J.J. Schacter. One would have expected no less of him, to be present to honor an orthodox rabbinic leader! David's ability to be a part of the larger Jewish world, regardless of ideological or religious divisions, made him distinctive, even admired, in a world that has so often closed off those essential connections across denominational lines.

The outpouring of stories today of so many holding claim to being his friend, his colleague, his student and so much more defined the nature and character of this unique tzadek. His humanity defined him. The stories of how he had made a difference in the lives of so many, affirms his image as a caring and engaged partner in the lives of all who were touched by his warmth and commitment.

We are each richer for having him with us on this journey! May his bride, Jackie, and each of his children and grandchildren reaffirm from this outpouring of love how much David meant to his community and most certainly to each of you. Now, in this hour of our sadness and loss, we bring you his dear family into our hearts and thoughts.

May you draw comfort and support from our collective embrace.

Warmly, Michelle and Steven Windmueller, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor

Today, I'm remembering Rabbi David Ellenson, Ph.D. as a teacher and colleague who was both gentle and firm in his conviction and love for the Jewish people. I was a young man growing up in Overland Park, KS when I first time David; my family hosted him for Shabbat when he was the visiting Scholar in Residence to the synagogue where my father was rabbi. He made a wonderful impression on me then and again each time I encountered him whether as a rabbinical student living in New York (I studied at JTS) or seeing him at the synagogue where I now belong. I am grateful for his warmth and ability to tell great stories. Yehi Zichrono l'vracha

- Rafi Cohen

Dear Ellenson family,

I knew David via HUC Los Angeles when he did some teaching at Heschel Day School and then subsequently when he was a colleague at the college when I was the educational director of the DeLeT program.

The news of David's death stunned me as I imagined him a fixed luminary in the world of Jewish scholars, leaders and 'mentschen'. It is a great loss to all of you and to the world with which you shared him, the Jewish people.

He will live on for so many of us in his teachings, his modeling of openness and acceptance and his lifelong quest for knowledge and meaning. May all of your memories of him bring you strength and determination to continue his legacy to you and to us.

We are all better for having known David. May God comfort you along with all of the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Sending love,  
Luisa Latham '97

Dear Jackie,

My heart is breaking for you and your family.  
All of us who were touched by David's warmth, scholarship and impact, will miss him. The Reform community and the larger Jewish world will miss his wisdom and presence.

Surrounding you with love.

All my best,  
Robin Eisenberg

The Jewish community has lost a shining light with the passing of Rabbi David Ellenson. Scholar, author, educator, rabbi, counselor, friend, husband, father, grandfather and mensch, his wit and humor were unique and much loved by all who came to know him. Our community will be much diminished...may his memory be for a blessing forever.

- Susan Nemens

It is very hard to imagine the Jewish world without Rabbi David Ellenson, a great scholar who was equally a profound soul, a teacher and a seeker, a practical, pragmatic organizer and yet an inspiring, uplifting visionary. Although I was consistently aware of his breadth of interests and accomplishments -- and hence ready to be intimidated and self-protectively withdrawn -- his loving, passionate energy and natural, deeply authentic commitment to k'vod habriyot drove him to reach out with the unreserved friendliness of a long-term buddy. Both when I was Director of Public Affairs of the New Israel Fund, and subsequently in my role as Rabbinic Director of the National Center for Jewish Healing -- even during the "early days" of both, when the ventures were a tad "suspect" in the Jewish community -- David perceived the truth and value of their core missions and programs, and offered his support and help in truly effective and significant ways.

Even with his high regard in the eyes of peers and colleagues -- in academia and congregational and organizational life, of the various Jewish denominational streams, from clergy of different religions and nationalities -- Rabbi David Ellenson was unfailingly humble, consistently dignified, and unusually accessible and embracing. We have lost a very great man, who was a very, very good human being. May his memory live as a fountain of blessing, bound up in the ongoing bond of life.

- Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub

I was so saddened to learn about Rabbi Ellenson's passing today. He was a mensch of mensches, a Virginia gentleman, a scholar, a beautiful human with a wise heart, and a kind teacher and role model. On behalf of all his colleagues in the Forman family (my dad, Rabbi Lawrence Forman, my brother, Rabbi Joe Forman, and my sister, Cantor Alisa Forman), I send our deepest condolences at this difficult time. I hope that the goodness of Rabbi Ellenson's life will bring you a measure of consolation and healing comfort. He was a shamash who brought so much light to others. I was honored to know him. May his memory be an abiding blessing.

- Rabbi Sharon Forman '94

I appreciated that Rabbi Ellenson took time out of his summer to teach a class or two for those of us in the Jewish Communal Service program. He was a gifted educator, a true mensch, and will be greatly missed by the HUC community. May his memory be a blessing.

- Michelle Landau Brooks '97

David has literally been a presence in my rabbinate since its inception: I met him when I first started my rabbinic education on the old campus on West 68th Street and he was a more senior student. He was the very model of a Reform rabbi -- a scholar immersed in our tradition but not captive to it, who in his life and career channeled its depth and its beauty and its intellectual and spiritual rigor into a living model for me, and for many others as well.

When I defended my dissertation David was a member of the committee. The conversation was intense, exciting, and animated, but my committee chair, the late Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, was surprisingly hostile and threw me several times with unexpected questions that seemed picky and unfair. When it was all over and YHY had informed me that I passed and brusquely said goodbye, David took me to lunch to calm me down and reassure me that it was, in fact, a good job. He laughed and said that YHY was just behaving badly because he did not know enough about Reform Judaism to discuss it intelligently. We then had a great conversation about the dissertation. He rescued that day for me. And when the dissertation became a book on Solomon Freehof and Reform responsa, he honored me by writing its Foreword.

I extend my heartfelt condolences to my colleague and friend, David's wife Jackie, and to all of David and Jackie's children and grandchildren and extended family. What a gift they were given, and how hard to have it taken away. May the sweetness of memory come to outweigh the pain of loss. זכר צדיק לברכה.

- Rabbi Joan Friedman, Ph.D. '80

I was honored to have had David teach me during the HUC Year in Israel during his Sabbatical in the Winter/Spring of 1998, and then join us again on the Bima 4 years later as we had the honor of being his first ordination class in 2002. Besides what I learned from him in the classroom, I still remember running into him in the Burger King on Ben Yehuda - he had finally caved into his kids requests for American fast food. There wasn't a hint of awkwardness into running into a student "in the wild", but rather a warm initiation for me to join with his family at their table. I never got to interact with him as much as I would have liked to after going to Cincinnati for the remainder of my time at HUC, but I'll never forget the utter warmth he exuded any time I saw him. It will always be one of the greatest privileges of my life, that he is the one who laid his hands on me and declared me to be a Rabbi.

- Rabbi Daniel Plotkin '02

The first time I met David Ellenson, was at the Board of Governors dinner at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati. I had just finished leading the audience in a rousing song of “Home on the Range” in Yiddish and Dr. Ellenson followed up with complimentary remarks. He was kind, gracious and welcoming to me that evening. And gave me my first job in Development at the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion after Ordination.

David had a rare combination of being a savant scholar and simultaneously socially adept in his own self-effacing manner. David was true mensch in every sense of the word. If there truly are Lamed Vavnick's, David was definitely one of them. The light of the world is definitely diminished with his death.

- Rabbi Andrea Cosnowsky '04

My fiancée Regina Lewald was a student of Rabbi Ellenson's at HUC-JIR Los Angeles as she completed her MA in Jewish Education. She asked Rabbi Ellenson to officiate at our wedding and were delighted when he agreed. When I met Rabbi Ellenson for the first time, I felt both his warmth as a rabbinic leader and his strength as a thought leader in Jewish Studies. This was not a duality for Rabbi Ellenson. He lived both sides of his life fully.

Thank you, Rabbi Ellenson, for supporting two aspiring Jewish professionals at the beginning of their personal and professional life.

- Jonathan Fass

Jackie, Hannah, Nomi, Rafi - Thinking of you all and sending so much love in this difficult time. David was such a wonderful leader for our HUC community and also such a remarkable mensch who exuded kindness in his interactions with me. We enjoyed sharing an Alma Mater in W&M, and I was touched to read about the recent naming ceremony honoring him there, and was saddened, especially now, not to be there to celebrate in person. One of my final classes at HUC was co-taught by David and Eugene Borowitz as he was retiring, and I recognized at the time what a gift it was, and how fortunate I was to be in their shared presence. As much as our entire HUC and Reform Jewish community loved him, I know that most importantly, he was yours, and even as we all grieve communally, my heart goes out to you for this tremendous loss. What an honor it was to be part of his life and your lives as well.

Sending love and light,  
Jay Rapoport '14



Though I'm a Conservative Rabbi and member of the Rabbinical Assembly, I had the pleasure of studying with Rabbi Ellenson a number of times under Conservative auspices. What I found particularly interesting was his thorough knowledge and respect for Teshuvot authored by Orthodox rabbis in Israel and his deep appreciation of the broad range of Jewish religious practice and learning. I also had the pleasure of seeing him at Ramot Zion Congregation in French Hill, Jerusalem a few times. He was always an exciting teacher, engaging, caring and thoughtful. I also remember his stories about fundraising for HUC. I learned so much from him. He continues to bless me.... and I know so many, many others.

- Rabbi Richard Hammerman

The sweetest memory I have of Rabbi Ellenson (quite literally) was meeting with him the week of my cantorial ordination.

He welcomed me into his office and together we sat at a small table, upon which lay a golden apple and a plastic knife. He began slicing it with care and precision, offering me bite-sized shards as we spoke. Would that I remembered his words as well as I remember that succulent, gleaming piece of fruit.

May the light of Rabbi David Ellenson's Torah never be extinguished. May his merit shield us.

שְׁלֵא יִכָּבֶה נֵרוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד  
זְכוּתוֹ יִגֵן עֲלֵינוּ

- Cantor Josh Breitzer '11

David was my teacher, mentor, and friend. He taught Modern Jewish Thought my first year at HUC-LA and instead of asking us to repeat the theologies of the scholars we studied, he was the first to ask us to articulate what we believe. He warmly welcomed me and my classmates into his home weekly for pizza and responsa study. He was m'sader kidushin at my wedding, brilliantly able to connect with both my Reform parents and community and my southern Orthodox in-laws. Even though he was important and well-known and had many people to see, he always made the effort to get in touch with me when he was in my city. My heart goes out to Jackie and the rest of the family. One of the Jewish world's great lights has gone out.

- Rabbi Esther Adler '87

I am so so sad to hear this news of David's death. He was such a warm, caring mensch...that is surely the best word to describe the man. A few memories...

1. One day I was walking not too far from David's apartment in NYC, and he was having coffee at an outside spot. He waved me over to come sit and schmooze with him. We didn't know each other well, but his warm personality and genuine interest in getting to become better acquainted allowed us to become better working partners and friends.

2. Throughout my time raising money for 'our commentary', I deeply valued David's support and endorsement. He was our most ardent cheerleader. When it became possible for a donor to underwrite a Hebrew version, David winked at me and said, "this will happen!"

3. David ALWAYS made time for a hug, a personal word, a conversation that reflected genuine interest in each person he was speaking with...he made every person feel important and valued. He role-modeled how to make people feel that they mattered.

David will be dearly missed by so many people well beyond his family. Those who were fortunate enough to walk with him will know they have been touched by a man of integrity and value...a mensch of the ultimate degree.

With deep respect,  
Rosanne Selfon

Dear Jackie and family,

I'm breathless to hear of the passing of David. What a tremendous loss for the world, especially on this first night of Hanukkah. I admired Rabbi Ellenson greatly and loved the opportunity to share a cabin with him during our delegation to Guatemala with Ruth Messinger and friends. He went to sleep reciting t'shuvot and woke reciting responsa. I remember also his teachings on kaddish and why a minyan was necessary and most of all I hold him as one of the most kind, compassionate, real teachers of torah who I've ever met. I admire and respect all that he was able to accomplish with such a soft and caring heart. His legacy and memory is a great blessings.

With love, lots of love to you all.  
L'chaim, to David.

- Rabbi Alyson Solomon

Rabbi David Ellenson z"l was a mensch, beloved scholar/teacher, lover of Jewish music, an esteemed leader/partner to klal Yisrael, and cherished gute neshamah. David's depth of character and humility drew respect and admiration from everyone who was lucky enough to know him. David was such an inspirational teacher. His impromptu preambles during public events were more thoughtful than most people's actual ambles! They spanned seemingly generations of friendships, anecdotes, Talmudic dictums, had a guaranteed shout out to William and Mary and of course his grandmother!

David's immense Jewish wisdom and intense love of Israel, both her land and people, were beautifully sincere. The only devotion which surpassed it all was the pure love he held for his family. In the 22 years I was blessed to know him, my favorite memories were sitting together and talking in my office at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati. The presidential suite is directly adjacent. Every time he came to the campus he would get settled and stop in to catch up. The best, was after his long days of intense meetings he would just come in and talk about life. He shared so many stories about his children, Jackie, and grandchildren. He was proud of all his children equally.

Another popular topic - music. As much as he LOVED contemporary Jewish music - especially his cherished Debbie Friedman, he had great respect for khazzanus.

I loved hearing about his research and what he was working on. The tremendous friendships he had with fellow scholars- such a joy to behold. He took great interest in my work and kept tabs ( in the most supportive way) on the details of the subsequent worship, courses, workshops, programs, and cultural events as they happened.

In those rare moments where I witnessed the slightest consternation on his part, it was in response to true injustices. He was an honorable man.

2 tiny remembrances - Security protocols at HUC changed in response to a shooting at a JCC in California. The Cincinnati Campus went into permanent lock down with all faculty, students, and staff receiving personal key cards. Not long after, David came to Cincinnati for meetings. I saw him from across the campus. Here was this man, a towering figure both literally and figuratively in the Jewish world, crouching by the administrative building. As I got closer I could hear what was happening. He was bent over low, by the new door intercom system, yelling, " Ellenson! ELL-LENSON!!!" A student was walking ahead of me, took out his keycard, and said, "Hello, Rabbi Ellenson" and quickly let him in. The security guard on duty still wasn't taking any chances with this mysterious Ellenson character.

2- A few months ago, I left a message for David on his Brandeis office voicemail. It was over a weekend. I presumed he would return the call sometime during the week or whenever he had a chance in the not too distant future. Much to my shock and amazement, he returned my call within 15 minutes. I was mortified. He was with his grandchildren on a Sunday. I assured him the call could wait. He said, "Yvon, if you're calling, it must be important." That was kind of man David was. His generosity of heart, time, and spirit knew no bounds.

It is fitting his death occurred just before the first night of Chanukah. It's the Shechinah's way of forcing us to bring light into darkness; to see the wonder and complexity in those dancing frames, to cry and laugh in memory, to embrace the fragility and vulnerability as he was so often willing to show.

David, it's time for US to share stories about YOU with tear strewn cheeks. A light may have gone out in Klal Yisrael but the warmth of David's earnestness will shine forth forever through insightful scholarship, precious memory, menchlikeit and endless love. זכר לצדיק

-Cantor Yvon Shore '95, Director of Liturgical Arts and Music

David was a mensch of all menches. In all my interactions with David (and i had many after I moved to NYC in 2011. He always greeted me with a warm smile on his face. Whether participating together on AJC's Committee on Freedom of religion or just running into him at BJ, at the JCC or just walking on the UWS, he was always positive and optimistic about the State of the world (not always easy!). David leaves a huge hole not only in the lives of his family and friends, but in the orbits of the Jewish AND secular worlds as well. May his memory ALWAYS be for a blessing z"l.

With much love and enduring admiration, Nancy Kaufman

Dr. Ellenson was by far my favorite history teacher - ever. He didn't teach about a time in the past. He shared his personal experience with our history as if he walked alongside the people and times that he taught. I always looked forward to his classes and later sought to hear him speak in a variety of settings. I so appreciated that no matter how much time passed over the years, he always made an effort to greet me and ask about my life. He was a very special person, teacher, and leader. I will always keep fond memories of him in my heart.

- Mindy Davids, RJE '90

I overlapped with Hannah at Wellesley for one year, and Rafi and I met when I was an HUC YII student, so David Ellenson's reputation preceded him both professionally and personally for me. I took his class on the historical development on non-Orthodox siddurim mainly because he was teaching it, and I constantly felt grateful to be able to learn from a teacher who was so wise and so kind. Just this fall, I tuned in to a lecture I had no interest in just because he was teaching it. I respected his semi-retirement, and always wished I had gone to rabbinical school a little bit earlier so that I could have had more time with him. He gave so much in his life, but it feels like he's gone too soon.

- Rabbi Chayva Lehrman '22, '23

What an honor it has been to have been a student in what I believed has been each of David's programs at Rodeph Sholom. He was a giant among people, one who will not readily be replaced. More importantly, he was a mensch. He will be sorely missed.

- Jay A Kranis

To the Ellenson family:

As you know, my friendship with David goes back nearly fifty years. He was my student assistant on the Holidays when I was assistant rabbi at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York City. You probably remember the story of the blowing of the shofar which he always delighted in telling (his inability to do so in front of the congregation and my stepping forward to comfort him at that moment).

One of the highlights of my career was the honor of nominating him to the Board of Governors to be the next President of HUC-JIR. When he became President, I was serving as President of the Alumni Council, and on behalf of all of us I presented him with a shofar mounted on a plaque with the words of Pirke Avot 1:1: "Raise up many disciples" - I can think of no rabbi in our time who did that more than David Ellenson. When in his presence, we always wanted to soak up his wisdom, and when we left his presence, we always wanted to model his qualities: his compassion, his humility his warmth and his ability to teach the values of our tradition in a meaningful and positive way.

Several years later, when he was becoming Chancellor of HUC-JIR, I was given the honor by the Women's Rabbinic Network to thank him for his leadership and all that he had done to support the role of women in the Jewish community and bring to the faculty of HUC-JIR distinguished female scholars whose impact has been incalculable. I remember presenting to him at that gathering one of the first Barbie dolls to be wearing a kippah and tefillin.

I was privileged to welcome David to Monmouth Reform Temple many times, not the least of which was as the main speaker at my retirement service. He spoke movingly that night about how welcoming women to the rabbinate changed the Jewish community forever by expanding the word m'dabeir to allow for m'daberet. I am grateful that the recording of his remarks (indeed, the whole service) is now housed at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati.

History will show that David made a real difference in the Reform Jewish community and beyond. May the legacy he leaves behind be a source of blessing to all who knew and loved him. Sending love and hugs to Jackie and all the family.

- Rabbi Sally Priesand '72

I began rabbinical school in 2002, at the height of the second intifada. Many difficult decisions were made, and I was proud to be part of the Year in Israel program class that studied in Jerusalem that year. One of the things that made that year special was the presence of Rabbi David Ellenson who visited us many times, taught us, encouraged us and wept with us. He told us over and over that our mission is to be "Klei Kodesh". For me, that is the most important lesson I carry today as a rabbi. And also for me, Rabbi Ellenson was the highest example of Kli Kodesh, that year and for the years to come meeting him in different places in the world.

Zecher Tzadik Livracha.

- Rabbi Stacey Blank '07, '08

I am very saddened by the passing of my dear friend, mentor, and colleague Rabbi Professor David Ellenson z"l. He was one of the few people that I've ever encountered whose essence effused a seamless combination of the highest forms of friendliness and human generosity, critical intellectual rigor and creativity, and devotion to family, to Torah, to Israel, and to the Jewish people. Experiencing his kindness, and learning from both his personal example and his scholarship were among the greatest privileges of my life. Seemingly miraculously, in the spirit of Hanukkah, he succeeded in doing this while remaining a "hevra man" who could joke, laugh, enjoy a shakshuka, and especially a good schmooze.

There are so many moments that I could share, but sitting here in Baka, Jerusalem right now I gravitate to the sight of the entire Ellenson family gathered together at the bimah of Kol Haneshama for the shaharit service in honor of Rafi's bar-mitzvah. Rafi read the Torah, everyone got an aliyah, David and Jackie were so proud, as were all of Rafi's siblings. What a beautiful family, thank you for sharing your wonderful husband, father, and grandfather with us. I'm sure that you will not be surprised to learn that every time we met for breakfast/coffee/just to chat, whether in Jerusalem, Manhattan or at an academic conference somewhere in the world, that which which came across most prominently was that his kindness and generosity towards other was rooted in the deep sense of love of family that pervaded his being.

May the entire family draw comfort from the love that he inspired, and may his life and ways continue to generate goodness and devotion as we seek to move forward.

ברוך דיין האמת, "קנה לב אהב נפשו שמר תבונה למצא טוב." - יהי זכרו ברוך

- Adam Ferziger

I was privileged to meet David, z"l, during his year's sabbatical in Israel with the family. Our relationship evolved mostly on our round trips to rehearsals of the play "Annie", in which Nomi and I had major roles as Annie and Ms. Hannigan. Our respective families then met and socialized around the shabbat table and in shule. Over the years, as Harvey has written, we kept in touch, sometimes directly and often by following his career and writings. David was the epitome of a mensch, with a great smile, sense of humor and forever acceptance and love of the other. We are so sad that he was taken too soon, and cherish his memory. יהי זכרו ברוך

- Cheryl Meirovich

Cheryl and I were privileged to know David, Jackie, and their young children, when they spent a year in our French Hill, Jerusalem community. Since then, we followed David's stellar career, all the time admiring him as a model of supreme menschlichkeit and passionate defender of religious pluralism. In particular, I hold dear the approbations he gave to my academic research, doing so with pleasure, as he wrote me. David's concern for both Israel's security and for its moral integrity testify to his love affair with the State of Israel and of the Jewish people. I recall a conversation we had on a bus in Jerusalem shortly after he became the head of HUC. He noted that the Board of Governor's called a meeting on the second day of Shavuot, a day regarded as a normal work day in Israel and so acknowledged in the Reform Movement in Israel and in the Diaspora. David replied to the Board's leadership that they, of course, could convene the meeting; however, they should know that he would not be in attendance. The Board changed the meeting date. What a straightforward and elegant way he advocated the centrality of Klal Yisrael. His memory will live on as a blessing.

-Harvey and Cheryl Meirovich

David alav hashalom became friends when we were both in advanced stages of our doctoral studies at Columbia, when we both lived on the Upper West Side, and especially when our daughters went to day care together and we would often meet and talk. (I have a nice photo of the two of us from those years, and if someone sends me an email, I will scan and send it.) We remained friends over the years, although we would meet mostly by chance every few years either in New York or Jerusalem. There is no one I liked and admired more. He was everything people have said about him: an open-minded and devoted scholar, a thinker, a person always working to better his own dalet ammot of the world (his communities, his institutions, his family) and the larger Jewish world and beyond, and above all the very model of a mensch. I appreciated his commitment to Israel and to justice for all. After spending lots of time in Israel and then moving there, the only one of the children I knew (and then in her younger years) is Ruthie. But I know how much he loved and doted on his family. May you all be comforted in your wonderful memories and find strength in your time of grief among family and friends.

- Ed Greenstein, Old friend, Professor Emeritus of Bible, Bar-Ilan University

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-Harvey and Cheryl Meirovich



It is because of David that I am still in the congregational rabbinate. In a moment of deep doubt, his call and encouragement put me back on track to find my way to my forever home serving Beth HaTephila in Asheville. I am forever grateful to him for reminding me who I am. What a gift from someone so dear.

- Rabbi Batsheva Meiri '96

There was no one like David, and I grieve for Jacqui, your children and grandchildren on the loss of such a giant and brilliant and kind and loving man. I've known and loved David since our school days when as a 4th year rabbinic student (he was a recently ordained rabbi) I worked for him as a teacher when he served as Assistant Rabbi at Community Synagogue in Sands Point, New York. We became dear friends that year and I'll never forget the Seder in my apartment when Ruthie was 5 years old and she knew the answers to every question (David told me - the cost of her education was worth it when he realized how much she knew). Our friendship continued on. I invited him in my two congregations in San Francisco (Sherith Israel) and LA (Temple Israel of Hollywood) to be our scholar in-residence. In the first, I was dating my wife Barbara (1981), and she asked him in a quiet conversation what it would be like to be married to a rabbi (me). He told her, "Sometimes you just have to take a leap of faith." Those simple words of advice persuaded her to marry me. At Temple Israel of Hollywood, he was our scholar in-residence at Camp Ramah one year teaching Zionist thought, and his passion in the early 90s persuaded me to become more engaged in Reform Zionist activism because, as he said, our relationship with Israel will not only change us but change Israel. That weekend led to me become many years later as the national chair of ARZA. David gave me the initial utzing that I needed and the intellectual and emotional framing to catapult me into serving American Reform Zionism and the IMPJ. Whenever we met, it was never a matter of the meeting of minds. It was always a meeting of two hearts. I loved him and like to think he loved me too. My wife Barbara loved him. David had an impact on her and me that changed our lives. He probably didn't know it in either case (though I think we may have told him in subsequent years), especially since we saw each other only infrequently, but he meant the world to us both. May you all find comfort amongst each other and all who mourn in Zion and Jerusalem. The world is a far better place because David was in it and worked his heart, mind and soul so exquisitely as a teacher, mentor, leader, and friend to so many. He touched so many of us meaningfully. One can only aspire to do that. - נפלו הגיבורים with abiding love and sympathy.

- Barbara and Rabbi John Rosove '79

I've never known anyone like Rabbi Ellenson before in my whole life, and I know I never will again. His insightful teaching, his extraordinary knowledge, his beautiful disposition.... He led the very secular Jew that I am to a place of incomparably deeper spiritual connection to my heritage, faith, and values. I never took the time to tell him this, to let him know what an impact he had on me. I am one of thousands who utterly adored him. His light will shine forever. His memory will always be a blessing to us all. Thank you, Rabbi Ellenson.

- Dina Pruzansky, JCC's YLJ group member

I knew that David and I were destined to be great partners on the first day we met. He was being considered for the presidency of HUC-JIR and wanted to meet me to talk about fundraising. We discovered that he and Jackie and my husband Marty and I were married on the same day, same year, in the sanctuary at HUC. Our blessed association was beshert and incredibly successful and fulfilling.

David and I traveled together 50% of our time, and raised over \$200 million for the College-Institute. I hope that I helped him with the transformation he envisioned. David was the ultimate mensch with incredible humility. He used to tell people that I taught him everything he knew. Hardly the case. Every time he spoke, no matter where or to whom, he taught me something new.

I will be forever grateful for our friendship and for our wonderful partnership. My warmest condolences to Jackie and the Ellenson clan. I know that the outpouring of love and caring from family, friends and colleagues will comfort you during this very sad time. May his memory be a blessing.

With love,  
Erica Frederick  
Partner, Amplify Partners

Boruch Dayan HaEmet. Those of us who had the honor of being Rabbi Ellenson's students know how his gaze of profound respect and willingness to hear every idea his students shared made a transformative impact on their confidence and commitment to serve the Jewish people. We strive to emulate his dedication to learning because of his example throughout our careers.

To his family I send my sincere condolences. I will treasure and share my memories of him as a blessing.

- Jane West Walsh, MAJE '85

I first met David Ellenson in September of 1972 in Jerusalem. Both of us were among the more than 50 new students in the First-Year-in-Israel Program of HUC-JIR. He was three years older than most of us and, even then, he seemed not only older but wiser. We were divided into different Hebrew classes, and David was among the select few who were in Dalet--the highest level. They were literally above the rest of us, on the top floor of the building and right above my larger class.

Because of his age and knowledge and life-experience, David could have been above us figuratively as well. He could have projected pomposity and conceit based on what he knew, but that wasn't him. He loved his classmates and was always one of the guys as we grew older and went our separate ways. He always spoke with pride and love about the Class of '77 and our individual achievements and accomplishments. He remembered everyone's name and spoke to us warmly whenever he saw us.

For me, it was a privilege to see his love and warmth conveyed to the next generation. My daughter Samantha Tananbaum worked for HUC-JIR in New York, with a close connection to the President's office. She got to see who David was, both in private and public--an awesome, kind mensch.

It is difficult when a classmate dies and a reminder that our journey through life can come to an end at any time, whether it happens suddenly or over a period of time. The news of David's death was shocking and sad. This loss will be felt beyond his classmates, beyond the HUC-JIR community and the Reform movement and Brandeis and the World Union. I want to express my condolences to his family. Something tells me that all of the qualities that David possessed and showed to his classmates were there in abundance for all of them.

Zeicher tzadik livracha. May the memory of this tzadik, our classmate, David Ellenson, always be a blessing.

- Rabbi Stephen Karol '77

I had the pleasure of meeting Rabbi Ellison this summer in Israel and was immediately struck by his warmth and menschlichkeit. I studied things he had written in cantorial school at Hebrew College and was looking forward to learning with him at a scheduled Scholar-in-Residence for April of 2024. His passing is a loss for his family, all who knew him, the Jewish people, and the world at large. May his memory be a blessing and may he rest in peace.

- Cantor Jeri Robins

My fondest memory of Rabbi Ellenson was when he came to teach our Wexner Fellows in Northern California. I was given the honor to pick him up from the airport before an evening study session. Racing from my office to the airport, there was time after the airport pick up to stop by my home to check in on my 3 young children, which Rabbi Ellenson willingly agreed to do with me. I was excited to introduce this esteemed rabbinical presence to my children.

My youngest, Saul was about 5 -6 years old and very soon after I left the Rabbi with him, I heard the sound of a basketball game going on in the backyard between Saul and Rabbi Ellenson!

It was the most heartwarming moment to see Rabbi Ellenson become this totally relatable fun guy as "rabbi" to my son. The impression it left was indelible. Studying with Rabbi Ellenson was also a total gift, his passion for his work often brought tears to his eyes and in the small study sessions we are felt intimately connected to the texts and materials through the enormous opportunity of learning with him.

He will be deeply missed but his impact lives on. May his memory be a blessing.

- Sharon Ufberg, student of Rabbi Ellenson from the Wexner Fellow cohort from Oakland CA

Dear Jackie and family,

How very saddened we are to hear about David. This is, first and foremost, an awful loss for you all - and, in addition, for us as part of the Reform community here in Israel. We got to know you all when our daughter Tami and Hannah were friends at the Frankel School. For us, David was a very sweet and wonderful father of Hannah. As members of Kehillat Mevakshei Derech and through mail from HUC-JIR over the years, we have followed his illustrious career - and we read now about his incredible contribution in all areas, both academic and far beyond. Please know that our hearts are with you all. Our granddaughter (Tami's daughter) now wears the shirt that you gave Tami in honor of My Fair Lady. We have remembered that connection with you all over these many years. May you find solace in the blessings that David, in his wisdom and menschlichkeit, has brought to us all.

With heartfelt condolences, Gail and Jeremy Cohen

Yesterday morning, I gasped, shaking with shock when I heard the devastating news that we had lost David. My heart breaks for dear Jackie, their kids, and grandkids. And for the Jewish people and the world who truly lost a great light, just before Chanukah. My heart is breaking and my tears streaming as I grieve the loss of a teacher, friend, and mentor whom I loved so dearly and to whom I am eternally grateful for shaping me, my rabbinate, how I understand Jews in the modern world, the history of Jewish liturgy, progressive Jewish day schooling, and so much more. David's brilliance, deep wisdom and profound ability to produce new understandings by linking worlds separated by time and space, combined with and in part made possible by his encyclopedic knowledge, were matched only by his kindness.

Like so many others, my life was shaped and informed by getting to study and learn with David. As a rabbinical and education student and later professor of Jewish education at the college, my almost two decades in Los Angeles largely overlapped with the time that David and his equally extraordinary wife Jackie, and their family were living there.

But it has been several years since I connected with him. And from the moment I learned he is no longer with us, I now find myself going back over articles and chapters he wrote –yearning to hear his voice once more, and probably because I am trying to say goodbye.

In reflecting on his work and so many interactions that are rushing back to me, I am struck by how consistently and inimitably he avoided succumbing to any binary thinking. Whether in his writing, or sitting in his classes, in being with him in faculty meetings, sermon discussions, or around his Shabbos dinner table, David's voice was invariably the one capable of holding and delivering multiple truths, in ways that people could hear it and really take it in, which made it all the more remarkable. David was able to see all sides of any issue not only with his unmatched mind, but b'chol lev. He embodied chazal's insight that the heart is the seat of wisdom. I always emerged from being in David's presence for the better: I had learned, I had understood something clearer or anew, I had been challenged, stretched, and always, always with love. So much love.

Something I deeply respected and appreciated about David was his willingness to cry. I can imagine he might have said it wasn't a choice, that his tears would just come during public lectures, seminars, ordination addresses and benedictions. But the way he held himself during every moment of being momentarily seized by the beauty of his own boundless empathy and humanity, was in and of itself a life lesson. One of the greatest gifts I received from David in my life is that he made tears into a human strength.

I remember David once comparing Maimonides' yearning to be free of his corporeal limitations to the sculpture of Rodin's Thinker – reflection upon reflection, thought reflecting upon thought infinitely. I think of that longing of Rambam's every time I see The Thinker, and then I think of David and I know, "No, there's more."

David, my dear teacher, mentor, and friend, through your life, your teaching, the relationships you built with *elef alfei alafim*, you modeled what it is to be a full human being, combining one's body, heart, soul, and mind. May we all continue to be beacons of such integration. In such a dark time of the most painful binary thinking, disconnection, detachment, and dis-integration, may we continue to strive for the ideal of wholeness – *shalom*, *shelemut* and *ribui shalom* - that David was, is, and always will be.

David was like no one else. My heart is with you and your family, Jackie. May you be surrounded by love and support now and always. I miss him so much it hurts and scares me. I don't want to live in a world without David.

Y'hi zichro baruch.

All my love,

Rabbi Tali Zerkowicz, Ph.D. '00, '02

A brief visit from Rabbi Ellenson made a world of difference. Rabbi Ellenson came to Houston's Congregation Beth Yeshurun as a weekend scholar-in-residence. His scholarship and menschlichkeit qualities shined through. While his stay was brief, his example of cross-denominational Jewish interest and commitment remain. May his memory be for a blessing.

- Bernice Heilbrunn, Houston Congregation Member

We are having trouble absorbing the fact that you are no longer with us. We have known you since our daughters were in grade school together at Pressman Academy. You were a pillar of our community; your brilliance outshone only by your humility. Even for those of us not part of your daily life, you left a lasting impact. After having the privilege to learn with you at the many shiurim or lectures you graciously participated in at Temple Beth Am, I used to tell anyone who would listen that even if you were reading a phone book (not that you ever read from any notes when you spoke), they should attend because they would surely walk away enriched. I also recall that when I coached Nomi and Talia's 4th grade basketball team, as a rookie coach, I was enthusiastic but nervous. You were there with your warm smile and words of encouragement (and we won the Championship that year!). We have missed you since you, Jackie, and the family left our kahal, but you have remained ingrained in our hearts, then and now.

As your neshama soars, we embrace Jackie, Ruthi, Micah, Hannah, Nomi, Rafi, and all of your beloved family. We hope they find comfort and support surrounded by the many who love them and you.  
Your memory is a blessing to us all.

Much Love,  
Vivian and Ron Alberts

David got his MA at the University of Virginia in 1972, when I was Acting Assistant Professor there. Whenever I was privileged to hear him in public he recalled his time and the tremendous influence my late wife, Jean, and I had on him. The myriad tributes are very much deserved. An extraordinary mensch!

- Rabbi Alan Lettovsky

Dear Ellenson Family,

On behalf of Mishkan Congregation in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I extend my deepest condolences to you on the passing of Rabbi David Ellenson Z"L. His remarkable legacy and influential leadership within Reform Judaism will forever be remembered and cherished.

He was not only an esteemed teacher but also a guiding light for many within the rabbinical community. His dedication to spreading knowledge, fostering understanding, and nurturing future generations of rabbis has left an indelible mark on countless lives. I am a grateful disciple of his disciples.

Please accept our heartfelt condolences. Hamakom ienachem etchem betoch shear aveley Tzion virushalayim.

Rabbi Diego Elman

So much has been said - and will be said - about David's contributions to Reform Judaism and the great Jewish world and community, that it seems difficult to add anything. Thus, what I will add is this: he was above and beyond all things a Mensch. When you spoke with him, he listened - you had his full attention. He was able to look at an issue from all sides. He was not afraid to expose his concerns and vulnerabilities in heart-to-heart conversations. He was a friend and a role model to all of us who had the great pleasure of knowing him.

The world will miss this giant of a man. His memory will always be a blessing.

- Cantor Kay Greenwald '92

Although my personal contact with Rabbi Ellenson was limited, I remember each and every encounter because of his warmth and kindness. He was truly "great" on every level, and his impact on HUC and Reform Judaism strengthened them both immeasurably. I send my most sincere condolences to his loving family. In the smallest of ways but with the deepest of appreciation, I share, as countless people do, your loss. Ha Makom Yinachem.

- Rabbi Lenore Bohm '82

Abraham Jonathan Heschel captured the essence of the impact of teachers when he said, "What we need, more than anything else, isn't textbooks but rather text people. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that students read – the text that they'll never forget."

It is David's voice, menschleite, humor and love of Judaism that will remain an enduring text for me. I am thankful for the classroom learning in Los Angeles, the conversations in the CL in New York, and the chats inside of David and Jackie's apartment as well as on the streets of New York City over the past three decades.

In addition to Jackie and their family, David's death is also a loss to the Jewish People - his wisdom, brilliance and passion for Judaism will never be forgotten. Jackie, Ruthie and Lorne, Micah and Sara, Hannah and Becca, Nomi and Spencer, Rafi and Lily, Rose, Shai and Yonah, thank you for sharing David with all of us.

May David's memory be a blessing. z'l

- Rabbi Joui Hessel, RJE '99, '01

We are forever grateful that we had the chance to know Rabbi David Ellenson. He was the definition of a great man - kind, loving, brilliant, scholarly, warm, funny, sensitive, philanthropic, emotional and understanding. We were fortunate enough to study with him for the past 10 years at the JCC in Manhattan in our Year of Living Jewishly study group. Every gathering and opportunity to learn from David, was a gift. Every session was sprinkled with education and exchange of personal stories. His smile, laughter and sometimes heartfelt tears were contagious. He was a human teddy bear to all of us - with a brilliance and compassionate soul all wrapped up in one. It was hard to hold back the desire to hug him at every get together. He was our revered father, teacher, rabbi and friend. The universe has lost a huge legend and we will forever be thankful he crossed our paths in such a deep way. Rabbi David Ellenson, may your memory be a blessing.

- Ayala and Ken Usdin

David blessed us with his life, and his legacy lives on to inspire our ongoing study and teaching. His academic brilliance was exceeded by his menschlekeit and outreach to everyone. We send love to Jackie and the family.

- Rabbi Paul Citrin '73



Among my many memories of the Council of American Jewish Museums (CAJM) meetings, the keynote presentation given by Rabbi Ellenson at the wonderful old temple in Cleveland was certainly among the very best. He talked about the meaning of the word “museum” and the value of what we do to create spaces in which people absorb learning. He valued our research and design, our dedication to these important institutions in society. I was so taken with his words and his manner of speaking that I could barely take notes. Indeed, his words were notes in a symphony of brilliance. He truly understood what museums were all about. I think the membership of CAJM was dumbstruck.

After that closing session, I was very fortunate to share a cab with him to the Cleveland airport. The conversation continued and I was in awe of this scholar mensch. A few weeks later, I wrote him at HUC to ask for a copy of his presentation. He said he didn't have anything, that the whole presentation was off the cuff with a few words he had jotted down on a scrap of paper. Indeed, brilliant.

Over the years, I would see him at HUC, as live across the street and would go to t'fila and programs. Whenever we saw each other, I would thank him again for that amazing speech in Cleveland and other times I heard him speak. I true teacher, absolutely eloquent, and kind man. I, too, shall miss him.

- Jill Vexler

To David's family,

I am deeply saddened by David's passing. We are friends from graduate school at Columbia Univ. as well as the NY Havura. Although I haven't seen David for some time, I always felt that we remained close. He was a superb scholar of German Jewry and the dilemmas they confronted as a result of emancipation. Above all, he was, as you know, the warmest, kindest, most generous person. As I emailed Ruthie, he was just the best.

Please accept my deepest sympathies for your loss. David will be deeply missed, but both through his scholarship, his numerous friendships, and your family, his legacy will carry on. I'm sorry I will miss the funeral, but I will watch the livestream.

With warm wishes, Vicki Caron, Cornell University

Our hearts goes out to the Ellenson Family during this difficult time. May David's memory be a blessing onto us all. Sending all our love.

- Noah & Jorie Schaefer

What a loss for the entire Jewish world... and especially for HUC, Reform Judaism and the Ellenson family. My thoughts are with you,

I studied with David in Los Angeles. His Modern Jewish Thought class was one of my favourite classes of all time. I have taught many classes based on the final paper we had to write, in which David asked us to synthesize our own approach to Judaism and Jewish Thought. It was truly a formative course for me. I transferred to NY, (we had no choice back in those days), and David remained (remains to this day) one of my favourite professors.

David was truly one of the g'dolei hador. May his memory live on as a blessing.

- Rabbi Ellen Greenspan, RJE '85,'86

Feeling held in the grief of so many, time standing still in the flow of memories, wishing for one more conversation with David, to feel like the only person he was aware of in that moment. Such in-person encounters were too few and far between in recent years, though a warm bond remained for more than fifty years. David and I interviewed at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College on the same day, probably in the winter of 1971/72. Another interviewee that day was Jack Staub, who would become a leader in the Reconstructionist movement, drove us to the airport. David and I sat with beer and imagined our futures in the rabbinate. We next encountered each other with delight on the first day of the first year of rabbinical school at HUC-JIR in Jerusalem. Holding David's first born that year was the first time as a young adult that I held a baby. Touched by David's gentleness all along the way, he approached all in the way of awe felt in holding a little baby, so gentle. In rabbinical school, for all of his own accomplishments and promise, he delighted in praise given to others, once kvelling for me in reading the praise written on one of my papers by a hard to please professor, standing there and reading the comments over and over and laughing with delight, adding his praise. I still keep a letter from David tucked into a bound copy of my rabbinic thesis, his own offer of praise and insight showing how carefully he had read another's work, even with all of his own pressure after he had become a professor at HUC-JIR in Los Angeles. Of compassion held in simple presence, a moment long remembered beyond the words spoken, David came to sit with my then wife and I when her father died, sitting on the grass in the yard, so caring and present. Never one to take himself or even beloved institutions too seriously, he could find humor in political tensions that might have divided others. To see the good and hold people together came as naturally to him as the warmth of his smile and his self-deprecating laugh that set people at ease. So may his loving and ebullient soul help us now from the world beyond to ease the pain felt for his loss and help us in his way of embracing each one to bring wholeness and make peace in this world.

Zecher Tzadik Liv'racha; Avigdor, Rabbi Victor Hillel Reinstein '78, Boston

I became president of CRS in 2010 and had the privilege of getting to know both Rabbis Ellensons better at that time. There were many times I would have the honor of speaking from the bimah and would look out and see R. Ellenson in the congregation. He was always so supportive of my spiritual and professional Jewish journey and I will be forever grateful.

When I first introduced my two sons, who were 7 and 5 in 2010 to David, my older one asked "where is he a rabbi"? Since it was clear he did not occupy the bimah at CRS. So I explained that he was the head of HUC, the special school that trained all of our rabbis. To which Simon so very wisely stated "oh, so he is the Yoda of rabbis." And he was. We will all be forever grateful to have had his light shine on us for even just a moment in time. May his memory forever be a blessing.

Sending you all love, strength and comfort.

- Karen Berman, Friend, admirer, former President, Congregation Rodeph Sholom

David was such an important figure in my development as a rabbi. He was an inspiring teacher during my years studying at HUC in LA, during which I would always enjoy seeing him as well at the Library Minyan and being warmly welcomed by him and Jackie into their home. I was so thrilled when he became president of HUC -- what a wonderful choice by the College and how marvelous that he was willing to lend his considerable leadership skills and his energy to the institution he loved. I just studied with him at Hartman this past summer; he was as always gracious, warm, funny, and generous. I always felt he "knew" me and was speaking just to me. This is such a terrible loss. He modelled for me what it meant to be a serious progressive Jew and rabbi. He walked the walk. My heart goes out to Jackie and the whole mishpacha. He will be dearly missed.

יהי זכרו ברוך.

- Rabbi Asher/Ed Elkin '90

David was one of the finest people I've ever known— a brilliant teacher and a deeply caring human being. He was there for me many times throughout my rabbinical education and career, and for each encounter, for each moment with him, I am so grateful. The world has lost a tzaddik, and we are all grieving and offering our love and support to you, his family.

- Rabbi David Vaisberg '10, '12

I send my deepest condolences to the entire Ellenson family upon the death of your beloved David. Thank you for sharing him with me and with the world.

I shared this message with Temple Beth Shalom on Shabbat Chanukah.

This teaching is dedicated in loving memory to my teacher, Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson, z"l.

For the musical fans among us, this week's Torah portion provides much of the content for the first act of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. Joseph is the favored son of Jacob, so much more so than his brothers that Jacob gives Joseph a multicolored tunic. Joseph, in addition to favoritism from his father, also boasts about dreams of his own superiority over his brothers. Jacob, hearing Joseph's dream, even chastises him for boasting.

Then, a few verses later, there is a peculiar encounter. The Torah says Jacob's sons are at work pasturing the flock near Shechem. Jacob sends Joseph to them from the valley of Hebron towards Shechem. As Joseph reaches Shechem he comes upon an ish, a man, who says his brothers have moved on from the location for another.

Who is this unnamed man and where did he come from?

Our commentators have lots of ideas. Rashi (11th century French commentator) says this was the angel Gabriel. Ibn Ezra (12th century Spanish commentator) notes that it was a passerby on the road, a seemingly random person. Ramban (13th century Spanish commentator) has a longer explanation. He says that God "sent him a guide without his knowledge in order to bring him [Joseph] into their [the brothers'] hands. It is this that our Rabbis intended when they said that these men were angels, for these events did not occur without purpose," (Ramban commentary on Gen. 37:15).

This is one of those instances in Torah where we do not know the true answer. All of the possibilities presented by the classical commentators and our own interpretations are plausible.

I think that Ramban is onto something though. The people that we meet, who direct us along life's path, can be like angels. They can assist us in getting back on track, opening up our eyes to something we could not see, or illuminating an idea, giving us guidance.

The person who assists Joseph has no name. They are a mystery.

Can you identify a person in your own life who gave you direction when you needed it? One person who gave me direction, even blessing, died yesterday. Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson was one of the greatest, if not the greatest, scholars of his generation. His prolific writings on Judaism in the modern world, rabbinic scholarship of the 19th century, and philosophy and theology was unparalleled. Rabbi Ellenson, a scholar-in-residence for Temple Beth Shalom a few years ago, headed Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. He gave me the blessing of smicha, rabbinic ordination. And most importantly he was one of the most genuine, generous, and kind people I ever had the privilege to know. Even as I mourn the loss of my teacher, I also acknowledge with profound gratitude the blessing of having him in my life. That he pointed me in the right direction. Rabbi Ellenson's memory will forever be a blessing.

If you have the opportunity this Shabbat of Chanukah, let those who gave you direction know. Send them a text. Write them a letter. Give them a call.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Urim Sameach, Happy Chanukah,  
Rabbi Ellie Steinman, RJE '08, '12

Dear Jackie and family,  
My deepest condolences on the loss of your husband/father/grandfather. David was a mensch among menschen. I will miss his kind eyes and smile as well as his wisdom and love of Judaism. He was always so welcoming at Rosh Hashanah lunch. It is a true loss for the Friedman and Gotlieb families. May David's memory be for a blessing. Fondest regards, Shellie Friedman

I miss David already. My condolences go to Jackie and the entire Ellenson family. With David's vast contributions to HUC-JIR and the Jewish world, he shared his time with the family. We are appreciative and indebted to David and the family. The many thousands who loved him, learned from him and considered a good friend are grieving. You can imagine what David would say if he could say about what we are thinking and doing. So we honor him as best we can with the parts of him that he shared with all of us. May David's memory be a blessing.

- Alan Warshaw

It is with great sadness that we remember David Ellenson. We met and became friends with David in the late 70s, when he joined the HUC-LA faculty. Frida was working on her dissertation at USC and serving as the interim director of the Louchheim School. Roy had been the director of USC's neighboring Hillel a few years earlier. We join the choir of David's colleagues and friends in attesting to his brilliance as a scholar and teacher, his warmth and collegiality, and his amazing menschlichkeit. I (Frida) have never forgotten his generous support and encouragement of my academic work as I completed my Ph.D. and entered the academy.

We last saw David in Jerusalem in 2010 during Shabbat services at HUC. We had not seen one another for a very long time. Seated across the congregation, we recognized him immediately--he pretty much looked like the David we had always known. It took him a while longer to identify us; unsurprisingly, this was followed by his public, very warm acknowledgment of our friendship and common intellectual interests.

We will miss him, and so will the Jewish world, to which he contributed so much.

We send our heartfelt condolences to Jackie, to their children and grandchildren, and to his many colleagues and friends. May his memory be a blessing for everyone who loved him.

- Frida and Rabbi Roy Furman '71

David was a scholar, a humanitarian, and a mensch. He was also a great leader. I worked with him on the Board of Governors of HUC for ten years and now more than even can appreciate his skill and tenacity in managing HUC through difficult times preparing to institution to face the future. David became President of HUC twice, both in some times of turmoil. The first when he replaced his predecessor who was forced to resign, and the second time to replace his successor who had died suddenly. In each case he provided crucial leadership to the College. In the middle of his first term, he faced a further great challenge, the 2008 financial crisis. The crisis immediately wiped out almost 20% of HUC's unrestricted resources as the URJ suddenly and without consultation slashed congregational dues. The crisis also wiped out almost as quickly 40% of the institution's endowment. David was a steadying force. He worked to realize the value of two large assets of the institution, a task that was the correct one but was not widely accepted at the time. He also embarked on a fundraising effort that rebuilt HUC's resources. HUC is in a strong position today to face the future because of the resources that David worked so hard and so well to develop. His impact on HUC and the Jewish world will live on as his legacy.

- Mark Biderman, Governor Emeritus

My deepest condolences to the entire family on this tragic loss. I will always remember David as one of the most inspiring and compassionate human beings I have ever met. Since his death, my mind just keeps repeating one overriding thought about him. David was one of the very few people I met who saw each and every person he encountered as being "B'tzelem Elohim". May we all spend the rest of our lives trying to learn from all that he was.

While the Jewish community has suffered a great loss, you, his family have suffered a tragedy. I pray that God be by your side as you heal.

- Cantor Debra Stein '86

I was profoundly lucky to have been a student in a small dissertation seminar taught by Rabbi Ellenson at the University of Chicago. Having inhaled his scholarship I was anticipating meeting a rock star in Chicago and was not disappointed. As others have said, after this seminar I did not just feel that I had obtained an academic mentor but I had gained a friendship for life. I was shattered to hear of David's passing. There are no words to express this enormous loss.

- Tracy Sivitz

Dear Ellenson Family,

I am writing to convey my condolences on David's sudden passing. Even over these first few days, in observing the outpouring of sparkling tribute messages from luminaries across the Jewish world, I'm feeling a sense of good fortune to have even crossed paths with him in life.

I came to meet David when I was working on the summer staff at OSRUI and Rafi was my camper. Having your family join us at camp for Shabbat left a lasting impression that I still carry with me. While I never had the privilege of studying with him or engaging with him deeply, I still learned about him what we all knew - that no one, truly no one, could match his capacity for love and care while still embodying transformational leadership and vision.

My own career later led me to Hillel and now to USC, where David made his home for such a substantial portion of his career. While many years have passed, his impact here is still felt deeply in the strength both of the Los Angeles campus of HUC-JIR and in the USC Louchheim school, each of which I work with regularly. To paraphrase G-d's words to Moshe in Exodus about the nature of G-d's presence, we may no longer see David's face, with all of the compassion and devotion it often transmitted, but his "achorai" - the translation of his presence in the world - lingers with us always.

May David's memory continually bless us, and may you find comfort among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Sincerely,  
Dave Cohn '17

I'm so shock to hear my beloved Ribi dr David Ellenson pass away  
My condolences to all his family his wife and children's  
I rede it on Jewish Jornal and immediately  
Call to my cousin Doughter Kimberly to confirm it with me so I can see the funeral  
online or Vidio from Kimberly Ellenson I love all Jimi and Rechel children  
Thanks to Kimberly for updating me  
Shabbat Shalom

- Manny Ozri

Dear Rabbi Jacqueline Koch Ellenson and Family of Rabbi David Ellenson,

Our hearts are all with you upon the passing the beloved Rabbi Ellenson.

I could go on forever about how much I respected him, admired him and looked up to him, how I adored Rabbi Ellenson, even loved him. But I will tell one story that captures why. This story doesn't even reference his incredible scholarship and riveting speaking. It's about his sweet, sweet neshama.

During our first or second year back in LA after our year in Israel program, we were blessed with Rabbi Ellenson as our Professor. I had noticed that it had occurred a number of times that someone in the class would ask a question and Rabbi Ellenson was so surprised that he would stand up and write on the board "Judaism 101" and then explained what seemed to him a very basic concept. While this hadn't happened to me personally, I wondered, rather innocently, if these moments could be avoided in the future. So one day I raised my hand and asked, "Rabbi Ellenson, I've noticed that there are times when we let you down for our lack of knowledge. Can you recommend any books that would help us better prepare?" He didn't answer and class ended shortly thereafter.

The weekend passed before our next class. He started the class in tears. He said that he has been tormented since our last class and was terribly ashamed because he realized he had embarrassed his students for their lack of knowledge and this was a great transgression. He said that he had such a rich Jewish background that he couldn't understand why there was so much we didn't know but that it wasn't our fault. He begged the forgiveness of the entire class and by the end of the class we were all in tears.

The humility that he modeled, genuine kindness and empathy, the suffering he expressed from having inadvertently hurt students, was so unusual. From our point of view, as we loved him so, he hadn't done anything wrong nor had he caused hurt. But what he demonstrated that day informed my rabbinate and my life. I don't think I'm alone at all in saying that David Ellenson is a North star on how to be a mensch.

Zichrono Livracha,  
Rabbi Karen Bender '94

David was someone who lit up a room without trying - just by being himself. He was kind and generous of thought . He was the embodiment of a Reform and liberal Judaism - I feel honored to have known him and send deep condolences to Jackie and to the entire family.

- Jo-Ann Mort



Almost 21 years ago, my family and I came back to Israel from a long “shlichut” (emissary) in the States. This shlichut led me to pursue rabbinical studies at Hebrew Union College (HUC-JIR).

I dreamed of doing community work. I wanted a combination of an intellectual challenge and intense interpersonal relationships within the framework of progressive Judaism.

You know what they say – be careful what you wish for!

From many perspectives I have achieved that dream – in no small part thanks to the spiritual teacher, the Renaissance man, the intellectual, the “\_mensch\_”, outstanding rabbi of his generation – my teacher, my rabbi and my friend – the late Rabbi Professor David Ellenson z”l – who passed away yesterday in the States.

Last summer I studied at the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem as part of a seminar for rabbis from all over the world. I chose Rabbi Ellenson’s elective courses. He always came up with something new and innovative; he always had a human, intelligent and grounded way of studying and teaching the issues.

After finishing my classes with him, I asked him for his blessing. I wanted him to place his hands on me once again – as he did when I stood under a tallit as he ordained me as a rabbi in 2007.

And he did so - with a smile, with kindness, with joy and with love.

For a moment I was once again his student and he my teacher – the one who believes in me as he sends me off into the field of action.

The closeness of his arms gave me strength.

We spoke about the possibility that I would write his biography in Hebrew. I was very eager to start the project, but he - in his modest way and in eloquent Hebrew (and complete with a “Davidian” hand gesture) said: "We will still have a lot of time for that..."

In these difficult days and hours, I need every drop of inspiration I can find for my religious and community work. Rabbi David gave me that.

The sensitive Rabbi David Ellenson always knew how to say a kind word, ask an appropriate question, listen attentively, and give me the feeling of being a special person.

An outstanding rabbi has left us suddenly - left us to face the challenges of life without him.

I will miss him – as will so many of his friends, colleagues and students.

תהא נשמתו צרורה בצרור החיים

- Rabbi Nir Barkin '07

Dear Ellenson Family,

I was deeply saddened to learn this sudden news. It was only in recent years that I met David and encountered his work. Each time we interacted his generosity of spirit, intellectual curiosity, humility and commitment to the Jewish people was easily discernable. Let me add my voice to those who will forever be touched by his leadership, his scholarship and his commitment to "derech erez" and of setting such a high personal example.

My your family never know such pain, and there is no doubt his memory will forever be for a blessing, for the lives he touched and for his innumerable acts of righteousness.

With respect,  
Scott Lasensky

Words of comfort

At a time of pain, may there be comfort.

At a time of sorrow, may there be solace.

At a time of grief, may there be joy.

At a time of silence, may there be words.

When you seek peace in silence,  
may these words stir you to calm.

Written after the death of my mother

by Rabbi Michael Signer

1/30/96

I'd like to think that David and Michael will once again be having their never ending discussions (academic and otherwise) over French Fries, Diet Coke and black coffee!

David will be greatly missed but we are fortunate to have so many good memories of our times together. Much love Jackie to you and the family. You are in my thoughts and I will be in touch soon.

- Betty Signer

I first met R' Ellenson when I was in high school, managing the Shabbat daycare for the Library Minyan at Temple Beth Am in CA. I had the opportunity to study with him one on one when I took an independent study course with him as my advisor in my senior year at UCLA. We explored the competing approaches of various Jewish thinkers on the Messianic era and Olam Haba, and the breadth of his knowledge and openness to questions and exploration (given my orthodox education background) was refreshing and memorable. When I made Aliyah the following year I didn't expect to run into him again, so imagine my surprise when, just as I was struggling with a difficult thesis I was trying to present in a Jewish Law paper I was writing, I bumped into him in the plaza of Hebrew University. And of course, as I described what I was up to and told him about my project, he told me about an obscure ת"ש that was the missing piece I needed for my paper. In the back of my mind I think I always assumed I would bump into him again the next time I had an odd halachik or existential challenge, and I am saddened by the thought that that can't happen now. His generosity and kindness made an outsized impact on me, and I can only assume countless others. His memory will, with certainty, be a blessing to all who knew him. Baruch Dayan Emet.

- Michal Rogson

Our whole family is so saddened to hear of David's passing. We have such fond memories of spending weekends with you both at Brenda and Burt's house in Bridgehampton. David always made time to talk to us and get know us all, even going so far as to write a college recommendation letter for one of our children. He will live on in our hearts, our thoughts and our memories, forever with a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face. May his memory ever be for blessing.

Sending you love,  
Melinda & Steve Lehman

My deepest condolences to family and friends of David Ellenson, and may his memory be a blessing. His presence in my life was a blessing and I will be forever grateful to him for helping me create and sustain my Jewish identity. I took Jewish studies courses with him while I was an undergrad at UCLA, and he taught with such sincere enthusiasm and kindness. He was generous with his students and inspired us with a rich and substantive depth of knowledge. He has had an impact on me as a teacher as well. He would stay after class just to chat and answer every question, and he helped me see education as a lifetime journey. His smile remains in my heart.

- Lauri Mattenson, UCLA

David was on my doctoral committee at HUC LA and showed the greatest kindness, generosity but also insight and focus on my work. He unfailingly gave me positive support and provided rich and deep material for me to explore and interpret. As a faculty member at HUC LA in the 1980s, he was the mensch of all the faculty and working alongside Jacquie allowed me to know the family well and appreciate how special they all were.

We were all delighted when David accepted the position as President of HUC and attended WUPJ events in Europe and Israel in that capacity. We always felt he was 'our teacher' and proud of all his achievements for the College-Institute, for European Reform Judaism, for his scholarship and his bridging of Reform and Traditional Judaism.

It is my zecut to now be the rabbinic advisor for David's son Rafi at Hebrew College. Rafi is physically and dispositionally similar to David and sometime I feel I am in some sort of time shift as student Rafi says things that Rabbi David would have said.

I listened into his webinar just a couple of weeks ago on 'milchamah mitzvah'. His voice, resonant and Southern, gave a clear sense of moral direction for us all to hear. His loss to all of us is significant at such an early time in his retirement. We have lost a real 'chaver' and 'rav' and "the Crown has been lost from our head"

- Rabbi Dr. Michael Shire '83, '96

On more than one occasion, Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson called me "my rabbi" and it remains the highest compliment of my career. That he could detect Torah in my voice, amidst all the voices of wisdom he knew by heart, was a breathtaking endorsement. When he called me "rabbi," in my very first year at Rodeph Sholom, I started to believe it - I was becoming a rabbi. David was a shamash in every way - his light couldn't help but kindle others' lights. I will cherish the flame he shared with me, with Reform Judaism, and with Am Yisrael. Rabbi Jackie, Ruthie, Rabbi Micah, Hannah, Nomi, Raphael, and all your spouses and children, I am so sorry for this enormous loss, and so grateful that you shared your husband, father and grandpa with us. Thank you. May David's legacy kindle blessing for all who mourn, miss, and remember him.

- Rabbi Juliana Karol '18

There are no words, no platitudes, that can aptly convey the deep, kind, generous, soul of Rabbi David Ellenson zt"l, nor the profundity of this loss ... for his family, for his friends, for his students, and for all whose lives were touched by his neshama. He of course would deny it but he was a true tzadik, a righteous person, and everyone who knew him will confirm that. As was said at his funeral today, I'd like to join the chorus of those nominating him to be a -l'nick.

The following are some words I've written over the past few days in a small attempt to honour our dear teacher.

"Rav Ellenson" I'd say, and without fail, in his distinct, warm, voice he'd reply: "you know, you CAN call me David." But there's a reason I couldn't call him David. In the eulogy he gave for Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, zt"l Rabbi Ellenson said something along the lines of: no matter how many times he said call me Eugene, I could never call him Eugene. He was Rabbi Borowitz, he was my teacher, and I needed to give him that kavod (respect) which he deserved. One afternoon at Brandeis, we were meeting after a class and once again he said "you know you really can call me David" and so, I paused and thought... I need explain this and remind him of his own words; however, this time they were applied to him. He wasn't so keen to accept this. But I exclaimed, I need to follow the torah you taught! you're my teacher and it's impossible to not show you that kavod... I'm always learning from you. (not only through his remarkably engaging teaching and lecturing, but through the way he graced this earth each and every day). So... of course, humble as he was, he acquiesced. He was such a kind, such a generous soul.

Rabbi was only one of the many hats he wore though...he was abba to my friends, grandfather, husband, friend, and so much more. he was SO much to so many. how lucky we were to know him.

It's not an overstatement to say that Rabbi Ellenson changed the trajectory of my life... It had been a challenging first year of cantorial school in Israel... I took a pause from school, but frankly, I'd almost dropped out. However, Rabbi Ellenson listened to my tzuris, so patiently and so generously, and he convinced me "come visit HUC in NY, give it another shot, it's different...you'll love it!" and so off to NYC I went, and then of course, off to French Roast (one of his commissaries).

This coffee (featuring diet coke for him, of course) and short visit to HUC is the reason I returned to HUC. Rabbi Ellenson is the person who got through to my stubborn and struggling heart. It is because of him that I was ordained as a cantor last may. I thank God for his kind persistence, his thoughtful guidance, his seeing the potential and hope I'd lost sight of, and so much more.

There's never a fitting time for someone to depart the physical realm, but if there were a time for a tzadik such as Rabbi Ellenson, during Kislev and the day before Hannukah, would be the time. Right after such a bright light was extinguished from our world (physically, not in spirit... his spirit's light remains forever) after so much darkness and grief, we needed the light of our hannukah candles more than ever.... and I'd like to think he knew of this tiny nechemta.

Wednesday morning, when the news was shared, I sat beside the windowsill— shocked, tears just endlessly cascading down my cheeks. And then, there were flurries, it began to snow. It seemed as if it was the world's way of weeping, just as he so often, and so unabashedly, did. Only Rabbi David Ellenson could cause the world to weep so beautifully.

Dearest, sweet, brilliant, loving, teacher... rest easy.

May you have unending diet coke to drink, a plethora of responsa and other rabbinic literature to study, and the abundance of love and care that you gave to so many to envelop you in olam haba.

- Cantor Emma Maier '23

It is with deep sadness and with enormous appreciation for the remarkable scholar, teacher and friend-to-all, that I am brave enough to share this space with so many distinguished scholars and Rabbis. I cannot remember when I first met Rabbi Ellenson. The reason I cannot remember is not because it was 20-25 years ago, but because from the first moment we met, he treated me like a dear friend. I cherished every opportunity to meet with him, learn from him, hear him speak and most of all, feel the genuine love that came from the best hugs. We cannot underestimate the enormity of his contributions to the Reform movement as well as to the larger Jewish community. Nor can we overlook the enormity of his gifts to us all-- he was so genuinely sweet, kind, generous and thoughtful with his whole heart.

May his memory be for a blessing. May the beautiful memories of moments shared bring peace and comfort to his beautiful family and to all who had the honor and privilege of knowing his love.

B'Shalom,  
Lauren Racoosin  
Past President Washington Hebrew Congregation, Alumni URJ NAB, Alumni  
Wexner Heritage Program

It is with deep sadness and with enormous appreciation for the remarkable scholar, teacher and friend-to-all, that I am brave enough to share this space with so many distinguished scholars and Rabbis. I cannot remember when I first met Rabbi Ellenson. The reason I cannot remember is not because it was 20-25 years ago, but because from the first moment we met, he treated me like a dear friend. I cherished every opportunity to meet with him, learn from him, hear him speak and most of all, feel the genuine love that came from the best hugs. We cannot underestimate the enormity of his contributions to the Reform movement as well as to the larger Jewish community. Nor can we overlook the enormity of his gifts to us all-- he was so genuinely sweet, kind, generous and thoughtful with his whole heart.

May his memory be for a blessing. May the beautiful memories of moments shared bring peace and comfort to his beautiful family and to all who had the honor and privilege of knowing his love.

B'Shalom,  
Lauren Racoosin  
Past President Washington Hebrew Congregation, Alumni URJ NAB, Alumni  
Wexner Heritage Program

Words are so inadequate in an aching time like this. The only words available to me are that it is an honor to have known David. It is an honor to be part of this People Israel, a term David referred to when he accepted the Presidency of HUC-JIR, because David was and will always be a most prominent and distinguished part of this People Israel.

- Howard Soloway

Abba, you welcomed me, into your home, into your life and into your world. I spent so many wonderful days with you and Ima on the UWS and Atlantic Beach. It was my absolutely honor to tour you around Jamaica and show you where Nomi and I call home and especially where we will be having our chuppah ceremony in January 2024 (aptly named Good Hope) and I know you will be there with us, It is evident (as it was before your passing) that you love with your whole heart, that you care deeply and show just how kind and generous humans can be to one another. You will always stand out as a shining beacon for how to be a mensch.

- Spencer May

Rabbi Ellenson was one of my favorite professors when I was in graduate school studying Jewish Communal Service/Social Work at HUC-JIR/USC Los Angeles. With his soft-spoken southern drawl, he was incredibly kind, warm, and made you feel important and special. He had a way of making you feel like whatever you said was absolutely worthy of his time, attention, and interest.

Something that always comes to mind when I think of him, was the very extraordinary way he'd put up his sleeves! I would sit in his class, listening to his lectures (which were really more like discussions) while staring at those cuffs. Somehow, he perfectly folded his cuffs up, going toward the inside rather than the outside as most do. The fold was precise, immaculate, and even. He will always hold a special place in my heart, as he introduced me to my favorite book, As a Driven Leaf by Milton Steinberg.

I was so lucky to know and learn from him. He will be greatly missed. May his memory be for a blessing.

-Lisa (Freed) Cohen, MAJCS/MSW '97

Dear Ellenson Family,

I cannot begin to tell you how much David meant to me and my family, too. He was my ideal of what an HUC President ought to be. He was my leader, my rabbi, my colleague, my friend, my kindred spirit. Above all he was a consummate mensch. I loved talking to him. I so enjoyed working for him and was so grateful that he took such interest in my work, sending me emails and letters in response to my books, articles, and short stories, too! I believed in David's vision and trusted his judgment. I loved watching him tear up whenever he spoke to us, as I knew his tears were genuine expressions of his love for Judaism, Israel, family, and all of us. I felt privileged to co-teach a course with him on Portraits of the Modern Rabbi: what an honor to spend those weeks with David, when he was still President, planning the course and then teaching together! When I myself became a rabbi in 2020, he wrote me the sweetest congratulatory note. I loved that we shared the experience of coming from the Orthodox world to HUC. Two years ago, I had the privilege of hosting him in my Hebrew literature course, where, in response to an American Hebrew story about a Jewish kid's experience of racism and segregation in the American South, he gave an engaging lecture about his own experience growing up in Newport News. There were so many occasions when I consulted him about my work and his, when he shared articles with me that he had written, including last year, when in the aftermath of an HUC Yom Iyyun I organized about reproductive rights, he asked to read what I had written for the program and sent me a related article that he wrote. I was delighted when David joined the Agnon reading group that Bill Cutter organized, because it meant that I could keep learning from him.

This past summer, I was in Germany and visited the Hildesheimer Seminary, and the first thing I did when we got there was take a picture of the place and send it to David. This Fall, upon being selected as the Faculty Governor, I had long conversations with David about various heady issues, and felt so strengthened in my convictions because David agreed and had my back. I am grateful to God to have known him and so terribly sad that he is gone. No one else can compare with him.

When I shared the sad news with my kids my daughter Shara immediately reminded me of the fact that when she had surgery as a little girl, David sent her a box of Graeter's ice cream as a get-well gift. That was David's sweetness.

Yesterday, Joe Skloot and I sat shmirah for him, and recited one Mizmor LeDavid, after another. So many of the verses we recited fit our David so perfectly. But that only made us miss him more.

Sending love and strength and hopes for nichumim from me and my entire family.

- Rabbi Wendy Zierler, Ph.D., Sigmund Falk Professor of Modern Jewish Literature and Feminist Studies



Jackie, Ruth, Micah, Hannah, Nomi, and Rafi,

We are heartbroken to hear about David z"l. It is rare to meet a person who changes your life in so many ways and at such different times. David was a true Tzadik. Ron met David when Ron was a teacher and David was a father at the Institute for Jewish Education on 3rd St. Ron loved working with Micah and Gina loved both David and Micah. Later we both were inspired and in awe of David as our teacher and academic advisor at HUC. He was brilliant, a genius, kind, and our role model. He taught us about Reform Judaism within a context of history which has been our guide to understanding our rich history and the meaning of historical events throughout our lives. He moved us so much that we asked him to officiate at our wedding in Seattle in 1986 which we remember as one of the holiest experiences of our lives. Spending the year in Israel with David and your whole family made the year so special. Following David's role leading HUC and the Reform movement around the world was astonishing, gave us great pride, and we could see how he was making a difference in our world. There are no words to say how much he will be missed but to know that his life brought great meaning in a way that will continue to make a difference for the ages. He will always have a place in our hearts. Sending our love to you and your precious family. May his memory wrap around you and your loved ones like a warm blanket and be a blessing during this shiva –and through our journey in time.

Love Sheva Locke '85, Ron Astor '85, Maya, Roe and Shachar

Like so many others I am devastated by the news of the sudden death of my dear friend and colleague, Rabbi David Ellenson. I first met David when he came to serve on the faculty of HUC-JIR in Los Angeles. I can't recall when it was that David came to San Bernardino (where our congregation was located for over a century) to speak to a Sunday morning adult class. He was profound, scholarly yet down to earth. Over the years he came out a few more times and then in 2017, after he had retired as president of HUCJIR, he came to deliver the Inaugural Lecture of the Rabbi Hillel Cohn Endowed Lecture on the Contemporary Jewish Experience that had been established in my honor. Among other things we shared an interest in German Jewry and I was able to share with him a number of books that my father (ז"ר) had brought to the US when we came here from Germany as refugees from Nazism. It was good to spend time with David over the years at NAORRR conventions. We had a number of memorable dinners together at those conventions. There are really no words to adequately describe the greatness of David Ellenson. Just as his life was an extraordinary source of blessing, so will his memory be a blessing. May comfort come to Jacqui and his entire family.

- Rabbi Hillel Cohn '63

I have no photos of myself and David Ellenson, even though we had countless encounters and great moments, as he had with countless thousands of his ardent admirers.

My favorite memory was when Jonathan Lubarsky Singer and I had been ordained. We were attending our third or fourth CCAR conference as brand spanking new rabbis. We had met David while in rabbinical school but he didn't really know us. We went to a local restaurant near the hotel to grab breakfast and it was filled with rabbis. David saw us, came up to the two of us and warmly engaged us in conversation. I expected this to last under a minute as everyone in the restaurant wanted to connect with David. But he stayed in conversation with us for a long time, really taking the time to get to know us on a deeper level and letting us get to know him with our questions. There was not a minute of that conversation where his body language suggested that he needed to "get to the next conversation."

For the entire remainder of my rabbinate, I was influenced by that encounter with David about what it means to give someone your full attention, and how not to spend all your time talking to the biggest names in the room, but to talk to and to learn from everyone.

David was a mensch, a scholar, a teacher, a friend, a gem par excellence. His shining light will always guide us, but I will miss the physical David dearly. Zichrono l'vracha.

- Rabbi Beth Singer '89

I met David ז"ל in Los Angeles in 1983 as a student at the Jewish Communal / Social Work Joint Masters degree at HUC. Immediately I became enchanted by his knowledge in Judaism and his humanistic values applied on his teaching and life. Met him again in 2010 in Jerusalem when he was president of HUC and he gave me the Doctor of Jewish Communal Service honoris causa after 25 years of community service in Israel. It was a great honor for me to meet him again and receiving his blessing. I am deeply sorrow for his surprising deceased.

יהיה זכרו ברוך

- Javier Simonovich, Zefat Academic College

To the Ellenson Family,

I am, on behalf of the Rabbanim, leaders and members of the United Kingdom Reform Movement, writing to express our most sincere condolences to the members of the Ellenson family and as we say here across the Pond we wish you all 'Long Life'.

As the Director of Synagogue Support for the Movement I had the opportunity of attending nine UAH/URJ biennials between 1997 and 2013. I remember very clearly an early morning breakfast session that Rabbi Ellenson addressed where he talked about the development of Minhag America and where David showed examples of the development of the Union Prayer Book. As the honorary archivist and historian of the Reform Movement this was of particular interest to me and David spoke with enthusiasm and great panache on the subject. At another biennial he was joined on the podium by other scholars of the liturgy and again he spoke with great erudition on the subject of liturgy. It was a privilege and honour to attend such events and to be in the presence of one so learned in his subject.

I hope that it is of some small comfort to you all that his name is very well remembered on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed at our Shabbat morning service yesterday our Rabbi, Miriam Berger spoke in very glowing and expansive terms of David's contribution to the American Reform Movement.

May David's name be for a blessing.

- David Jacobs,  
Former Director of Synagogue Support for the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain

Condolences to the Ellenson family from one of his countless students and admirers. It was an honor to learn from him in the classroom in Los Angeles and then as part of his administration in Cincinnati.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

- Rabbi David Komerofsky '99

Rabbi David Ellenson was a beloved and much anticipated teacher, speaker and scholar. We greatly enjoyed listening to and learning with him. And his dear wife Rabbi Jackie is a precious jewel and perfect partner for Rabbi David in every way. Our condolences to Jackie and her beautiful family.

- Elizabeth and Mickey Levy

I was very sad to hear that David Ellenson passed away. He was the cousin of my wife, Carol (nee Rosenthal), which means I have known him for a good 55+ years. My wife and I have lived in Tel-Aviv for over half a century and used to see him on many of his frequent professional visits to Israel. There was one event which sticks in my mind, from perhaps 15-20 years ago, which reflects both his loyalty to Israel as well as his readiness to criticize the state when the state's representatives did not meet his high moral standards. I admired these qualities in David since I personally have had difficulty over the years in accepting Israel's behavior towards non-ultra-orthodox Jews. He once came to Israel to present a very large donation to several Israeli institutions, in a ceremony involving one of the current chief rabbis of the state. The rabbi made clear that his participation on the stage with David was dependent on David being introduced as a professor but not as a rabbi, since in the eyes of the Israeli chief rabbi, only an orthodox Jewish male could be a rabbi. When David was informed of this condition, he declared that he would not deliver the donation and would return to New York immediately. The state rabbi relented under pressure, and the donation was conveyed to its intended recipients. Nowadays especially David's common sense and high moral standards are sorely lacking in the world.

- Paul Wexner, Tel Aviv University

Rabbi David Ellenson was a "Gadol Hador," and also a "Lamad Vavnik." We join with the family to mourn the passing of a gentle, kind, learned, and beloved husband, father and leader of our Reform Jewish family. He leaves this world a better place and his legacy lives on through thousands upon thousands. Yehi zachro baruch. May you be comforted together with all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

- Lori and Rabbi Joshua Plaut '86

There are brilliant scholars in the world, and there are incredibly kind and compassionate people as well. But it is astonishingly rare to have both of those dispositions bound up in the same soul. Yet that was Rabbi Ellenson, as anyone who knew him will affirm.

Read in full at <https://www.atreewithroots.org/blog/rabbi-david-ellenson->

- Rabbi Neil Gold '97

My condolences to the entire Ellenson Family on such a sudden and tragic loss. The comments about David are 100% consistent. He was a mensch x 120. His kindness, intelligence, genuine concern for colleagues and Judaism, his love of family all wove the fabric of his neshamah. He was a great teacher, not only of texts, but of life. He taught rabbis that 'emotions' are a good thing--and that it's ok to cry in public--a hard and needed lesson for rabbis to hold precious. David qualifies as one of the righteous 36 and our world is diminished by his passing. And Aaron Pankin z'l, just gained a beloved colleague for God's heavenly yeishiva. David will always be a blessing and his legacy will influence generations yet unborn.

- Rabbi Deborah Hirsch '82, '97

Dear Jackie,

I can't even begin to imagine your loss. Although it's been so many years, I can vividly remember staying at your home in LA as Elizabeth and I were interviewing at HUC, and how gracious and warm you both were. David was a role model and I so appreciated his support through the years, and his readiness always to find time for a meal or a chat when our paths crossed in NY or in Jerusalem. He was always so ready to share his scholarship, his wisdom, and his affection.

I hope you find some consolation in all of the love and embrace of your family and community near and far.

Sending care, and strength.

המקום ינחם

- Rabbi Tamar Malino '01

It's funny that while I spent so many hours in the classroom with David, all of the memories that run to the front of my mind right now have nothing to do with his formal teaching. His greatest lesson was in how he lived his life, kindness, curiosity, joy. I remember how he giggled when he told us the story of how when Rafi was a toddler and he pointed to a Diet Coke and said "Abba! Abba!" Every time I hear a soft southern drawl I remember David saying that a southern accent immediately knocks 10 IQ points off how someone perceives you, and I remind myself not to judge.. But most of all I remember the smile and the twinkle in his eyes whenever he greeted someone, and how he made every person feel special. He was someone who made me so proud to be able to say that he was my teacher, my rabbi.

- Rabbi Mona Alfi '98

At the age of 18, I was living life to its fullest, hopping from Latin club to club, spending summers in France and Spain, and enjoying the freedom of living completely carefree with my only worry being when my next pair of Brazilian jeans would arrive from Rio. Moreover, as one of three Jewish girls in my sorority, Judaism was as far from my consciousness as the future ramifications of student loan debt. The world was my oyster (not kosher, I know, but I didn't care at the time) and nothing would rattle my plans of future greatness as a professor of French existentialist literature. However, this all changed the minute I walked into Professor Ellenson's class. Moreover, what I thought I would audit for an easy "A" to fulfill a tedious history requirement turned out to be lifechanging in the best of ways. I was transfixed by his profound analysis, eloquence and ability to discuss the complex challenges that the modern State of Israel faces; I was like a deer in the headlights of his grandeur.

Read in full at <https://jewishjournal.com/judaism/obituaries/366310/a-light-to-illuminate-the-darkness-a-personal-reflection-on-the-legacy-of-rabbi-david-ellenson-zl/>

- Lisa Ansell, Lecturer of Hebrew Language and Hebrew Learning Coordinator

With profound sadness, I learned of the death of my beloved teacher and colleague, Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson. I never passed up an opportunity to study with David, and each session he led was both highly informative and genuinely inspiring. When I was asked who I wished to be the guest speaker at the Shabbat marking my retirement in 2012, without hesitation I requested David. After speaking words of praise about my rabbinate, David invited both Robin and me to step before the Ark where he offered the most beautiful blessing to us both. Truly, he WAS a BLESSING in our lives and in the lives of his many students. His name will always be sweet on our lips. I pray comfort for his dear Jackie and the entire Ellenson Family.

- Rabbi Stephen Einstein '71, '95

We remember David when he came to visit his dear friend, Bob Levine, in Danbury, when he installed our daughter-in-law Yael at Holy Blossom and when he and Jackie joined us at services at BJ with our daughter Felicia. Through all those years and occasional meetings, he was so warm, so present. and such a mensch. It was a privilege to know him. May his memory be for a blessing.

- Roberta and Rich Sol

Dearest Jackie,

David Leichman and I extend our heartfelt condolences to you and your family. David's death leaves us all in deep mourning, and we send a hug of love and support to you in this very sad and trying time. We will miss David very much. He truly made each of us feel special and loved, and we now turn that love to you.

I have always found comfort in the psalm designated for Hanukah, Mizmor 30, particularly verse 6:

בערב ילין בכי ולבוקר רינה

The night can be very long, and seemingly endless, but the path of mourning leads us eventually back to joy and song, choosing life.

With love and blessings, Rabbi Miri Gold '98, '08 and David Leichman, Kibbutz Gezer, Israel

Dear David,

I met you at a Kalah in Beloit Wisconsin. With my friends Joan pines and Bonnie Denmark Friedman and Judy Gordon. z'l. I have been and groupie of your since that very day. You studs with in front of the ark in the chapel in Cincinnati when you inducted me into the board.

I will always remember your smile and your kindness.

May your memory be a blessing.

Love,

Ann Wenger

I did not know Rabbi Ellenson personally, but whenever we passed at HUC we smiled and said hello. I always felt his warmth. I took his class, Religion and State: America and Israel. ecause of the pandemic the class was online. I kept the text. So very sorry he died.

- Janet Dash, Central Synagogue Member

In memory of Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson: with gratitude for his brilliance, his teaching, his laughter, his tears, his respect, his sincerity, and most of all, for his friendship. זכר צדיק לברכה

- Rabbi Linda Henry Goodman '85, '99

From the time that we first met David at the Library Minyan in 1978, he has been a shining light and a probing mind for both of us. For Elliot, David has also been a teaching and writing partner as well as a warm, good friend. I was delighted to contribute to the Festschrift in David's honor, and he then contributed to the Festschrift in my honor, both of which are just symbols of the deep affection we had for each other. A brilliant mind and a clear, articulate writer, David was also a master teacher and, much to his surprise but not to mine, a consummate administrator and fund raiser as well. More than that, he was a mensch of the first order, whose genuine warmth extended to everyone he met. He was a real gift to us all, and thank you, Jackie and his family, for sharing him with us.

We want to confirm what several people said during the funeral: David was among the 36ers whose menschlichkeit sustain the world. We will all miss him terribly.

Hamakom yenahem etkhem b'tokh sha'ar aveilei Tziyyon v'Yerushalayim.

Warmly,

Marlynn and Elliot Dorff

Library Minyan at Temple Beth Am; American Jewish University

Words are difficult as my heart is so heavy. As I watched David's funeral from California, I realized that I've been so privileged to know so great a man as David-who taught me in the HUC Communal Service and impacted my understanding of Reform Judaism like no other, who welcomed me and my whole class, into his home with his lovely wife, and made me believe I was important, that I could make a difference in the world. He was my example-that we each could have an impact, even if a small one, on some individual, some group, some organization, and that impact could be as simple as a smile, or a touch or as big as a reorganization of a program or even greater. There were no limits with David. The only notes that I saved from my HUC days 40 years ago were from David's class!!! Not that he ever used notes himself. But I never wanted to miss anything. Everything David said gave me something to think about. Years after being his student and seeing David at Jewish functions, he always treated Jason and I as if we were his best friends. Boy, he must've had thousands of best friends. David will surely be missed but never ever forgotten. He has left a legacy of love and knowledge, of strength and kindness.

Love to you Jackie. With love and grief,

Lindy Passer '85 and Rabbi Jason Gwasdoff '87



Dear Jackie and Family,

Ein Melim. There are no words that can properly describe the immense feeling of loss and sadness caused by the passing of David, z"l. He was a true mensch - in every sense of the word. My life is richer for having known him. I will always remember his warmth, kindness and genuine concern - especially when he visited my classmates and me in Jerusalem - many times - during the height of the 2nd Intifada. His words conveyed how much he cared for us and supported us - and his tears echoed his sentiments. I am grateful that David ordained me; the picture of him with his hands on my shoulders proudly hangs in my study. May you and your family find a measure of comfort by the outpouring of love for you, and David. HaMakom Yi'nachem.

With love,  
Rabbi Beth Jacowitz Chottiner '07, '12

I was so very stunned to learn of David's death. Much has been said, and will continue to be said, about his scholarship, his genuine concern for his students and colleagues, and for his ever present menshlichkeit. Of many encounters with David, two significant memories come to mind.

One was at HUC in LA when David was applying to be a professor there. I was one of the students interviewing him for the position. While we were quickly and easily impressed with his intellectual capabilities, what leapt out at us was his sincere concern for us as members of the HUC community. In a sense, he was interviewing US, with palpable compassion.

Several years later, I brought David to my synagogue in Long Beach as a scholar-in-residence. Over Shabbat dinner, he mentioned that he was applying for the presidency of HUC. Knowing how much he loved being close to his students, I thought he was joking. But he was completely serious. I asked him if he was worried about perhaps losing touch with students by being in such an administrative and fundraising role. He said, with complete candor, that he hoped he would be in a better position to ensure that the College-Institute responded to the human needs the students. And as president, that is precisely what he did.

- Rabbi Howard Laibson, RJE '81

We took Rabbi David's class at Ramah family camp and listened to his soft voice wishing his father could see him as a Rabbi teaching. Rabbi Ellenson didn't agree with all the Orthodox ways but believed in laws and Israel. Little did he know that he would make major changes so Torah/traditions became relevant to all Jews without belittling them for not having background or believes. Only Rabbi Jackie knew the sounds better us in the Wizen bldg. I'm sure his family will be at a loss for a long time with a hole in their hearts.

xxoo Bluma and Edward Felix and family  
Ramah family camp and Guests in their Jerusalem home many years ago.

I was one of David's first graduate students at HUC LA in 1979 and have remained his student ever since. As a Ph.D. student at Claremont Graduate School, I was able to take a full quarter of my coursework at HUC. Once I found David, I never wanted to stop studying with him. I took all four of his seminars, but it was his course on Modern Jewish Thought that electrified me. David didn't just open a window; he unlatched the observatory dome and revealed the vast richness of Jewish thought. What had been a sliver became an expanse, filled with creative possibility. And then David gave me a second gift. He made me feel that I had something to contribute to this expanse. At a time when I most needed to believe this to be true, David affirmed that it was so. In big, enthusiastic check marks in the margins of course papers, in personal notes of support and letters of recommendation, he welcomed me—and thousands of others--as friend and colleague.

Not only did David's encouragement sustain me early in my career but the model of his intellectual openness shaped my work. He encouraged my enthusiasm for process thought and its value for Jewish theology. It wasn't his approach, but he saw it as a creative possibility and that made it deserving of serious consideration. This encouragement came from his own profound scholarly understanding that the vitality of Judaism depends on receptivity to new ideas in dialogue with tradition.

David wore his brilliance lightly, but I believe he truly was a tzaddik. He embraced the world, past and present. He poured his love into our lives. I am deeply sad that David is no longer physically present, but I am deeply grateful that he remains very much a part of my life.

- Sandra Lubarsky

I cannot possibly express the depth of impact that David had on me. Besides the copious notes I took in his classes which I regularly consult, most recently this year on Hermann Cohen and Martin Buber for learning with my Chevruta, David wrote me a letter of recommendation that landed me in HUC based on my studying with him at UCLA in the late-eighties/early nineties. Over lunch twenty-five years ago, his insistence that one can learn from every person, even those whom others found distasteful, became embedded deep within my psyche because of his Menschlikeit. There's so many little vignettes of my time with this גדול הדור from his Los Angeles years that keep flooding my mind during these very hard, sad days; his warmth was healing and inspiring. I care a thousand times more about S.R. Hirsch and Hildesheimer and others because of David. I loved this teacher, scholar, mensch, and cannot stop the tears from flowing. I will never be the same, and he has left before his time. There will never be a time for him to go. We need him. ל, זצ"ל He truly was--is, in my heart and in the hearts of so many of his students and admirers--a Tzadik, a LamedVavnik, a Mensch. במקום שאין אנשים השתדל להיות הרב צבי דוב בן שמואל וטובה.

- Rabbi Jonathan Klein, '97

Dearest Ellenson family,

As so many have shared, the world and our community weep with grief over the loss of our beloved, beautiful rabbi. When I look at the photo of the day that David ordained me a rabbi, I look terrified. And yet, David met me in that moment with compassion, kindness, and confidence--placing trust in me to build my own path in the rabbinate and the world. That was just one single instant in the myriad ways he impacted others with love and care. As we light candles for the first night of Chanukkah, we will seek ways to bring light to this world, as he did. We are forever grateful.

Sending deep care in this impossible time. May his memory always be for blessing.

-Rabbi Rachel Van Thyn (RVT) '13

Audrey and I extend our most heartfelt condolences to the entire family. David's loss will be profound, most of all, for you, but for all who knew him as well. His spirit, intellect, neshama and smile permeated spaces, both great and small. We were privileged to have known him and pray that today's pain will quickly turn into those special memories that enrich us.

- Jeffrey Solomon

I can say without a doubt that Rabbi David Ellenson was one of the kindest people I have ever met. He was the definition of a mensch, with a heart of gold. He touched countless lives, and while I didn't know him as long or as well as many others, he definitely made a lasting impact on me.

Rabbi Ellenson was a classmate of my dad's, and I met him when my dad got his DD. When I started working in the Jewish world, we crossed paths every once in a while. But, it wasn't until he took over as Interim President at HUC-JIR that I really got to know him. That was an incredibly difficult time for the HUC community, and David helped us through like no one else could, even as he was dealing with his own immense grief.

It was my great joy to honor Rabbi Ellenson when I worked on the PR team during that time. He was the focus of HUC's Day of Giving in 2019, and it should come as no surprise that we raised almost twice the original goal. Part of the campaign was collecting tributes to Rabbi Ellenson, and I'm so glad I got to share with him even a fraction of what he meant to his students, colleagues, friends and community.

May his memory be a blessing, just like his life was to all who knew him.

- Samantha (Karol) Tananbaum

I grew up with David in Newport News, Virginia and enjoyed his friendship throughout our years there as well as our years at William and Mary. We went to services together at Adath Jeshurun where his family was well known and respected. David was (as mentioned many times at the service today) a friend to everyone and liked by everyone. I don't think any of us realized how bright and talented he really was. We just knew what a nice person he was. And he never forgot his roots in this small, southern town.

Many years later I was delighted to meet his daughter, Ruthie, at a book festival in Charlottesville, Virginia. She was just as warm, friendly, and delightful as her father. I didn't know the other members of his family but I followed David throughout his illustrious career. And throughout this career he remained humble, kind, and gracious. He will be greatly missed by all and may his memory be for a blessing.

- Ronni (Green) Cristol

Dear Jackie and Ellenson Family,

I'm still trying to understand that our beloved David is no longer in this world. I hope you will understand and appreciate that his was "our David" to so many of us. The loss those of us in his circle of friends and colleagues feel is so profound, I can't begin to imagine the depth of your pain.

David gave so much to all who knew him. He was the definition of relational Judaism. I know he truly saw the face of G-D in everyone he encountered. His heart was so bursting with love for all of us, maybe that's why it just couldn't last longer.

Jackie, I've always admired you, but never more than yesterday. How wonderful that you were able to speak so eloquently about your beloved David. It meant so much to all of us to hear from you.

The Jewish world has lost a giant and HUC has lost its heart. David inspired me in so many ways and taught me so much. I will cherish his memory always.

I hope you find comfort in each other and in all of us who loved him and love your whole family. May you all find strength.

- Marcie Zelikow

Jackie,

Beyond his immense academic and leadership contributions, I will remember David as personifying "menschlichkeit" and sacredness during our personal and professional encounters.

For example, after not having contact with David for a couple of years, I asked him to give me some feedback on a draft article I had written. He responded immediately, indicating that he would review it and included a warm update regarding retirement - especially grandparenting and spending time at the beach house. A few days later, he emailed me useful comments reflecting the attention he gave my request.

Rita and I hope the many expressions of sadness and concern for you and your family, together with your memories of David, are providing you and your loved ones with a measure of comfort.

Warmly,  
Rabbi Paul Menitoff 70

Dear Jackie and family,

I wanted to share a story with all of you from when I was working at HUC in the office of College/Public Relations. I had just come back from maternity leave with my second child and was feeling guilty about leaving my infant son with a babysitter. David told me that when he was a baby, his own Mother was told by her friends to hire a nanny so that she could participate fully in the voluntary social services charitable work that women at the time were heavily involved in. It was exactly the right story I needed to hear at the time, and it was an example of what a kind and caring man he was . We have fond memories of spending time at the Library Minyan at the JCC with all of you when you lived in Los Angeles, and send our condolences at such a sad time.

May God console you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

- Michelle Wolf '85

I grew up in Newport News and I was a boyhood friend of David's brother Jimmy. David took me to my first football game when he was a student at William and Mary. I have followed his work over the years. What an impressive human being. Sending love to the family.

- Mark Gordon

David Ellenson was a positive support for my rabbinic life in the American Jewish community. He knew so much and he graciously shared his knowledge and its context with all of us. His seminar at any rabbinic gathering was always my first choice. He was younger than I, but I always treated him as a wise elder. Indeed, he was a wise sage of our contemporary Reform Jewish experience. He encouraged my aspirations to be understanding, enthusiastic, appreciative, kind and empathic by his deep display of those values in his life as lived. We shall greatly miss him and his influence on the course of Jewish life and thought. He was a shining star for our liberal world!

Rabbi Jerry Goldstein '63

Dear Jackie, Ruth, Micah, Nomi, Hannah and Rafi,

Such a precious person, your husband and father was, whose impact on this world will continue to shine, including through each of you. We are sending you massive hugs!

Sally Klein-Katz, RJE '86 and Rabbi Michael Klein-Katz '77

In 1984 and 1985, I came from Paris, France to the Summer Certificate Program in Jewish Communal Studies at the Los Angeles campus. At that time I had the honor to study with David. He and his dear friend, Michael Signer, taught a memorable course together on Jewish Practice and Tradition. Subsequently, over the years, I remained in touch with him and we met up again on one of my visits to the States when I attended a lecture given by him on the NY campus. He was an exceptional teacher, a mentor, and a friend. May his memory be a blessing.

- Gaby Taub '85

Hello Rabbi Jackie,

This is Brenda Bodenheimer Zlatin. You may remember me from my years working as a consultant to the Hadassah Foundation when Linda Altshuler was the director and you were the Chair. I got to know David when I joined the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation, where the Blaustein Scholars program at the Pardes Institute was part of my portfolio. David was the first Blaustein Scholar and I had a few conversations with him, seeking advice regarding the continuation of the program. I remember him as so kind and gracious to me as I was taking my first steps in a program area that I really didn't know. He was so generous with his time and wisdom. I have heard many accolades about his skills as a mentor and that is exactly what I experienced. I'm sure that you will receive many tributes like these from people who interacted with David only briefly, and now I have added mine to the pile. I hope and pray that your good memories will comfort you and that you will be able to nurture yourself and your family during this difficult time.

Warmly, Brenda Zlatin

How sad I was to learn of Rabbi Ellenson's death. My best memories academic memories from my year in Israel in 97-98 was of David's class on Reform Judaism, the history of change and our prayerbooks, Minhag America; it was transformative. It also happens that my mother, who with my father was on sabbatical that summer, sat in on a few classes with me and also said it was some of the best learning (she is the mother of a cantor and rabbi, a son in law rabbi and now a grandchild almost a rabbi). She told me how she loved those few sessions with David.

Though he was in LA the rest of my years in school, he was always so lovely and generous when he saw me, asking after me and the family, and I only ever thought of him with a big smile and a warmth that filled my heart and soul.

My heart breaks for you, Jackie, and your children and grandchildren. It is no consolation, but David's teachings, his smile, his laugh, and his loving tears will stay with me always, and will continue to be a part of my teaching and my life until the end of my days.

- Cantor Rosalie Will '01

Dear Jackie and family,

I am so sad about David. He was such a sweet bear of a man. I feel grateful our families came together at a time of health and abundance. I pray you are comforted among the mourners of Zion.

With love,  
Etja (Evelyn) Ruth (Stettin)

I was able to be in the warmth of Rabbi David's smile only a handful of times. What I remember most was how lovingly he spoke of Hannah and Becca and how much joy he got from playing with Shai when he was a baby. May the whole family, and the whole community be surrounded by care and comfort during this time. So much love.

- Zvi Bellin



A message from Chancellor Shuly Rubin Schwartz to the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) Community:

Like so many in the community, I am heartbroken to learn of the death of Rabbi David Ellenson (z"l). Rabbi Ellenson served as president and Chancellor Emeritus of Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. He had the special ability to be both a profound scholar and an exceptional institutional leader. Internationally recognized for his scholarly work in the areas of Jewish religious thought, ethics, and modern Jewish history, he was also known for his devotion to sustaining HUC-JIR's excellence.

JTS was honored to work closely with Rabbi Ellenson throughout the years. Three successive JTS chancellors were blessed to call him both a colleague and a friend. I knew him as a true "Ohev Yisrael" and a staunch adherent of religious pluralism who believed in the power of each variety of Judaism to bring more people closer to God, Torah, and the people Israel. With his prodigious intellect, incisive thinking, and, most of all, his love for the Jewish people in all its variety, he inspired all those he encountered.

As so many can attest, he was a marvelous human being, a trusted friend, and a wise counselor. I personally grew from every conversation I had with him, whether about our shared interests in 19th-century Wissenschaft scholarship, American Judaism, the future of American Jewry, or the unique challenges of institutional leadership. Chancellor Emeritus Eisen, who worked closely with Rabbi Ellenson, recalled that "David Ellenson was one of the wisest, kindest and most loving human beings I have known. It was a great privilege to be his friend—a privilege shared by so many in the Jewish world—and a special pleasure to have his companionship as I led JTS at the same time as he led HUC. There are not enough candles on all our hanukiyot to make up for the light that has just left our world. Truly a man whose memory, like his life, is for blessing."

"I am deeply saddened by President Ellenson's sudden death," said Chancellor Emeritus Schorsch who also knew Rabbi Ellenson well. "I mourn along with the multitudes that he touched. He was a dear friend, an outstanding leader, and a tireless scholar."

Rabbi Ellenson received an honorary doctorate from JTS in 2014, a day that now holds added meaning in our community.

As he did in every conversation we had over the last 17 years, David asked me about my children—who refer to him as “Uncle David.” My kids became particularly close with David when he lived with us for part of every week for three years during his tenure as a professor and director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies of Brandeis University. For my children, the highlight of the week were their breakfasts with our beloved house guest. Knowing that as twins Ma’ayan and Aviv craved individual time and attention, he would take each of them separately to In a Pickle, their (and his) favorite local diner for pancakes or waffles, topped with whipped cream and chocolate sauce, reminding them that they also needed to add some fresh fruit to their orders (!). Every week, the twins would negotiate who would go to breakfast with Uncle David on Tuesday and who on Wednesday.

Read in full at [www.jewishboston.com/read/saying-goodbye-to-a-beloved-mentor-family-member](http://www.jewishboston.com/read/saying-goodbye-to-a-beloved-mentor-family-member)

- Rabbi Or Rose

We have lost a shining light of the Jewish people. A prolific teacher, thought leader, mentor, friend, colleague and exemplary mensch. May his memory be forever a blessing and source of inspiration. May the Ellenson family find comfort in the many tributes and may they know no more sorrow. Baruch Dayan HaEmet!

- Ed Finkel

Dear Jackie and all the Ellenson Family,

Heidi and I are so saddened by David's loss. He was such an important mentor, teacher, and friend to our family. Sending you love, affection, and our deepest condolences.

נפלה עטרת ראשנו

Love,  
Heidi and Rabbi Neal Gold '97

I don't remember a meaningful moment with Rabbi David Ellenson that didn't involve tears.

He was a man so full of love- of Torah, of people, of life- that it flowed forth from him lachrymoniously.

I remember the first time we met. It was July 4, 2007. I had recently arrived in Jerusalem for my year in Israel at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, where we was the President. I had gone to dinner with some classmates at a steakhouse, in celebration of the day. David happened to be in the restaurant with his family, noticed a group of his new students, and came over to us to introduce himself (like that was necessary) and to get to know us. After a lovely talk, he returned to his table and his family. As we finished our meal, the waiter let us know he had picked up the check for all of our meals.

What a mensch.

Over the next six years we would see each other a few times a year, he would teach, and we would be moved to tears- usually him first.

My time at HUC ended in tears that he and I shared, as we stood together under the ordination chuppah at Temple Israel of Hollywood, and with his hands on my shoulders, Rabbi Ellenson ordained me as a rabbi in Israel.

Today, when I learned of his untimely passing, my eyes welled up.

Rabbi, may your memory be for a blessing, and your Torah continue to inspire us all.

- Rabbi Greg Weisman '11' 13

The Israel Reform Movement mourns the passing of Rabbi David Ellenson, PhD, former President of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Rabbi Ellenson's dedication to Israel engagement led to significant growth in the Israel Rabbinical Program and the establishment of the M.A. Program in Pluralistic Jewish Education. His collaborative leadership style fostered unity, and his commitment to peace, religious tolerance, and social responsibility leaves a lasting impact. A true 'menche' and dear friend, Rabbi Ellenson's warmth and humility will be deeply missed. We remember his contributions with gratitude and respect. We send our heartfelt condolences to his family.

- Reform Judaism in Israel

We join all in the Jewish community and beyond who are mourning the loss of our very dear friend and longtime colleague, Rabbi David Ellenson—a true giant of Jewish life and learning.

Our Chair Emerita Lynn Schusterman, Chair Stacy Schusterman and Co-President Lisa Eisen developed a close relationship with Rabbi Ellenson over many years when he served as head of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and, subsequently, as director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University.

Upon his passing, Lynn shared: “So many of us were fortunate to learn from David and benefit from his wisdom. As a rabbi and a scholar, he was the perfect blend of mind, heart and soul. He had a deep passion for the study of modern Israel, and he devoted himself to advocating for and building a vision of an inclusive and welcoming Jewish community that mirrors my own. He will be sorely missed.”

May Rabbi Ellenson’s memory be a blessing, and may we continue to spread the light he sparked in each of us. Read more about his life and legacy.

- Schusterman Family Philanthropies

David was my rebbe. He pastored me through the untimely and sudden death of my father, whom he knew before my birth. He never hesitated to share his paramount love for, pride in and commitment to his wife and family; just this week, he waited to schedule a meeting until he helped send his grandchildren off to school. I know that relative to his family and his close friends, my loss is small, and I pray that this community of his students can support them in their profound grief. Yet David took to heart the teaching of Sanhedrin 19b that one who teaches Torah to the child of a friend is like another parent. David knew that all of us need to feel that type of love, and I am in awe of his ability to offer both validation and instruction, often at the same time. Not only to me, but to many hundreds of us who have lost our rabbi, our teacher, for he was a Gadol HaDor, a great rabbi of our era.

Read in full at <https://www.jta.org/2023/12/08/obituaries/david-ellenson-was-my-rabbi-i-cant-believe-we-wont-learn-from-him-anymore>

- Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein '06

David served as a juror for the Obermayer Awards from 2015 to 2019. He was a thoughtful scholar with broad interests and deep knowledge of German Jewish history. For many years he led the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion that trains reform rabbis. He was also incredibly kind to me.

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When I think of David, I think of having coffee with him and my mother at a cafe near Brandeis University, where he taught. It was December 2017, a year or so after my father passed away. We talked to David about the Obermayer Awards. He was a member of the jury. I had just gotten involved.

We really didn't know what would happen with the awards going forward. (Widen the Circle didn't exist yet.) I was taking on a larger role, but I also had a full-time job. And to be honest, all of my work was still deeply tinged with grief. We wanted to expand the impact of the awards, but all I had were a few stories about the amazing remembrance work I had seen among our awardees and a belief that the work held lessons for current times.

David understood the significance almost immediately. I really didn't have to explain in any detail.

"If the Jewish experience becomes reduced to the Shoah and tragedy, and not aspects of Jewish culture and life, it's distorted, frankly," he said. "That's why I like what you are doing."

We discussed the yellow brick wall project, in which Berlin sixth graders research and memorialize people in their neighborhood who were victims of the Nazis — one name and one brick per student, year after year. David remarked on how that project combines abstract work on the past with very concrete elements, that it is creative and has a strong emotional component.

He explained that one reason he liked being a rabbi was the significance of history to his work. "My major focus was on 19th century German Jewish history... I always feel like I'm doing a religious deed by bringing them back to life with lessons they can impart for the world today."

I left that conversation with renewed energy, and we stayed in touch. I would update him from time to time, and he would offer ideas and encouragement. It was so heartening to have someone as accomplished as David take an interest in what I was doing.

May his memory be a blessing.

- Joel Obermayer

H-Judaic is devastated to learn of the sudden passing of Professor David Ellenson (1947-2023), past president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, past director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University, leading scholar of Jewish Thought, and one of the most beloved and respected figures in Jewish Studies in our day. Prof. Ellenson died suddenly; just yesterday he attended an event celebrating Professor Jacob J. Schacter of Yeshiva University. Perhaps alone among American Jewish scholars, Prof. Ellenson held honorary degrees from HUC-JIR (where he was also ordained and taught throughout his career), from The Jewish Theological Seminary - JTS, and from Yeshiva University.

Professor David Ellenson's online biography at Jewish Virtual Library: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/david-ellenson> We extend deepest condolences to his wife, children, grandchildren, as well as legions of students and admirers across the spectrum of Jewish life.

- H-Judaic

AJR mourns the untimely death of Rabbi David Ellenson z"l. He was a great scholar, a kind, compassionate, and caring human being, and a guide to so many on their Jewish journeys. He will always be remembered for his many years of leadership at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and for his devotion to his many students, friends, and colleagues. But his interests always went beyond movements and to the needs of individuals Jews and the Jewish People. Zekher Tzaddik L'vracha, The memory of this righteous man will always be a blessing.

- Academy for Jewish Religion

Rabbi David Ellenson, as president of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, ordained me as a rabbi. As a teacher, he was wise and erudite. As a leader, he was both humble and committed in his role. As a rabbi, he was caring and empowering. He guided not just HUC, but was a voice for Jews and Judaism around the world. May the memory of the righteous be for a blessing.

- Rabbi Jason Holtz '10

Pardes mourns the passing of Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson, former President and Chancellor Emeritus of Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion. Rabbi Ellenson was the 1996-97 Blaustein Scholar at the invitation of Rabbi Daniel Landes. Professor Ellenson was a scholar of modern Jewish thought and history, and wrote extensively on the development of German Orthodoxy in the 19th century. He was a prodigious scholar and a masterful teacher.

His love of Am Yisrael was enormous and his menschlikeit extraordinary. The Jewish world has lost a giant.

We join together with his students and colleagues worldwide in offering condolences to his beloved family. יהי זיכרו ברוך

- Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies

The world is poorer today for the loss of Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson. Chancellor Emeritus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, he was a scholar and specialist of Modern Orthodoxy. His son, my learned classmate Micah Ellenson, once described him to me in class at HUC as a reluctant Chancellor, a man who would have preferred a quiet corner of the archives to the limelight.

May Rabbi Ellenson's Memory be for Blessing. May God comfort his family and friends. Baruch Dayan HaEmet.

- Temple Beth El of South Orange County

The world is poorer today for the loss of Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson. Chancellor Emeritus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, he was a scholar and specialist of Modern Orthodoxy. His son, my learned classmate Micah Ellenson, once described him to me in class at HUC as a reluctant Chancellor, a man who would have preferred a quiet corner of the archives to the limelight.

May Rabbi Ellenson's Memory be for Blessing. May God comfort his family and friends. Baruch Dayan HaEmet.

- Rabbi Jason Rosner '15

David's relationship with our family was by far one of the most meaningful communal relationships we have ever had. Since first meeting David in our Zionism class at HUC in 1983, Debbie and I knew how special he was. His brilliance was only overwhelmed by his kindness. We were two twenty two year old, HUC students when we met David but his interaction with us was personal, meaningful and special. How did he make us feel like we deserved that level of respect? That just was him. From then on, our lives seemed to cross paths many times and by the time that our kids were living in New York, as young 20 somethings themselves, he made sure to have them over for the family break-the-fast celebrations. He took time to meet with one of our daughters, Elana, who as a Barnard graduate was trying to decide between Rabbinic or Medical school. He sat with her at a local coffee place, a couple of times and helped her process what was best for her. We sat together at my parents home, with whom David also had a loving relationship, and discussed the world's challenges. One visit, he sought everyone's opinion about a particularly vexing challenge HUC was facing. He believed everyone's opinion was of value and he listened closely. He was the very description of a mensch and truly believed in the concept of being created in God's image. As the Rabbi at the funeral suggested, David was a lamed vavnick, despite our never actually knowing...we know!

- Barry Cohn '85

Dear Jackie and Family,

We send our love and share in your sadness. We know your upcoming smichot won't be the same without David. Tom loved working in your Los Angeles home where the joy and liveliness of your children combined with your active professional lives.

As shared at the funeral, David had a warmth that made us all feel special. He and I share a trait. Rabbi Benjamin Ross said that I channeled David when I got emotional cried delivering divrei Torah. I shall always treasure that comparison and hope that I can reflect some of David's spirit in my words.

The issues David raised about tradition and modernity are important to me and I'll always think of him and look to his writing to inform my views.

Jackie, your strength and your ability to combine all your life roles inspire me. You are truly a woman of valor.

Fondly,  
Karen and Tom



My deepest sympathies to you, Jackie, and, and to your family on David's recent and sudden passing. I had the privilege of meeting David forty years ago when I was an incoming Communal Service student in Los Angeles, and he was a young, already beloved and distinguished professor.

My memories of David echo many that have already been shared, at his funeral, and elsewhere...the neatly rolled sleeves, creating lengthy, engaging class lectures without notes, the ever-present diet coke nearby, his humility, brilliance, and Menschlichkeit. I truly hope he understood the impact he had on so many.

Some brief vignettes:

After being selected to give the student remarks at our Summer Graduation, I made an appointment to meet with David to help me flesh out some ideas. I wanted to speak about dreamers and weave the Joseph story into my remarks. Not only was he incredibly helpful, he was unerringly kind and gentle as he made suggestions and helped me to frame my remarks. I felt then, and feel still, so honored to have had that time alone with him.

I was always pleased when our paths would cross during the 16 years I served as the URJ's Director of Synagogue Management. At one point we connected, and spoke briefly. He told me he had heard wonderful things about the work I was doing, and to keep it up. I have no words to express how meaningful and encouraging that was, and how I often thought about my responsibility to live up to those words. Finally, I recall a URJ Executive Committee Meeting where David was the guest speaker. Towards the end of his remarks, he noted that he had to leave when he was finished speaking because he and Jackie were celebrating a significant anniversary (I think 25th). He mused that he was struck by how quickly the years had passed, Then with his trademark twinkle and shy grin, he noted that some of the days had passed VERY slowly, but the years had flown by! Of course he got a huge laugh and quickly clarified (as if he needed to!) his deep love for his life partner. May all who mourn find strength during this difficult period, and in time, the memory of blessings of happier days.

With sympathy and gratitude,

Dale Glasser '85

Rabbi David radiated warmth and years of profound learning with humility. His memory will always be a blessing to those of us who met him and benefitted from his wisdom.

- Mark Wisan

I am one of the many people who was so fortunate to fall within the orbit of David Ellenson, a person of the most remarkable generosity of spirit. I say this because my advocacy over the years pushed on two issues that were complicated for the head of Hebrew Union College – rabbinic officiation at weddings of interfaith couples, and admission of rabbinic students who were in interfaith relationships. Despite my pushing, and I'm sure some differences of opinion, he became a supporter, and a friend.

We first met in June 2006 when InterfaithFamily (now 18Doors) was an exhibitor at a CCAR convention in San Diego and really scrapping for attention. I excitedly reported to a colleague afterwards that I had handed the president of Hebrew Union College an invitation to a reception and information session that we sponsored, and that he had come!

At some point, though, after Rabbi Ellenson was quoted in a publication as reiterating HUC's policy not to admit rabbinic students who were in interfaith relationships, I wrote a letter to the editor criticizing that position. Rabbi Ellenson had argued that that rabbis should be role models; I said what a great role model it would be for interfaith families to see a rabbi who was intermarried.

In March 2008 I wrote an op-ed for the New York Jewish Week emphasizing the importance of interfaith couples being able to find rabbis to officiate at their weddings. That April, I was invited to a reception at which CJP's Barry Shrage and Rabbi Ellenson spoke. I wrote David a long email in advance, discussing two studies that had recently come out that showed the positive impact of rabbinic officiation on future Jewish engagement. At the session, Rabbi Ellenson spoke at some length about how he had been approached by four families that week asking him to speak to children who were intermarrying. He mentioned InterfaithFamily's work several times. I followed up with some resources we were developing, which he said he would surely use.

In March 2010, I attended another CCAR convention as an exhibitor. This I will not forget – Rabbi Ellenson introduced me to his wife Rabbi Jacqueline Ellenson by saying that I was “doing God's work” – and she said she had used InterfaithFamily's website and resources for a wedding in her own family.

In October 2015, InterfaithFamily hosted an afternoon of learning, and an evening reception honoring Barry Shrage, and me on my retiring as CEO. I was incredibly honored that Rabbi Ellenson spoke at the program. He sent me an outline of his remarks ahead of time – he said that our work had made a positive difference to interfaith couples received a welcoming attitude in contrast to the rejection of the past. And he outlined the remaining challenge – how to include interfaith couples and families while maintaining integrity of the Jewish community – how to maintain a Judaism of hospitality and authenticity.

In his outline Rabbi Ellenson referred to InterfaithFamily as an “Institute.” I thanked him for the promotion, saying we hadn't been called that before; with his characteristic humor, he replied, “Institute? Organization? What's in a name?”

I am sorry to say that my last contact with Rabbi Ellenson was five years ago. I asked if he would write an endorsement for my book, *Radical Inclusion: Engaging Interfaith Families for a Thriving Jewish Future*, and he agreed. Stuart Matlins had advised me that Rabbi Ellenson was probably the single most highly regarded leader who the desired audience of my book would look up to. So, at the top of the cover of the book, Rabbi Ellenson's blurb appears: “Must reading for Jewish laypersons as well as Jewish communal and religious leaders. Vital for all who are concerned about the future of Jewish life in North America.”

Since the news of Rabbi Ellenson's untimely death I've seen many well-deserved tributes from many corners of the Jewish world. We have lost a truly great leader. I send sincere sympathy to his wife and children and their families.

- Edmund Case, President, Center for Radically Inclusive Judaism

I took a few classes with Dr. Ellenson when I was an undergraduate at USC in the early 90's. He left an indelible impression on me in several ways. Most memorable though is the lesson that I learned from his kindness. If you take the time to show kindness to an individual, they will remember it forever..that's how powerful an act of kindness can be.

May G-d comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Fondly,  
Jonathan Choslovsky

Every time we met, David greeted me like an old friend, even latterly, when we met rarely.

My appreciation for his Introduction, "Jakob J. Petuchowski: The Man and His Thought," to Jakob J. Petuchowski, *STUDIES IN MODERN THEOLOGY AND PRAYER* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1998), xi-xvii, has no limits. It is insightful and gracious, with a true feel for what mattered to Jakob, the man and his thought.

A similar insight is shown by selecting a particular topic for Jakob J. Petuchowski's quotation in Michael Marmor and David Ellenson, *AMERICAN JEWISH THOUGHT SINCE 1934* (2020), namely the topic "Revelation." That the editors picked that as being essential to Jakob -- out of all the things he said and wrote -- is truly amazing. "Revelation" was a subject which occupied Jakob since before he entered HUC-JIR in Cincinnati in 1948.

I wondered whether David and Jakob talked about "Revelation" peripatetically between the Cincinnati classroom building and the dormitory, so that at least David, one co-editor, would have been aware of the cruciality of this problem for Jakob. Or did the editors arrive at this theme, unaided by informal discussion? We may never know.

- Elizabeth Petuchowski, Ph.D.

Rabbi Ellenson was a sweet and loving Mensch. He entered my life twice. First, when he bestowed an honorary degree from HUC on my father, Gerard Daniel, z'l, who lacked for nothing else in this world. Because his education was disrupted by the Nazis, he was never able to finish his studies. He very much valued the honorary degree and had enormous respect and love for Rabbi Ellenson. I was also deeply honored by Rabbi Ellenson when he inducted me into the board of the Hebrew Union College.

- Miriam Daniel

My deepest sympathies to you, Jackie, and, and to your family on David's recent and sudden passing. I had the privilege of meeting David forty years ago when I was an incoming Communal Service student in Los Angeles, and he was a young, already beloved and distinguished professor.

Like so many others whose lives were touched, influenced and enriched by David whose recent death shocked and saddened us, I cherish the memories of our time together.

I agree with all the beautiful words that have been written on FaceBook, spoken at his funeral and elsewhere, to describe him: Brilliant, thoughtful, scholarly. Warm, caring, welcoming. Nurturing, loving, and devoted to those he loved, most of all his family. He was a "lamedvavnik" if there ever was one!

We met in Jerusalem in 1972 as we began our rabbinic studies together at HUC. He was already the smartest Jew I had ever met. But he was also the most humble. Never arrogant, always respectful, David made you feel you mattered. He talked to you eye to eye, heart to heart. He was interested in what YOU had to say.

Over the years we saw each other at conventions, where he would always make time to join his classmates for our reunion dinner, even when his schedule was crammed with the meetings and sessions that required the presence of the president and chancellor of our Rabbinic Alma Mater. "The Class of '77," he used to say with his ever present smile, "was the greatest there ever was." He made all of us feel special. But my unique memory of him has to do with his marvelous sense of humor which was always expressed with his impish smile and that gleaming sparkle in his eye. He was wise and mature, but never far away from making some innocent but fun mischief.

It occurred at our DD ceremony, the honorary degree we receive after 25 years as rabbis. Awarded by the president of HUC. It was David's first year in that position, and fittingly, it was his own class that he first blessed with this honor.

He made personal remarks about each of us because he really knew each of us. When it came my turn, he called me up to the bimah. He glanced over to the provost of HUC, who had the same name as mine. David then faced me and as he handed me the diploma, called me by the moniker he had given me years before and relished every time he saw me: I award the Doctor of Divinity to "the REAL Norman Cohen!" And then that memorable David Ellenson bear hug!

- Rabbi Norman M. Cohen '77

Rabbi David Ellenson, a man of profound wisdom, kindness and intellect.

Zecher Tzadik Livracha

Shalom

Love to the Ellenson and Koch families.

Charles, Anne, Ben and Hava Stone

This loss felt profound even though I only had a small chance to know him but heard many stories through Rafi and my first thought when hearing the news (as I was getting a Diet Coke) was how sad all of us must be that he will not get to see his beautiful children, Rafi and Hannah get ordained from Hebrew College and HUC respectively.

When I was a first year at Brandeis, I was fighting to keep the Reform Chavurah alive, and people kept telling me to go talk to Rabbi Ellenson about doing a program to show people what Reform Judaism actually is. I finally walked into his office in Mandel (I can picture it to this day), and he asked me about my life and my ambitions and agreed to do the program despite the fact that it was tremendously inconvenient with his travel schedule.

The next year, I had the opportunity to take a class with him and perhaps the best sampling of the Brandeis Jewish community one could ask for. It was a 6-9 pm class and EVERY WEEK, Rabbi Ellenson would bring in pizza and snacks and of course a couple of liters of Diet Coke, one for him, and one that I consumed much of. His consideration and kindness, even beyond his tremendous scholarship and teaching kept me going and I often wonder if I would have pushed through had he not been there in 2018.

His body may be gone, but his soul lives on in so many of his students, his colleagues, and his friends. We are told not to give a eulogy on Hanukkah (and can only speak provided no one cries), but hopefully, God will forgive us because, as one of the speakers at his funeral said, he had a career sponsored by “the Coca Cola company and Kleenex”. Hat a light to be extinguished so soon.

- Fourth-year rabbinical student Emily Dana

This summer in Jerusalem, I had the opportunity to visit with David; we spent a couple of hours together, sipping iced coffee (me), and diet cokes (him). We spoke about our families, our health, and our lives, and of course, about the future of Reform Judaism and Israel. I was grateful that I was able to share with David how deeply he impacted my life, both as my advisor while a student at the Los Angeles campus of HUC, and as my beloved teacher. 30 years after my ordination, I still carry his teachings with me, as well as his passion for Judaism and extreme menschlekeit. I was also deeply moved by David's stepping in just days after Aaron Panken z"l untimely death to officiate and bless us in Los Angeles as we received our Honorary Doctorates. With great humility and compassion, he shared his blessing with me, and as he did, we both had tears in our eyes.

David will forever live on in my heart, and I know in the hearts of so many as well. His brilliance, humanity, and humility, will continue to inspire me always. May his memory always be a blessing to the Jewish people, to Israel, and most especially, to his beloved family.

- Rabbi Stacy Friedman '93

Here are my strongest early memories of David in the New York Havurah - first, finding out that he had been a Jewish linebacker in Virginia - that blew me away. Second, attending his senior sermon - brilliant, cogent, so David! And third, attending his ordination - I will never forget seeing the Gdolim of HUC at the time - Gottschalk and Company - walking down the aisle at Temple Emanuel bare shouldered and bareheaded - and then David's whole class making quite a statement walking down the aisle wearing kippot and tallitot!

And then there was David's more recent story about buying the expensive suit (at Nordstrom's in Texas I believe) to wear to his "audition" for HUC Head and telling them that, if he got the job, he'd be back to buy another suit - and then he did!

Love that man, and will miss him a lot, Aliya Cheskis-Cotel

I became his friend as a result of being a Governor and then Vice Chair when David was President. I am grateful to say that he was my houseguest when he visited Chicago. He honored me with his presence. With all of his vast achievements and incredible scholarship he always a mentch, and conversed with me as a warm hearted considerate friend.

- Frederic Lane

I could imagine no other gadol (great one) or mensch (kind one) to have ordained me as a rabbi than Rabbi David Ellenson. I'm grateful to have been his student and to have had him as a teacher. I know he made everyone feel like they had a special connection but being from Virginia, I know it was true. His gentleness paired with conviction, his grace balanced with thoughtful critique and his unwavering commitment to the Jewish people alongside other groups, faith leaders and movements driven by shared values modeled for a whole generation of rabbis what leadership and stewardship looks like. He cared about every single student and he nurtured all of our relationships to learning and community and dialogue. Our Torah and commentaries stand on his shoulders for all the days forward. I am so grateful that he accepted the invitation to join the Repair the World Jewish education committee this year. After our meetings, some of us would often text to comment how grateful we were to have these unexpected touch points with him - all the more so given the timing of his moving on from this world. My deepest condolences to Jacqueline Koch Ellenson and all their beloveds. A giant so widely loved yet loved most by his family and dearest friends. May he have the highest aliyah and his menorah shine bright thru the windows that connect this world to the one beyond.

- Rabbi Jessy Dressin '10, '12

Academic brilliance and inspired institutional leadership are not necessarily accompanied by kindness and generosity, as they were in David's case. He leaves a giant legacy. I will always cherish the personal memories I have of David, whom I first met when he was a first-year rabbinic student in Jerusalem; our friendship continued through intermittent meetings over the decades, most recently at AJS, at Brandeis when I was a student again at the SIIS, and most serendipitously, in Jerusalem. One day, at a dairy restaurant, we sat and caught up on family events. As one person after another entered the restaurant, they rushed up to greet David effusively. Folks at the neighboring table watched with growing interest as this behavior was repeated throughout their meal. Finally, one of them came over: "I think I should recognize you, right? Who ARE you?" "Oh," David demurred, "I'm a teacher . . . lots of students." That was his humble heart speaking. May his memory inspire more humility, more kindness, and more menschlichkeit in the world.

- Gail Berkeley Sherman, Reed College

Thank you for sharing your husband/father/grandfather/friend/teacher with our community. I am grateful to have been able to watch his incredibly moving and meaningful funeral online.

I knew Rabbi Ellenson when I was a student in the HUC-JIR School of Jewish Communal Service from 1992-1994, in Los Angeles. I remember him as incredibly kind and approachable. I don't think I ever was fortunate enough to take an entire course with him. To this day, though, I remember experiencing a particular lesson with him. I don't remember the topic, but I do remember how the lesson went. We sat in a circle of tables in the classroom. In my mind, I have a visual memory. Rabbi Ellenson started speaking. Over the course of the next hour or so, his lesson meandered around, seemingly off on various tangents. His trajectory went up in the air and spun in little circles, twists and turns. And then.... the lesson came in for a landing, right back to the spot where he had begun. I was utterly mesmerized and in awe. He had delivered the entire lesson, with all of its wandering and returning, without a single note. Over the past 30 years, whenever someone mentioned Rabbi Ellenson's name, I would tell this story. I realize now that of course my experience was not unique. He did this all the time, as someone mentioned during the funeral. But for me, it is an anchor in my memories of him. I am sure it will continue to bring a smile to my face and to my heart for many more years.

My condolences; may his memory be for a beautiful blessing.  
- Ilana Steinberg '94

Professor Rabbi Ellenson was a true mensch. He exuded warmth and filled a room with light. I am honored to call him my teacher. From my Year in Israel to my ordination in 2016, and each time I would return for various events, it didn't matter that I was but one of thousands of his students, he always greeted me with that smile that led me to believe that he really cared about who I was and what I was thinking. Rabbi Ellenson somehow simultaneously embodied both immense knowledge and incredible humility and an inexhaustible desire to share both with those around him. I am better for having had him in my life.

May his memory be for a blessing...

- Cantor Lauren Goodlev '16

In tribute to a scholar, a leader, a mensch, and a beloved friend. May his memory be for many blessings.

- Chip Edelsberg



Holding the Extra Shamash: In Memory of Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson, Z"tzL  
Shared by Miriam Heller Stern, Ph.D., Vice Provost for Educational Strategy; Director, School of Education;  
Associate Professor of Education at HUC-JIR

To the Ellenson Family and the Greater HUC-JIR Community:

While I was not at HUC-JIR during the years of David's leadership of the College-Institute (with the exception of the interim presidency) I only had the tremendous privilege of being in his aura and learning from the lore that preceded him. I have been moved by the many testimonials and eulogies of his students far and wide, representing so many stripes of the Jewish community. I wrote this reflection on the fifth night of Chanukah to process and express what it means to me to be a leader, a teacher and a parent in this moment in history, and what it means for all of us who strive to carry on David's legacy in whatever comparatively miniscule way we are able.

Holding the Extra Shamash

It's night five of Chanukah, 5784 in Jewish time – years we have counted since our people's origins in the Ancient Near East and the Land of Israel -- and 2023 by the Gregorian and secular counts. It's a holiday like no other holiday in our lifetime. Our history has been disrupted by hatred and war before, and here we are, facing a set of challenges that we thought we would only read about in our prayers, classical texts, and history books. In real time. Our world is on fire.

"It's going to fall! Don't drop it!" My ten year-old daughter shrieks in the middle of our recitation of the blessings over the candles. She doesn't trust that my husband or I can balance holding not one shamash, the "leader" candle that lights the others, but two shamash candles, at once. Normally, every member of the household lights their own chanukiyah, their own set of candles. This year, we are lighting an extra set, with our hearts turning toward the hostages in Gaza who cannot light for themselves. We know every human being is a light, and we pray the light of the hostages – our extended family -- will not be extinguished, despite their Hamas captors' sinister and evil intentions. We pray for miracles, and we light for them.

But holding two candles and lighting two sets of candles at the same time is not easy. (Try it.) The wax is hot, the flames dancing unreliably at their own will, and the more family members are crowded around, the greater the chances someone is getting singed by accident. But in this symbolic moment of insisting on preserving light in the proverbial darkness, we don't have a choice.

A lot of us are struggling to hold it all together. To work while distracted or in a deep emotional fog. To provide support and comfort to others. To teach, to lead, to act, to contribute. To fight. To grieve. To hope. A lot of us are walking through the world holding more than one shamash.

But here's the beauty of our people and the beauty of the shamash. We can pass the light to the person beside us. We can hold it with our children and absorb the drip of the hot wax, or experience the heat and breathe through it together. We can light in community, and hold it together.

This week the Jewish community lost one of its greatest lights in Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson, zecher tzaddik l'vracha, former President of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion – may the memory of this righteous one be a blessing. His disciples are too numerous to count. Rabbi Ellenson was truly a shamash, lighting the way for everyone. And now, with his untimely departure from this Earth, many of us feel like we are holding more than one shamash. When a teacher's teacher's teacher leaves us, for a moment we might wonder how we will possibly keep the light alive. But one of David's greatest gifts was that he modeled how to hold more than one shamash, and he passed the light to so many, with genuine interest and personal investment. Perhaps we just have to figure out how best to balance those candles, passing them among peers and partners, and from one generation to the next.

And perhaps Chanukah is also about learning from unlikely teachers – the other lights in our lives – our children. Tonight, my middle son, 15, just took the second shamash candle and lit one with his right and one with his left hand. (Duh. Why was I holding two candles in my dominant hand and risking lighting my other child on fire?) It was a little awkward, but it worked. As my colleague Dr. Sivan Zakai teaches, sometimes the younger set just figure out a new way of looking at things. That's the magic. It's our job to make room for them to do that. That's where we draw our hope.

To paraphrase Elie Wiesel, hope is a moral imperative when we are in deep despair. The miracle of Chanukah is that against all odds, and despite so many realities we can't wrap our heads around, our hope will not be extinguished. We must muster the courage and strength to hold the light and pass it to everyone around us. Light another shamash and another. Am Yisrael Chai; our people live on.

Dear Ellenson Family and HUC Community,

Although I watched every minute of the live-streamed funeral, I'm still struggling to accept that Rabbi David Ellenson is gone and we will never hear his voice again. David was the first person I turned to the day my #MeToo article was published. He was directing the Brandeis Schusterman Center for Israel Studies where I was a summer fellow. He believed me, took immediate action by opening a Title IX case at HUC-JIR (where he was simultaneously serving as interim president), and disinvited the perpetrator from speaking on campus to our group. David was a steadfast supporter of my work on intermarriage and Jewish identity. He happily agreed to be on the advisory board of [loveandtradition.org](http://loveandtradition.org) when it was a fledgling 501c3, and insisted on giving me books off his own shelves, which I shall always cherish. Other folks, for whom David served as a surrogate father, grandfather, teacher, and lifelong friend will write more profound tributes than this one. I'll just add that during a week when my life felt like it might spin out of control, David sat with me in a pizza place on South Street, acknowledged that we weren't supposed to talk to each other (according to attorneys), and said: "But I'm a rabbi. I want to know how you are?" He was more than a brilliant scholar, renowned rabbi across denominations, mensch, mentor, and southern gentleman who enjoyed soda and the Celtics; David was also a tzaddik, a deeply righteous person. I miss him already. His wisdom and compassion touched my life. Sending heartfelt condolences to all who knew and loved him, especially his beloved wife Jackie. May your eulogy inspire all women whose life partners are taken too soon to speak their truths, as you did so beautifully. David's memory is a blessing. Thank you for sharing him.

- Keren McGinity  
Interfaith Specialist, USCJ

I remember the first time I heard Rabbi Ellenson speak to our year in Israel class. It was the first time I had met him, and my whole HUC journey was just beginning. What he taught us that day had a profound impact on my identity formation as a Reform rabbi. He told us that he believes we Reform Jews are doing Judaism right. I was confident in my affiliation already, but his faith in our movement moved me. He was proud and wise, and humble and honest. Learning from him later on in my time at HUC, and hearing the respect he had for all sorts of Jewish expression only increased my respect for him. But nothing compares to the great fondness and affection I developed for him, a direct result from his incomparably warm *menschlichkeit*. He was one of a kind, and I feel so very lucky to have known him. His memory is a blessing in all of our lives. Thank you, his family, for sharing him so generously with the Jewish world.

- Rabbi Susan Moss '15

Dear Family of Rabbi David Ellenson,

I have known of Rabbi Ellenson from afar. I learned from him at CCAR Convention workshops, I rejoiced in his visit to the Rashi School, the Boston Area Reform Day School which I founded, and I had several conference call encounters with him on the future of Jewish Reform Day School education. A week or so ago, I had the unique opportunity to be his study partner in a Zoom learning experience, our first one on one encounter. We examined a text together, and although my Jewish learning is nowhere at his level I felt that for those fifteen minutes he was a chaver "a study friend" for me. It was an unforgettable experience which I shall treasure for the rest of my life.

He stands for me as an exemplar of a rabbi who was a scholar, a teacher, a community leader, and most of all a mensch. My memory of him will always be for a blessing.

- Rabbi Hank Zoob '67

I am still trying to absorb the heart-breaking reality that our beloved teacher, colleague, and friend, Rabbi David Ellenson, z"l, has died. What I most want to say about David is what everyone else seems to be emphasizing as well, that David was unusually brilliant and insightful, and an incredible teacher and scholar, but even more important was his uniquely big heart, his one-of-a-kind sweetness and kindness that seemed to know no bounds, and touched us all. The combination of brilliant mind and heart without walls, contributed to his being a true source of light and love in our world, and a model and inspiration that will continue to move and motivate me. It is painful to even say these words, that I will deeply miss David. and at the same time, I will try to carry his work forward in my own small ways, by trying to more fully embody his qualities of caring and kindness, as well as his kind of deep knowledge and humility, readiness to be challenged by others' questions and ideas, always conducting his pursuit of knowledge and debate l'shem shamayim, for the betterment of us, the Jewish world, and the wider world.

My heart goes out to Jackie and to Ruthie, Micah, Hannah, Nomi, and Rafi, and all the partners and grandchildren, and the whole family. May you all find comfort in these shared tributes and memories...

זכרונו לברכה

May David's memory be for blessing always.

- Rabbi Ruth Sohn '82

Rabbi David Ellenson did not teach Judaism; he embodied it. His classes neither began nor ended. They were ongoing. He would seemingly begin making a point, and then come his favorite phrase -- "And by the way" -- a source of frustration for me because I wanted him to keep to his point, but, then, came another "And by the way" and then another, an ever expansive footnote that became an endlessly fascinating experience, as I grew more delighted and overwhelmed by all his delicious knowledge, wisdom, enthusiasm, and all the connections that he grasped and offered. His warmth defies description. He was joy personified, and what a joy to be in his presence! What an inspiration!

- Martha B. Tack, CRS Congregant

I was one of David's first graduate students at HUC LA in 1979 and have remained his student ever since. As a Ph.D. student at Claremont Graduate School, I was able to take a full quarter of my coursework at HUC. Once I found David, I never wanted to stop studying with him. I took all four of his seminars, but it was his course on Modern Jewish Thought that electrified me. David didn't just open a window; he unlatched the observatory dome and revealed the vast richness of Jewish thought. What had been a sliver became an expanse, filled with creative possibility. And then David gave me a second gift. He made me feel that I had something to contribute to this expanse. At a time when I most needed to believe this to be true, David affirmed that it was so. In big, enthusiastic check marks in the margins of course papers, in personal notes of support and letters of recommendation, he welcomed me—and thousands of others--as friend and colleague.

Not only did David's encouragement sustain me early in my career but the model of his intellectual openness shaped my work. He encouraged my enthusiasm for process thought and its value for Jewish theology. It wasn't his approach, but he saw it as a creative possibility and that made it deserving of serious consideration. This encouragement came from his own profound scholarly understanding that the vitality of Judaism depends on receptivity to new ideas in dialogue with tradition.

David wore his brilliance lightly, but I believe he truly was a tzaddik. He embraced the world, past and present. He poured his love into our lives. I am deeply sad that David is no longer physically present, but I am deeply grateful that he remains very much a part of my life.

- Sandra Lubarsky

I first heard about David from my friend Phil Miller, now-retired librarian at HUC-JIR-NY. Phil's parents lived in Providence, RI and I used to have Thanksgiving dinner with them when I was a graduate student at Brown and Phil would come in for the holiday. David had begun rabbinical school at that time while a PhD student at Columbia and Phil (and others) had spotted him as a rising star. I can't remember when or where David and I first met--perhaps at AJS while I was still at Brown? At any rate, sometime after I joined the HUC faculty in 1979 we reconnected. Because David was in NY and then LA and I was in CN, we had fewer opportunities to be together in person. I think the first opportunity likely was when David came to CN for a medical ethics conference that the College sponsored in the 1980's. Additionally, I was at his home in LA in the early 90's when I was in for a conference that Larry Hoffman had initiated at Brandeis-Bardin, and we all drove up to the Valley together. Later, in the mid/late-90's we were faculty suite-mates at one of the URJ summer study kallot at Beloit College in Wisconsin (I think that was when we both met Joan Pines for the first time). Fast forward . . .

David was a dear friend and colleague, uniquely gifted in so many ways. Brilliant, compassionate, kind, thoughtful, caring lifanim mishurat hadin. A true mensch---a Jewish and human/humane ego ideal for all of us. The reason he could raise such huge sums of money for the College is that he fully embodied what the College stands for and should be. Who could resist him? He had a great love for others and others responded in kind.

Annie and I adore him (not past tense). We spent many good hours shmoozing together at Skyline Chili (his favorite Cincinnati haunt). And we cannot see a can or bottle of Diet Coke without thinking of him.

We send our love, care, and concern to Jackie and the children. We all need him still ----but what he has given us can never be lost. Yehi zikhro barukh.

- Rabbi Rick Sarason

The Deutsch Family Professor of Rabbinics and Liturgy, HUC-JIR

Rabbi David Ellenson was a brilliant scholar, an inspiring leader, a gentle and down-to-earth human, and a true mensch with a generous heart and spirit. As his student, I was always in awe of how he taught without notes, and with so much humility. I am grateful and honored to have called him my teacher, colleague, mentor, and friend.

- Lori Klein, MAJCS, MSW '91

Three David stories that speak to his beautiful neshoma.

1) David was a person of deep kindness. When I had some minor but very painful repair work done on my prosthetic eye, David hear about it and dropped by with some treats and to visit. It made me feel better and I was touched.

2) When Toni lost a baby in the second trimester we had to have an abortion. The afternoon we came back, there was David, dropping by to check in--with a chocolate babke. Such sweetness.

3) Early on Lew Barth asked the HUC faculty to teach a session for the Reform Brit Milah program at SS Wise day school classrooms.. David and I spoke the same evening. David was highly offended by the posters on the wall. They showed "jobs you have when you don't go to college" or something like that. David wrote to the head of school to object that these were all honest ways to make a living and were all honorable in their own right and it was wrong and not Jewish to look down on them. David, of course, was more eloquent. I remain impressed to this day.

- Bruce Phillips, Ph.D., Professor of Jewish Communal Service, "Uncle Bruce"

Dear Jackie,

Not a day has gone by since learning of David's death that I haven't thought about David countless times. No matter what I may be doing, his n'shama, his wisdom, and his infectious smile embrace me. I am filled with gratitude for the blessings that he has brought to you and your beautiful family, to the College, to the Jewish world and....to me personally. At the same time, waves of sadness sweep over me as I contemplate not being able to speak with him and, most important, as I contemplate your loss and that of your family.

Mine was the precious privilege to work closely with David for nearly a decade. We spoke often, we planned, we negotiated, we fine-tuned, and we took counsel from one another. I have collaborated, as you know, with a host of Jewish leaders. Never have I encountered a leader and colleague who combined David's wisdom, vision, and judgement, with such a huge measure of humility -- authentic and integrated humility. And therein was his genius. Exceptional ability combined with warm humility. This master teacher was always learning because he saw in every one of us a spark of Divinity.

Yes, he was the brightest star in our firmament and for that he shall always be our blessing.

B'yididut chamah,

Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff '60

A letter to the community from the Brandeis University Office of the Provost:

Dear Colleagues,

I am sad to share that David Ellenson, Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, and former director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis (2015-2018), passed away in New York on December 7, 2023. He was 76 years old.

Born in 1947, and raised in Newport News, Virginia, David received his BA from the College of William & Mary in 1969 and an MA in religious studies from the University of Virginia in 1972. He received his PhD from Columbia University in 1981. In 1977, he was ordained as a rabbi by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), and joined their faculty two years later. In 2001 he became president of HUC-JIR, a position he held for twelve years. David's intellectual interests included modern Jewish history, ethics, Jewish religious thought, and the evolving relationship between Jewish law and emerging trends in contemporary American society. He was a world-renowned scholar, a prolific author and editor, and a beloved rabbi, educator, and mentor.

In 2015 David assumed directorship of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies, where he taught and advised students from the undergraduate to the doctoral level, championed the expansion of important areas of Israel Studies, and presided over a wide range of programs. In 2017, under David's leadership, Brandeis hosted the annual meeting of the Association of Israel Studies and one year later he convened a conference in celebration of the center's 10th anniversary. Along with Michael Marmor, he edited an important collection on American Jewish Thought Since 1934 for Brandeis University Press. Professor Lisa Lynch, who was the provost during David's time at Brandeis, called him an "extraordinary man."

It is a remarkable testament to David's spirit that, while he was admired as a prolific scholar of the highest caliber, he is perhaps remembered even more for his endless kindness, generosity, emotional openness, and good humor. Even years after leaving Brandeis, he held regular meetings with his former students and staff and was a wise and compassionate guide who shone with care and respect for everyone he came across. It is exceedingly rare for a gifted orator to also be an attentive listener, for a single individual to hold both a brilliant mind and a generous heart.

David is survived by his wife, Jacqueline Koch Ellenson; his children, Ruth Andrew Ellenson, Micah Ellenson, Nomi Ellenson May, Hannah Miriam Ellenson, and Rafi Ellenson; and his four grandchildren, Lily, Rose, Shai, and Yonah.

Notes of condolence may be sent to the Schusterman Center at [scis@brandeis.edu](mailto:scis@brandeis.edu), where they will be collated and sent to David's family.

I am grateful to Alexander Kaye, Director of the Schusterman Center, for his contributions to this memoriam.

Sincerely,

Carol A. Fierke

Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

David Ellenson was a leader, a mentor, and a gifted teacher. Few people have had such a profound impact on the field of Jewish Professional leadership. To be with David was to feel blessed by his big personality and his gentle spirit. I have vivid memories of being his student in the School of Jewish Communal Service in the mid-90s mesmerized by his unique talent to make ancient stories relevant and exciting. Later in my career, as the associate director of the School, I became his colleague. Even though I was his student more than 25 years ago, I was always in awe of David's presence. It is hard to talk about David without mentioning his inherent ability to empathize with those around him, laughing vigorously and crying openly. We have lost a giant.

- Mandi Richardson, MAJCS, MSW '97  
Associate Director, Zelikow School of Jewish Nonprofit Management

The world, and particularly the Jewish world, is a poorer place without David Ellenson. So much has already been said about his unusual ability to bond warmly with an impressively wide range of people. I was one of those lucky ones.

As Executive Director of Celebrate 350: Jewish Life in America, I had the joy of getting to know David. During this year-long event, so many people found personal space for celebrating their place in American Jewish life. David, who was already beyond busy with his HUC-JIR obligations, seemed to take particular pleasure in seeing American Jews embrace the 350th and in talking about ways to further advance its message of strength and forward movement. I thoroughly enjoyed our chats and learned from him each time.

Jackie, you have also touched me as a gifted teacher. Hannah, I briefly met you through your NIF work. To all the family, my husband, Arthur Rubinstein, and I send heartfelt prayers and hugs. We cannot imagine your pain. May strong loving memories of David as a passionate family man and loving spouse bring you comfort.

Warmest wishes,  
Alice Herman

What a loss for the Ellenson family and for the entire world!!! Sending love and deepest condolences!

- Carol Boyer



I first encountered Dr. Rabbi David Ellenson in 1982. I had just graduated from UCLA as a Spanish and Linguistics major and was taking the year post-graduation to apply to graduate school and help add Jewish Communal experience to my slim resume. In those days, it was possible to take a class with an HUC-JIR faculty member during your application year. I believe I was told it was so that I could see if this program was for me - I have a truer feeling that it was to check out the suitability of future students, at least in the School of Jewish Communal Service. The class I took with David was "Goodness, Suffering, Evil and Hope in the Jewish Tradition." David masterfully led us through the great Jewish thinkers on the subjects. I felt that I was introduced to one of the great thinkers of my time - David Ellenson. Same Diet Coke in the morning, rolled under sleeves in the way we all associated only with David, and photographic memory - not a single note in front of him and the most masterful teaching I have (still) ever experienced.

Miraculously, I became a double master's student (MAJCS/MSW) in 1983 and would again have the honor of studying with David. It was he who introduced me and so many of my fellow SJCS alumni to Martin Buber's I-Thou philosophy - one that would, for so many of us, distinguish our approach to communal practice.

In 1992, upon Rita Lowenthal's (z"l) retirement, I was hired to become part of the administration/faculty of HUC-JIR/Los Angeles. In those early years, my office was in the "junior faculty" wing of the basement offices, along with David, Dr. Isa Aron, and Dr. Michael Zeldin. The walls in that "wing" (a generous term) were rather thin. We learned more about each other than we sometimes planned. Mostly, I could not believe that I was in proximity to them- especially to my teacher, David.

Over the years I was at HUC-JIR, David would become a colleague as I chaired the faculty and later, our President. David had a grace about the way he interacted with all of us despite his position, title, and overwhelming teaching prowess. I recall that prior to his presidency, we had a system-wide teaching effectiveness in-service training program for all faculty, and we agreed that because David was a master teacher in an entirely different orbit from the rest of us humans, that one of the Rhea Hirsh faculty would (and did) gently excuse him from said program as he simply didn't need the training. His was a combination of natural and sometimes unconscious talent in conveying material, and his intellect and passion for whatever he was teaching felt transcendent at times.

It was some of David's Ellenson-isms that stick with so many of us to this day: the teaching from the director of his childhood JCC in Newport News, Virginia who taught David that it wasn't enough to love Judaism, for in communal practice you also must love Jews. From one of David's professors (it may have been Dr. Bamberger), "You should keep an open mind, but not so open that your brains fall out!" I have repeated that more times than I can count during my career. I could share pages more of these teachings, but will include only one more, that I think is from David's beloved, Rabbi Jaqueline Koch Ellenson: "You can be right or you can be married." We took that not only as personal advice, but wisdom for our communal partnerships in the field.

I struggle with what I believe about what happens when we die. In my happy ending version of what might be on the other side, I envision David with the thinkers whose work he treasured and shared with thousands of HUC-JIR and other students across the world. He is deep in conversation, shirt sleeves rolled under perfectly and a Diet Coke at hand. It is a table of equals... maybe David is even teaching them.

In the more realistic version, David's sharing through teaching and leadership is in all of us who were privileged to learn from him, serve with him, and be part of the Jewish communal enterprise with him. I like to think that his teachings left little sparks in all of us, illuminating the way together forward as we struggle to process this great communal and personal loss. I know all SJCS and Zschool alumni join me in sending our deep love and support to the entire Ellenson Family. David's memory will always be the deepest blessing. Zichrono livracha.

- Marla Eglash Abraham, MAJCS/MSW '85

I arrived at the LA campus of HUC-JIR in 1979 as a second-year rabbinic student. Since David was faculty, I assumed he had been there for many years. I only learned much later that he too arrived in '79. One would never know from his brilliance as a teacher that he was a new professor.

David was my instructor for Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Modern Jewish Thought. I still have the papers I wrote for him on Judah HaLevi, Maimonides, Spinoza, Hermann Cohen, Rosezweig, Scholem, and others. I kept these papers in part because I find myself decades later astonished at the sophistication of my philosophic inquiry – David elicited that from me. But even more importantly, I treasure to this day his evaluation of my work and the encouragement he expressed, inscribed in remarkably legible handwriting!

My rabbinic journey took me to Colorado, Texas, and finally back home to California. I feel like I never really lost touch with David – not just because he served as a scholar in residence at regional rabbinic conferences. But through his voluminous writings and his presidency of HUC, David was for me the guiding light of the Reform Movement.

During his funeral service, I believe it was said that David was a genius as a teacher and a genius as a friend. How true. Here's my story of David's genius as a friend: The 2009 CCAR Conference took place in Israel. I arrived in Jerusalem too late to attend the opening banquet. But restaurants were still open, so I went across the street from the Dan Panorama to get a bite to eat. As I entered, I immediately saw David engrossed in a conversation with a young woman whom I did not recognize. Of course I came to the table and said hello. David greeted me warmly but after a few moments it was clear I would not be invited to join them. I wasn't insulted in the least. I knew that at conferences private conversations were often pre-arranged. So I adjourned to an open table and proceeded to enjoy my dinner.

Many months later, I was at HUC-LA to receive my DD degree. Before the ceremony, we honorees were gathered in the chapel. David entered, took me aside, and proceeded to apologize! He felt badly for not inviting me to sit with him and his daughter. He explained that he had recently had a heart attack and that evening at the Jerusalem restaurant was the first opportunity he had to talk with her in person. My God! The fact that he even remembered my encounter with him months before and that he felt the need to apologize for his presumed breach of *derech erez* speaks volumes about his *menschlikeit*; his exquisite sensitivity for the feelings of others.

I grieve deeply for the passing of my beloved teacher and friend.  
Yehi Zichro Baruch.

- Rabbi Avi Schulman '84

David and I grew up one hour away from one another; he was from Newport News, Virginia and I from Richmond. To me, an endearing part of him was always represented by his “good old Virginia country fella” image, as he never lost his Southern drawl nor his abiding appreciation for his Newport News roots, his William & Mary education, and his love of Diet Coca Cola. I shared his love of Virginia but never was blessed in acquiring our mother tongue! We both were part of AZA during our teen years, growing up Southern! Of interest, David grew up Orthodox and came to embrace Reform Judaism only later in his educational journey.

Just last month, David was so excited to return to William & Mary to dedicate “the Ellenson Family Study Room” at Hillel’s Shenkman Jewish Center.

For those of you who knew or studied with David, words are not necessary to describe his warmth and personal caring for his students! His scholarship was extensive and impressive; his academic and administrative accomplishments truly significant. He will be known and respected for all of this, but he will be loved and appreciated for his humanity and passion.

He was a true lover of Israel and the Jewish people, may his memory be for a blessing!

- Steven Windmueller, Ph.D.

Emeritus Professor of Jewish Communal Studies, former Director of the Zelikow School of Jewish Nonprofit Management

David was one of the menschiest people ever, and aside from his encyclopedic knowledge of texts, he had the same level of care and knowledge about other people. One of my favorite stories was, about five years after I was ordained, he saw my mother at a public event that I wasn't even at. He immediately went up to her, remembered her, remembered her name, and remembered that she was my mom. It was unbelievable, and his hugs were legendary. I will miss him so deeply, along with the entire Jewish world, and his memory will truly be for a blessing.

- Rabbi Geoffrey A. Mitelman '07

Dear Jackie, Ruth and Lorne, Micah and Sara, Nomi and Spencer, Hannah and Rebecca, and Rafi, Lily, Rose, Shai and Yonah,

My deep condolences to all of you on the death of your beloved husband, father, father-in-law and grandfather. I can hear David's voice in my head speaking about Jackie and sharing parenting stories when I was the Admissions and Recruitment Director on the NY Campus (2004-2010). He loved you beyond measure and it is truly remarkable that his love extended to thousands of people around the world. Perhaps it's like the children's song, Love grows one by one, two by two, and four by four, Love grows 'round like a circle and comes back knocking at your front door. As David shared his magnificent love with the world, may it continue to return to you again and again, forever.

I was blessed to study with him on the LA campus and to always learn from him wherever he taught. He is missed by and has made an indelible mark on the hearts of thousands. Most important he was your precious family member. May God bring comfort to you all as you are surrounded in loving memories of your own and of the thousands and thousands who loved and were loved by your beloved, David.

B'Shalom,  
Rabbi Faith Joy Dantowitz '93

Words cannot truly express the loss of David, both to his family and to all who knew him. He was the epitome of a mensch in addition to his awesome intellect. As part of the "older" cohort in the 2002-2003 Year-in-Israel class, we formed a special bond with David. And it was such a privilege to see, speak, and learn from him regularly on the NY campus in the following years. His door was always open, and I feel blessed that I received smicha from him....I am looking at the pictures right now! My heart goes out to you, Jacquie, and all the family. May wonderful memories and the support of friends and family bring you comfort and peace. We have lost a giant and a friend.

- Rabbi Debra Goldstein '07

Such a tremendous loss. David was always so very kind and had a guten neshoma. I loved how he would tear up mid-speech and how wise a man he was. My heart goes out to his beautiful family.

- Cantor Rebecca Garfein '93

David Ellenson z"l was my teacher during my time in Wexner and he was an important sounding board as Chicago Jewish Day School was being created. I would like to think he was a friend as well. With his warmth, smile and sincerity, he made everyone feel as though you were a close and valued person, a friend. He touched so many lives, across so many communities.

Please accept my condolences and wishes that his legacy be continued by the faculty, alumni and students of HUC.

My husband and I cherished our time with David and are both heartbroken over his sudden death. May his name be for a blessing.

Warm regards,  
Wendy Platt Newberger

Rabbi Ellenson was an impactful and visionary leader who made immense contributions to the HUC community over his decades of service. He empowered and uplifted countless students over the years, leaving a meaningful legacy. His presence will undoubtedly be missed.

We want you to know that the JDC community has you and the HUC community in our thoughts during this difficult time. Do not hesitate to let us know if there is anything we can do to help. Please pass along our sympathies to Rabbi Ellenson's family, friends, students and all who had the privilege of knowing him.

May his memory be a blessing.

Sincerely,  
Andrew Belinfante and the JDC Leadership

Condolences on the unexpected passing of this giant of a man, a man whose deep intellect is matched by his warmth and kindness. I am grateful to have been the mohel with him at britot and to have had the chance to know him and to learn from him to some small extent. The world is better for his involvement, and sadder with his passing.

- Dr. Emily Blake

We will always remember from our years together in Los Angeles David's smile, intellectual honesty, and care of family.

David was a true role model for Klal Yisrael-bridging the seemingly insurmountable divisions in our communities. His humility helped heal the divides.

We will always remember our Chanukah and birthday celebrations together. Our Shabbat discussions with David and Jackie were always memorable.

Daniel sends special love to Micah.

With love to Jackie and the kids,

Frieda, Steven, Daniel, Shira, Jonathan Huberman

Rabbi Ellenson was a beloved teacher, mentor and friends - from my days as his student at HUC's School of Jewish Communal Service in the '80s, and later as part of the Temple Beth Am Library Minyan and extended community. Sending love and prayers for comfort to the entire Ellenson family.

He will be missed greatly, and I know his memory will always be for a blessing.

- Sheryl Goldman '82

We are honored to have had Rabbi Ellenson in our lives.  
Rabbi Ellenson served our congregation, COMMUNITY SYNAGOGUE, for one short year. His impact on our lives lasted a lifetime.

Our sincere condolences,  
The Turok Family

With deep affection and gratitude to a wonderful Wexner teacher.

- Lydia Shorestein

David was such a sweet and kind person. When we were looking into adopting our children, he sent me relevant articles to read. When we brought our newborn daughter home from the hospital, he and Jackie had left a carseat from Rafi on our doorstep. Though we haven't been in touch since the family left LA I have always had such warm memories of them and their family. David's passing is a tremendous loss to all who knew him and my deepest condolences to Jackie and the family. Sending much love.

- Batya Ordin

I joined the administration of HUC-JIR as Director of the Rabbinical Program on the NY Campus in January, 2008. I didn't know David but quickly came to understand why he was so beloved. Despite all of the overwhelming demands of the presidency, especially navigating HUC-JIR through very challenging times, David wanted to stay connected to the students and the classroom. He was so happy when he was able to build in time to teach and to advise a few students on their theses. And how thrilled the students were when he offered those classes. I was honored to be able to sit in on such a class and to experience David as a teacher (though he was always teaching!).

David was the consummate mensch. I will never forget how he shlepped out to Long Island (it could have been the night before Thanksgiving) for shiva for my father. I remember the moment from ten years ago as if it was yesterday. We were getting ready to start the service and we were nine. There was knock on the door - who could have imagined a better tenth for a minyan than David Ellenson!

May the light of his life continued to burn brightly through all who knew him and were so deeply touched by him.

- Rabbi Reni Altman '88

In memory of David -- schoolmate, friend, teacher, mentor, scholar-rabbi role model. Words fail me at the magnitude of our loss. May God comfort Jackie and all his family among all the mourners of Zion. And may we liberal Jews not stray from his commitment to both tradition and modernity.

- Rabbi Joan Friedman, Ph.D. '80

Dear Jackie and family,

Like so many others, we were deeply saddened by David's sudden death. We all continue to need his generosity of spirit and the world needs his brilliant intellect, especially now. We hope that these recollections will bring you some comfort.

Many years ago our Adult Ed Committee at Adat Shalom in San Diego County arranged for David to come from LA to speak. Around 6:30 PM, I got a call from him that he was stuck on the freeway in the rain with a flat tire so Mark went to pick him up to get him to the Temple in time. After the talk, AAA fixed David's car and he returned to LA. The thing is, David never forgot this event. He retold the story of Mark "rescuing" him almost each time we saw him, including when he bestowed our DD degrees. He sweetly recalled and appreciated what we didn't think twice about. At that DD event, he acted warmly and warm-heartedly once again. My mom was declining from her recurrence of breast cancer but she and my father made it to the ceremony (HUC, LA) and left the lunch a bit early. I mentioned to David that they had to leave but they had asked me to send regards. He wanted to say hello in person so he caught up with them in the parking lot to chat for a few moments even though he had plenty of other things on his mind at that moment. Still, David took time to make them feel appreciated and cared for. We loved him, admired him, and respected him.

- Rabbi Deborah Prinz '78 and Rabbi Mark Hurvitz '78

Dear Jackie and Family,

There are truly not enough words to express my sense of loss for David and for your family. His teachings leave an eternal imprint on my memory and as a rabbi I will try to live up to his high standards of scholarship and learning. I treasure the picture of Rabbi Ellenson's hands on my shoulders for ordination. And I fondly remember you both attending our wedding in LA. You were both such a strong source of support and encouragement for us. Perhaps I most take to heart David's propensity for emotion and tears during lectures. It seems that tears flow easily for me these days as a congregational rabbi.

I hope that the strength of family and community that David helped build are holding you up and offering comfort at this time. His vision and legacy will live on. May his memory be an enduring blessing.

With deep love,

Rabbi Karen Citrin '01 '03 and Rabbi Micah Citrin '03, '05



I sadly never studied with Rabbi Ellenson but had the pleasure and honor of knowing him both through the LA Jewish community and as a student at HUC in the Jewish Communal Service program. He was always kind, caring and thoughtful in our interactions. I was deeply honored when he agreed to contribute to a book I edited and our interactions during that process were always meaningful, thought-provoking and heartfelt. I was deeply saddened to learn of his death. I know his memory will always be for a blessing

- Jeff Bernhardt '94

Dear Ruthie & Family,

We are sorry of the passing of your dear father. In reading about him, it is obvious that he enriched so many lives. May his memory be a blessing.

With Love, Benji & Ellie Rusonik

Absolutely heartbroken by the sudden passing of our former HUC President, Rabbi David Ellenson, a beautiful soul, a fount of wisdom and learning of the entirety of Judaism, whose incredible intellectual capacities were only surpassed by the size of his heart and soul. A generous, sweet, compassionate, warm, friendly, and very funny man, he was a classmate of my father's at HUC, and took an extra interest in looking out for me; even mentioning publicly at our graduation that it was "the first time he'd be bestowing a degree upon the child of a classmate." I will never forget his hands upon my head at our ordination, blessing me with words from both our tradition and his own wonderful heart. I always loved to learn with him, as so many of us were blessed to do, and always appreciated his genuine care and concern as he asked about how I was doing and what I was up to, both rabbinically and otherwise. The Jewish world has lost a giant, and he will be terribly and deeply missed. Zecher tzadik livracha, may this beautiful righteous soul always be remembered for blessing, and may his entire family be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

- Rabbi Joshua Strom '08

A brilliant mind, an innate ability to make anyone interacting with him to feel comfortable and welcome. Unique outgoing a Mensch.

- Frederic Lane

To Rabbi Jackie Koch Ellenson and her family,

With deepest condolences and in loving memory of David, my dear and cherished friend and former fellow graduate student. (A contribution has been made to Beit Halochem USA-Friends of Israel Disabled Veterans in David's memory.)

Ellen Birnbaum