

Professor Israel Francus (z"l)

We are gathered together to remember the life and legacy of Dr. Israel Francus, a JTS Seminary College and Rabbinical School graduate and JTS's Judge Abraham Lieberman Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Talmudic Exegesis.

Professor Francus was an admired and adored teacher and an extremely warm-hearted person. Many, many students were either turned on to Talmud or became serious students of text because of him. He had a wonderful sense of humor, and he intertwined his witty remarks with his teaching.

His influence on a great myriad of students is incalculable. Students young and old recalled his inspiring stories and his care and concern for them as people. Even when he was critical of a student, he was friendly and encouraging, as well as patient with both beginners and more advanced students. Not only did he teach them Talmud and Codes, but he also taught his students the importance of remembering and honoring one's teachers.

So many have shared stories about him. Several alumni shared that when they took his class, there was never enough time to share the important point he was making, so when class ended, Professor Francus left the classroom and walked down the hall while in midsentence, leaving the class to either trail him back to his office or stay behind to finish up taking notes.

Rabbi Josh Gruenberg shared, "The joy of taking Dr. Francus' class cannot be overstated. In the span of just one class, he could make you laugh to your core with lightning-fast quips, remind you of the great care rabbis have always taken in understanding our tradition, lift you up with a compliment that inspired you to work harder, and make you cry as he shared heartfelt stories and lessons on the occasions of his teachers' yahrzeits."

Professor Francus had no interest in administrative details. When asked for a syllabus, by Dr. Stephen Garfinkel, he once said, "Syllabus? You took that course with me over 30 years ago. Do you remember it?... The course is even better now, so you write up the syllabus."

On a personal level, he and Tova were part of our community – The Francuses lived around the corner in Morningside Gardens. As a young married graduate student, I too lived there, and we davened together in the Seminary synagogue. They always joined for meals in the Seminary sukkah, and we'd see the two of them every day walking up and down Broadway for their exercise."

One of the most vivid memories I—all of the faculty – have of him is when he played with our young children during faculty-board barbecues.

ילדו כל המלמד בן חברו תורה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו ילדו (Sanhedrin 19b). I understand this as the coda to Prof. Francus's life: Dr. Francus, for all his travails earlier in life, never lost a

belief in the future – the future that would be forged by children, by his students. And this propelled his career which nourished the lives of so many.

Yehi Zikhro Barukh. May his memory be for a blessing.