

Reflecting on the Meaning of Judaism as an Evolving Religious Civilization through the Poetry of Dr. Judith Kaplan Eisenstein

By Rabbi Erin Hirsh

Mordecai Kaplan introduced the idea that Judaism is more than a religion; Judaism is a **civilization**. Religious beliefs and practices are profound aspects of Jewish life, but our Jewish civilization also encompasses art, music, social justice, food, literature, language, history, values and ethics.

Judy's lifelong passion for Jewish music exemplifies her father's appreciation of the central role that creative arts have always played in Jewish communal life. When Judy was a young child, she loved Jewish music. Throughout her life, Judy created, shared, and taught Jewish music. Judy published the very first songbook of Jewish music for children. Eventually, Judy earned a doctorate in Jewish music education and became Dr. Eisenstein. For Jewish people all over the world, the joy of *Hanukah* is not rekindled in our hearts until we sing Dr. Eisenstein's English version of *Hanukah*, *O Hanukah*.

On the next page you will find a poem that Dr. Eisenstein wrote describing the role of Jewish music in our civilization.

It would be a wonderful poem to read aloud when:

- teaching Judy's story or about Jewish music
- celebrating *Shabbat Shira*
- or honoring a cantor or a choir.

It can also be used as a text to study with teens and adults.

Judy's life and career afford us a unique opportunity to teach learners of all ages that Judaism is a civilization at the same time as we teach the richness and power of Jewish music. We can't imagine a more fitting way to honor Dr. Judith Kaplan Eisenstein.

The people gave the music life,
and the music, in turn, pulsed in the people,
passing from parent to child,
and from land to land.
The joys and triumphs,
the tenderness and warmth,
the agony and sorrows,
the prayer and protest which we shared by Jews
and made them one,
were poured into music;
and where they are still felt,
that process continues today.
When we live for a moment with that music,
we are touching the pulse itself,
and our own is quickened in turn.

- *Dr. Judith Kaplan Eisenstein*
Heritage of Music, 1972