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August 1, 1967

Dr. Asher Siev  
1505 Waring Ave.  
Bronx, N.Y.

Dear Dr. Siev:

This letter will serve to summarize my suggestions to you concerning the forthcoming Golden Anniversary of Yeshiva College. Please forgive the disconnected and unorganized form of my ideas. They are given in no special order.

I believe that the festivities should not last more than a day or a weekend, should be concentrated, and by all means should strive for high academic excellence (non-pedantic, of course) rather than for the stereotype of the Alumni-Homecoming species.

I feel that this event can become more than a celebration, and that it can fill a real void in the life of the Yeshiva. We-- that is, Yeshiva University-- are the major institution of what is known, for better or for worse, as "Modern Orthodox Judaism". As the academic center of Modern Orthodoxy, it is our responsibility to articulate clearly and convincingly what we are, what we believe, what we have to contribute, wherein we differ from others and wherein we do not. For about half a century now, successive generations of Yeshiva students have indulged in the luxury of ridiculing the concept of Synthesis. I suppose that this is a combination of adolescent questioning and rebellion, authentic criticism, and typically Jewish, and especially Orthodox, collective masochism (otherwise known as "bittul"). Yet the fact remains that this lofty ideal, to which we refer by that unfortunately pedestrian word "Synthesis", is our *raison d'etre*. From time to time, some of us have ventured to discuss it in intellectually respectable form. But it has not yet been attempted in a systematic manner.

I feel that this forthcoming anniversary is the appropriate opportunity to fill this lacunae. If this is done well, as I certainly hope it will be, then it should be published in one volume. This book will serve as the only available source for the ideology of Modern Orthodoxy and as an academically proper textbook for Freshman orientation at Y.U.



Following are some of the individual lecture themes that I can think of at first blush:

1. Synthesis as an ideological Principle in the History of Yeshiva University. How the idea which was ultimately embodied in Yeshiva College was treated and developed by those who founded the institutions later to become Y.U. (Klaperman's treatment needs considerable elaboration to show the development of the idea qua idea. It also requires a more fundamental attempt at an intellectual formulation from a critical point of view, and not only quotations from then contemporary Yiddish newspapers).

2. Institutional Predecessors of Y.U. I'm thinking of the Yeshiva of Rabbi Rheines which, though it didn't last very long, represented the idea of Y.U.

3. The Idea of "Synthesis" in the Works of Various Historical Personalities. Some of the greatest Jewish personalities of all times, particularly those who have been exposed to non-Jewish culture, developed-- implicitly or explicitly-- a philosophy or at least modus operandi for dealing with the problem. I myself wrote briefly a comparison of Kook and Hirsch on this theme. While a lot of fundamental research has gone into the attitude of Maimonides, it needs a concise, academic, and readable summary. Much more work has to be done on Saadia, Halevi, etc. Perhaps someone who reads French can work on Benamozegh.

4. An Evaluation of Synthesis at Y.U. Is it really working at Y.U.?-- and why not? What's right with us-- and what's wrong? Can we and ought we change our manner of effectuating the ideal? This is potentially a bombshell -- and potentially the most creative result of the whole conference.

I suppose other ideas will occur to me as I go on -- but I must stop now because of the pressure of other work. I hope that this memorandum will in some way prove helpful to you and your committee in your deliberations.

Good luck, and best regards to Mrs. Siev and to Yussie.

Cordially yours,

NORMAN LAMM  
PJ