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רח' זינוסטינסקי 61, רמת-גן, טל. 734921



November 10, 1971

Rabbi Norman Lamm
Jewish Center
131 W. 86th Street
New York, New York

Dear Rabbi Lamm:

Enclosed please find a transcript of a recent radio broadcast on the Israeli Army radio station.

The participants in the interview were Dr. Daniel Tropper, our Israeli director; Yaacov Boyer, a Gesher field director; as well as several young people who took part in Gesher Seminars.

We hope that you will find this both interesting and enjoyable.

Very truly yours,

Ahava Gross
Ahava Gross

enc:



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Thursday 21 of AV 5731
August 12, 1971
Israel Defense Forces Station (Galei Zahal)

DR. TROPPER: Gesher is an organization which was founded two years ago with the purpose of bridging the gap between the religious and the secular communities in the State. We are convinced that the bridge can be built only upon the foundations of Judaism. I speak here of Jewish values not so much as of Jewish observances. Judaism is the heritage of all of us and it represents the unifying factor for Israel.

ANNOUNCER: A seminar was recently held at the field school in Gush Etzion in which the opportunity was given for religious and non-religious youngsters to come together. The organization sponsoring it is called GESHER. Concerning this organization we are hearing from Dr. Tropper, the head of the organization and from Yakov Boyar, the program coordinator.

DR. TROPPER: The main thrust of our work is among youth and we organize a variety of activities for them.

YAKOV BOYAR: Our operations are based upon two premises. Firstly, we base ourselves upon the desperate situation which exists in the country between religion and the people, between the Jews and Judaism, and between the religious and non-religious populations. Everyone agrees the situation is not good, each from his own point of view. One claims it is not good that we have religious coercion. One claims that it is not good that we have anti-religious coercion. We claim that it is not good that people speak about coercion at all. We want to bring about a bridging of the gap very simply- by understanding and dialogue.



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Let everyone do what he wishes to do but if we understand each other there will be fewer points of contention. This is the first point.

A second point is that we all agree that Judaism must maintain a basic and important place within the Jewish people. No one denies this. One calls it "Tradition" another "Religion" and another "Heritage." Everyone as he wishes. But everyone agrees that it is important and that it is good to know it. To observe or not to observe is a personal problem for each person to tackle- it is not our problem. He decides after he knows. It is like a student in school who is asked to write a composition. If he is given only one topic he is not satisfied. However, if he is given a selection of topics he is able to select that which he prefers. This is the problem with our state. Each one receives only one topic; the chevra know nothing about Judaism.

Even in religious schools where the students observe mitzvot and learn Jewish philosophy, they generally keep religious observance by rote, because this is what they were taught to do. The time has come for them to begin to think, to deepen their understanding, to really know Judaism.

ANNOUNCER: You try to give the youth a religious experience. What are your methods?

YAKOV BOYAR: I would like to alter that concept slightly. It is not that I deny that they have a religious experience but we must look at it in context of the total experience. Dr. Tropper has previously stated that he is not certain as to the source of this experience- I too do not know precisely how to define it. It is a fantastic experience of encounter between two types of youth that in reality are one unit. Until now they were under the impression that they are two separate units and that there is no link between them- suddenly they discover that they have



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so much in common, that there is more to unite than to divide, that they have many mutual interests. And here they come together to discuss the most basic concept of all, their very essence, Judaism. From this springs forth the deep experience of coming together. I have no doubt that within this general experience there is also an element of religious experience- whether one will call it a religious experience or not is up to him. But that they undergo an unusual experience at the seminar none of the participants will deny.

ANNOUNCER: The seminars are but one program of Gesher which in addition sponsors days of study, regular discussion groups and workshops. What do the activities give the secularists and what do they give the religious? Orna Bar On of Ramat Hasharon (secularist)

ORNA: I understand them! I know them! I understand why they are religious!

ANNOUNCER: Eitan Kedmi (secularist)

EITAN: Before I came to the Gesher seminars, a religious person in my eyes was a short man, fat, with a kapota, with payes, and black clothing. Now all this has changed. Today a religious person to me is a young man, nice- it's just that..... its just that he has a kippa on his head. This to me is very crucial.

ANNOUNCER: Sara Weiss, a religious girl.

SARA: It's very difficult to say what happened. But one thing is for sure- the seminar raised my estimation of all human beings. I met with other people and judged them as individuals.

ANNOUNCER: Does the non-religious youth change to be religious as a result of the seminar? We asked Daniel Tropper.



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DR. TROPPER: No, not as a rule. It happens only in isolated cases. In general, as the youngsters have indicated, the seminars change their attitudes regarding Judaism. They now see that their religious peers share many common values with them, such as love for Israel, security- the very same values which they cherish. To change into a religious person who observes all the mitzvot is something which requires a long process. It will happen to some individuals and if they find meaning in it I am happy for them- but this is not the goal of Geshher. The goal of Geshher is, as its name implies, to build a bridge by bringing all of us closer to the values of Judaism. After this point, let everyone do what he wishes.

ALTAR: Everything is created jointly. We are both searching for something and in these meetings we meet in the middle. In the process we slowly develop profound friendships.

I want to say something else. Many of the youth reach Geshher out of a search for truth in life. What is really true? Why was man created? Why should we live?-- these and similar questions. Geshher is a vital stop along our route. For many of us it is a stop at which we will remain for a long time.