**Foreword**

Our revered colleague, Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff, stands on the shoulders of generations of rabbis and scholars who have shaped the Conservative Movement, first as it emerged in North America in the late 19th and 20th centuries and now as it continues to grow all over the world (where it is known as Masorti, meaning Traditional Judaism).

Conservative Judaism is sometimes mischaracterized as being a middle ground between Reform and Orthodoxy. Not so here: From this book’s first paragraph to its last, Rabbi Dorff clearly articulates Conservative Judaism’s essential, vital, and unique character—a resilient, authentic understanding of Judaism that balances response to the rapid pace of change in contemporary life with the eternal values of Judaism. The book’s subtitle—“evolving thought and practice”—also expresses this well.

 As Rabbi Dorff explains, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) of the Rabbinical Assembly, the 1700-member international organization of Conservative Rabbis, addresses questions of law that have evolved over millennia and are rooted in a multiplicity of texts. Rabbi Dorff turns to the CJLS responses, or *teshuvot,* as primary sources in his analyses of the evolving nature of Conservative Judaism. Some of the questions the Committee has addressed— such as whether women can serve as rabbis and whether same-sex couples may wed under Jewish law—have shaped a generation (see chapters six and eleven respectively).. Other queries, while seemingly small—such as whether quinoa is kosher for Passover—are nonetheless vehicles for testing and reinforcing the mechanisms by which change is made in the Conservative Movement.

Rabbi Dorff's publications include more than 200 articles on Jewish thought, law, and ethics, together with twelve books he wrote and another fourteen he edited or co-edited. We might suggest that Rabbi Dorff’s extensive teaching, speaking, and writing constitute a lifetime of preparation for this thirteenth book. Here he draws on history and philosophy, explains the Conservative Movement’s contributions in critical areas such as theology and prayer, and details how the CJLS works to illuminate the Conservative/Masorti Movement’s unique, evolutionary perspective. He also zeroes in on Zionism and the Masorti Movement in Israel, where the approach of “evolving thought and practice” is finding increasing resonance among citizens of the Jewish State.

The journey that began in the early 19th century as emancipated Jews began to take their place in modern society while maintaining a deep devotion to Jewish tradition and values continues today. We are indebted to scores of colleagues, including Rabbi Dorff, for their many decades of work on the Law Committee. And we are especially indebted to Rabbi Dorff for drawing together all the strands that define the Conservative Movement—theological, legal, philosophical, historical—into a tapestry that represents this uniquely American movement that has spread far beyond these borders. The breadth and depth of Rabbi Dorff’s work will resonate with his colleagues and provide an extraordinary source for teaching and preaching; enlighten Conservative Jews about the essential nature and significance of their movement; and provide scholars with an abundance of primary material for their future research and writing. The transmission of Jewish tradition begins in the Torah when Moses chooses Joshua as his successor, and from this ancient origin it passes through hundreds of generations, coming to rest on those whose life’s work is the preservation and perfection of this tradition. And in our generation Rabbi Elliot Dorff adds a link to this chain of tradition forged by all those who have gone before.

May we continue to imbibe their wisdom in the spirit of Yose ben Yoezer (Pirke Avot 1:4): “May your house be a meeting house for Sages…drink their words thirstily.”

Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, Executive Vice President

The Rabbinical Assembly