

Dr. Ismar Schorsch: Celebrating Eighteen Years as Chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America



This month, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America will celebrate Dr. Ismar Schorsch's eighteenth anniversary as Chancellor. It is an event of major significance for the Seminary, Conservative Judaism, and our congregation, one of the twenty-

two founding synagogues of the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, and the oldest Conservative congregation in the region.



Dr. Ismar Schorsch

I hold Dr. Schorsch in especially high esteem and affection. We met in 1966, my first year as a rabbinical student. Dr. Schorsch, who himself was ordained as a rabbi by the Seminary in 1962, was a graduate student at the Seminary and Columbia University, working on his doctorate

in history. He was my first professor in Jewish history, and he made it come alive. His presentations were lucid, highly organized, and filled with the drama of Jewish life through the ages. To this day, I will refer to my copious notes from his lectures as I review different periods of Jewish history. As Chancellor, his leadership has continued to inspire me, and for many years now, I have been privileged to be part of his Chancellor's Rabbinic Cabinet, and benefitted from the more intimate meetings he convenes regularly with us.

Since he was named Chancellor in 1986, coinciding with the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Seminary, Dr. Schorsch has had a stellar effect on the institution, the Movement, and the Jewish world. The Chancellor of the Seminary is not only the custodian of the intellectual traditions of our Movement, he is the leader of Conservative Judaism worldwide. His vision informs all that we do.

As Chancellor, Dr. Schorsch has strengthened the institution, and advanced a vision of the Movement as a rabbi, not as an academician. Born in Berlin, he grew up in Pottstown where his father was the rabbi of Congregation Mercy and Truth, and he received his undergraduate degree from Ursinus College in College-

ville. He understands the soul of the Conservative Jew, and identifies with the mission of the Conservative rabbi. He has provided his colleagues with encouragement and support, understanding intimately the challenges we face on a daily basis in advancing Judaism.

Dr. Schorsch's weekly commentaries on the *parashat hashavua* are available on the internet, and are noted for both their erudition and accessibility.

Several years ago, Dr. Schorsch made it a priority to expand the scholarships the Seminary could offer to the rabbinical students. Too many rabbinical students, he believed, were distracted from their studies by the need to work excessively to earn the money needed for their tuition and other costs. He challenged his colleagues to redouble our efforts to raise the funds for these scholarships and fellowships. When our leadership approached me a couple of years ago and asked me to be AJ's Seminary honoree at the city-wide annual dinner, I asked that the funds raised be earmarked for a rabbinical school scholarship. I was honored that we were successful in our endeavor, and established the Congregation Aduv Jeshurun Rabbinical School Scholarship Honoring Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom.

In March, Chancellor Schorsch convened the first-ever reception bringing together recipients of these scholarships with the donors and their representatives. Cindy and I were honored to attend, and to meet **Ben Kramer**, a first-year student in the Rabbinical School, and the first recipient of our scholarship.

It was a thrilling experience. Ben is a native of California, and comes to the Seminary after a career in an internet company. Though raised in a home where religion was not a priority, he was inspired by his rabbi to begin a quest that ultimately resulted in his choice of the rabbinate as a career path. He is characteristic of many new students for whom the rabbinate became a calling after having tried other careers and found them unfulfilling. Ben is a man of great passion for Judaism, who aspires to the pulpit rabbinate. Cindy and I both feel certain he will be a strong addition to our ranks.

On Monday night, May 24, Dr. Schorsch will be honored for his vision and dedication at the Seminary. Cindy and I will be going, and I hope that a contingent of AJ supporters of the Seminary, who appreciate the work Dr. Schorsch has done and know the importance of building for the future, will join us. Please let me know if you would like to be among them.



Rabbi Seymour and Cindy Rosenbloom greet Ben Kramer, the first recipient of the Congregation Aduv Jeshurun Rabbinical School Scholarship Honoring Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom at the first National Scholarship Reception convened by Dr. Schorsch in March.

This is a wonderful season for the Seminary. In April, **Amy Mayer** spoke at JTS *Shabbat*. Our former executive director, Amy is in her third year of rabbinical school. This month, I will be attending the Seminary commencement where **Hilary Yohlin** will graduate from the combined program between the Seminary's List College and Columbia University. **Aaron Friedman** is also a student in the combined program, and in the fall, **Gabe Miner** will begin his studies there.

I am particularly proud and gratified that on May 23, my wife **Cindy** will be honored by AJWA Sisterhood for Torah Fund, which raises money for JTS, and on June 1, the city-wide dinner will be held at the National Constitution Center. A new display of the Seminary Library will be on exhibition, and Philadelphia Jewish leaders Jerome Shestack, Stanley Tuttleman and Rabbi Ira Stone will be honored.

All of this vitality is a rich tribute to the passion, vision and commitment of Chancellor Schorsch. His work has been a blessing to our people and our Movement. His example is a challenge to us all to work ever more effectively to advance the message of Conservative Judaism, and through it strengthen the Jewish people everywhere.

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