

November 12, 2024

To the Gender Justice Caucus of the Association for Jewish Studies:

It is with great pleasure that we nominate Professor Elisheva Carlebach, Salo Wittmayer Baron Professor of Jewish History, Culture and Society at Columbia University, for the AJS Gender Justice Caucus Award for Mentorship. Elisheva Carlebach arrived at Columbia University in 2008 after many years at The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York. She is a specialist in early modern European Jewish history with a focus on Germany from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Professor Carlebach has published three monographs, dozens of articles, and has a forthcoming book on Jewish women in early modern Europe. Among the many theoretical frameworks that her work engages with, her focus on gender history and theory has inspired her undergraduate and graduate students to pursue research that explores these aspects of Jewish history as well. Professor Carlebach teaches courses ranging from broad surveys of late antique and medieval Jewish history to more specialized courses in early modern book history, religious conversion, and Jewish communal history. In 2017, she was awarded the Lenfest Distinguished Columbia Faculty Award, which recognizes the excellence of Columbia University faculty as teachers, scholars, and mentors. As her students and colleagues, we can think of no better candidate for the AJS Gender Justice Caucus Award for Mentorship.

Professor Carlebach has been an important mentor to Jewish studies scholars around the world, as exemplified by the collected reflections from her students and colleagues which we have compiled here. When interacting with new students, she always takes the time to understand their intellectual interests and challenges, offering not only expert guidance through thoughtful feedback, but also genuine encouragement and profound support. Her mentorship goes far beyond academic achievement: it helps students build confidence, nurtures their intellectual curiosity, fosters academic rigor, and empowers them to find their own voices. She introduces students to lasting networks of kind and supportive colleagues, providing foundations that significantly shape both their academic journeys and personal growth. One former student described her wisdom, guidance, and generosity even before submitting an application to graduate study: “she willingly and without hesitation responded to an email from me as a bewildered undergraduate, and took the time to meet with me and offer direction about the basics of applying to graduate study. For nearly two decades, Prof. Carlebach has been unflagging in leaving no email unanswered, no request to meet denied, no ask for a letter of recommendation unfulfilled.” She embraces the motto that once you are her student, you are always her student. At the same time as she encourages progress, she possesses an acute sense of when to provide creative space.

Professor Carlebach is known to treat all students as her own, even those who are not formally her advisees. One student wrote: “While I ended up attending a PhD program at a different university and having advisors from that program, Elisheva continued to mentor me and meet with me, especially when my official committee members proved to be absent and unable to provide me with the academic and emotional support I needed. Elisheva met with me, helped me find a dissertation topic, gave me encouragement when I was close to giving up, and continued to advocate for me in numerous ways. I will be forever grateful for her support.” An international

student similarly recalled: “By welcoming me as a visiting scholar at Columbia University in 2018, she opened up a world of inspiration. Although she was not my supervisor and had no formal obligation toward me, she embraced the role of a mentor, supporting me not only by caring deeply about my work but also by affirming its importance.”

Professor Carlebach is a paragon not only of professional mentorship, but of intellectual leadership. To be in her presence as she asks questions of primary sources and scholarly works is to regularly receive a master class in sensitive reading of texts and sharp appreciations of analysis. To have her read a piece of your own writing is to be presented with penetrating insights and constructive suggestions that elevate any work. In the classroom as well, Professor Carlebach exemplifies a marvelous blend of brilliance and wit. Anyone fortunate enough to meet her knows the privilege of learning from her gracious example and keen empathy. A junior colleague who has co-taught with her described the way in which Professor Carlebach treated her as an equal from the outset: “It is an honor to be able to see her precise and pointed guidance to students in the classroom, and I've learned a tremendous amount from watching her teach. She has taught me that I can lead in my field as well, and that I am a strong partner—regardless of my tenure or appointment status—in the academic world.”

Colleagues admire Professor Carlebach’s rare ability to marry her scholarly erudition with practical wisdom. One colleague spoke of Professor Carlebach’s sage advice on topics as varied as research, departmental dynamics, interacting with administrators, or how to balance child-rearing with scholarship. “Elisheva is the rare scholar and mentor who can see both the forest and the trees simultaneously and advise accordingly. She serves as a model for how to pursue multiple commitments with passion and balance the demands of teaching, research, raising a family and just being a mensch.” Those former students who now have their own students address their questions by asking, “how might Professor Carlebach approach this matter,” and in those instances in which they are able to recall her insights from comparable situations, they know that the next generation of scholars is benefitting not from their own thinking, but from their role in passing along the wisdom of their mentor.

Professor Carlebach has indelibly changed the field of Jewish studies by dedicating time and energy to uplifting the careers of so many of the next generation of scholars, especially women. She has provided crucial advice to emerging female scholars on how to navigate institutional gender biases in graduate school and beyond. Professor Carlebach is beyond devoted to her students — no matter how busy she is, she will always meet, support, and fight for them. She gives students confidence in faltering moments and stands behind them regardless of the ultimate path they choose. By far the most important education we have received from her is the model that she sets: she leads by example, somehow gracefully intertwining the roles of scholar, teacher, mentor, and friend.

Sincerely,

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