

Dear Rabbi Lamm,

Hopefully, you had a good holiday here in Israel, and are rested and refreshed as you head back to New York. I want to thank you again for finding the time to meet with me in New York, and for sending me your very thoughtful piece on the Holocaust, "Faces of God." I have read it once, and will send you some thoughts on it over the coming weeks as I read it again.

I arrived in Israel just before Yom Kippur after a very successful eight week stay in the US. Shortly after we met in New York, I was scholar in residence for a weekend in Phoenix. On Shabbos I delivered two sermons, and after the Kiddush gave a one hour class on the subject "The Teleology of Maimonides." Following the class, the president of the shul told me that he was undertaking to raise money to bring me out for a two week stay. I guess he liked the class.

On Sunday I led a workshop in Non-violent (or: Compassionate) Communication, a method I learned last year and that I am now beginning to teach. (In my "shtut meshugener" Purim message I mentioned it to you as a skill I think every musmakh would be most enriched by having.) I was then invited to return for another weekend on my way back from LA. They specifically requested that I teach again both Torah and Compassionate Communication. So I went off for two weeks to LA, in which I visited friends, and also preached, taught Torah and led Compassionate Communication workshops, then came back to Arizona in September.

The wonderful news is that in the course of two months the people in Arizona raised a cool \$5,000. It covers airfare from Israel, hotel, car rental and a very generous wage. They are still hoping to raise money for an publicity campaign. God willing, I will visit Arizona for two weeks beginning Purim. (Anything beats being there in August.) Being so dramatically appreciated and desired is still new to me. I hope it is a sign of things to come.

I have a special thrill and great joy teaching Compassionate Communication. First, because I am especially pained when I see people getting hurt by words, perhaps because of what I myself have experienced. Second, since people are able to apply these skills right away, it allows me to make a very immediate contribution to *tikkun olam*.

As I studied and applied this skill over the past year, I have seen just how valuable it is to me. It was gratifying to now see the effect of teaching it. In LA, a couple that heard me present asked if I would agree to counsel them based on this method. I did, and a relationship that was about to break up was given another opportunity to work itself out. In Arizona, parents raised a whole host of parenting issues, and left with the sense that they received new and valuable ideas. And the Rabbi and a group of congregants in Arizona registered for a two-day Compassionate Communication seminar.

Speaking about compassionate communication, our mutual friend and colleague, Rabbi Blech, mentioned your name in his last message. He shared with me how hurt he was that you were publicly attacked for your "getting out of the cave" speech at the RIETS dinner. It pained me, as well, that you were subjected to this grief because I need to see people, any person, treated with respect. Even more so somebody like yourself, who combines knowledge of Torah, personal qualities and tireless work--15.5 hours per day, you told me--on behalf of the yeshiva. And it pained me even more because the message you delivered reflects my own understanding of how Torah can be life-enriching for both the individual and the community, and I need to see it received with respect. In addition to all that, I need to see Torah discussed in an environment of respect and ethical speech. On top of all this is the personal *kesher* to you, which makes this story much more painful.

There is an incident that took place many years ago that comes to mind in this context. Rabbis Amital and Lichtenstein were visiting NY for the Gush dinner, and they hosted a get-together in the YU cafeteria for graduates and friends of Gush. There was food, *divrei torah* and

singing. At a certain point in the evening the two Rabbis got into a debate about what is expected from a Gush graduate now studying in university. Rabbi Amital thought that what was important was to keep alive the emotional connection to the experience of learning Torah in Israel, while Rabbi Lichtenstein saw no reason that one should not learn 5 hours a day regardless of where one was...

Each began bringing support for his position. After three rounds, Rabbi Amital said to us: "I want to clarify for you where Rav Aharon and I disagree." He then succinctly summarized the two positions, and the discussion moved on to another subject. This happened 18 years ago, but it is still vivid in my mind. It illustrated to me how to argue: one states the opposing position, one's own position and the reasons for both, and then lets the listener decide for himself.

Years later I found out that this was the Beit Hillel way of doing things. In discussing why the halakhah was established according to Beit Hillel, the gemarah in Eruvin (13B) says that it is because "they were tolerant and humble, and they would study their position and that of Beit Shammai. Not only that, they first mentioned the view of Beit Shammai view and only then their own."

To which I usually add, borrowing the style of Tosafot:

V'im tomar, what does character have to do with how the halakhah is paskened? V'yesh lomar, that is the whole point...

In LA last month I met with a good friend, Stan Levy, who earns a living as a lawyer and also serves as the Rabbi of the Jewish Renewal community there. He described to me a series of public forums that he and Rabbis of other denominations held for the Jewish community at large. They agreed at the outset that nobody would attack anything another said. Instead, each would state his own position, bring sources and explain why he found this particular position appealing and meaningful. It was a great success, both in terms of the material covered as well as the paradigm they presented of how to disagree.

Perhaps one possible response to the way your speech was attacked would be to establish this paradigm at Yeshiva. Like you, I respect academic freedom and the right of free expression. But these principles are not above the Torah and do not justify violations of Jewish ethics. An entire range of values, of which academic freedom is only one, need to co-exist together. Perhaps you, Rabbi Lamm, alone or in consultation, could choose a model for how discussions, disagreements and arguments are to take place, and then add a stipulation about it in employment contracts at YU. There may be a period of adjustment and grumbling about the new rules, but as people adapt to the model there will be a more peaceful and respectful environment at YU. It would likely serve as a beacon for the broader Jewish community, as well, which so very much wants to see Torah discussed in an ethical, respectful manner.

I want to share with you again the joy I feel about our relationship, my great respect for you and your message, and the pain I feel about what happened. I pray that you find the inner strength to walk the not-so-easy path of Beit Hillel. I often think of it as the way of "passion and compassion," stating one's position with passion and arguing it with erudition, but never denigrating one's opponent. By so doing you will ultimately prevail, just like the halakhah was finally decided according to Beit Hillel.

Best wishes and nesi'ah tovah,

Uzi

P.S. Enclosed is a piece on Breishit, which I hope you enjoy. I am very pleased that Judaic Seminar, an internet parashat shavua forum with high standards, included it in their issue this week.

Considering all that is said in our Deity's name, I especially call your attention to the last two sections, "The Art of Listening" and "Misquoting God."