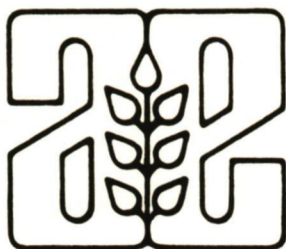


Aruch



Why Are We Here?

An Address by
DR. NORMAN LAMM
President, Yeshiva University

ALBERT EINSTEIN COLLEGE OF MEDICINE
OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY



A speech delivered by Dr. Norman Lamm, President of Yeshiva University, on Thursday, June 16, 1977, during a dinner at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine marking the induction of new members of the Board of Overseers and celebrating the placing of the cornerstone for the Irwin S. and Sylvia Chanin Institute for Cancer Research.

Why Are We Here?

**An Address by Dr. Norman Lamm,
President, Yeshiva University**

Mr. Parker, distinguished guests at the dais, ladies and gentlemen. I am very grateful to you, Mr. Parker, for your introduction. I am reaching the end of that period when I can be introduced as a "new President." I think at the next Einstein affair, I shall probably qualify as an old President.

I would like to add my congratulations to those already expressed by the Chairman to new members of the Board and to all members, professional and lay, of the Albert Einstein family.

In an age when democracy is misinterpreted as that which sinks to the lowest common denominator, when "equality of opportunity" is misinterpreted as a kind of imposed but fictitious equality of talent, Einstein stands out as a brilliant exception. Its faculty and its student body constitute a genuine meritocracy in which you can get ahead only if you deserve it. Its lay leadership represents to my mind an authentic aristocracy of service, where only if you serve are you deserving of recognition and where you serve because you feel an inner compulsion to put your talent and your substance at the service of your fellowmen. So, to the entire Albert Einstein family here gathered, and to those who aren't here as well, my warmest felicitations.

Permit me a few words about the mission of this school in which we are all involved. In the past twenty-two years we have undergone a change of focus that speaks volumes about the whole nature of our enterprise and also tells us a great deal about sociological changes in the American community.

One of the main purposes for founding a medical school under Jewish auspices was because many Jews could not find their way into the medical fraternity—neither as students nor as faculty—without great difficulty. We were guests who were tolerated—and sometimes not tolerated. The Jewish community felt that the time had come when we had to have the kind of school where people would be accepted on merit alone—because they are of value to medicine and science and education; where the Jewish community would conduct the model of an open medical society, as it were; where there would be no racial or religious discrimination.

That ideal was admirably achieved and, as a result, medical schools opened up to Jews throughout the country. It happened not only to medical schools, but to all or most schools; so much so, that we Jews, who are in fact such a small minority in this country, are probably the smallest genuine minority group in this country that fails to qualify as a “minority” in the amazing lexicon of our day.

T hat purpose having already been achieved, what happens to the Albert Einstein College of Medicine? What do we stand for? What do we do? Why are we here?

It seems to me that the answer is a simple one. Jews have always contributed to the well-being of society and the common weal of mankind in the same manner as all others contribute—namely, as individuals. But our feeling was that we must make a contribution as a *people*. We must undertake an institutional Jewish contribution, whereby a Jewish-sponsored school which accepts and welcomes students and faculty of all kinds—of all races, religions, faiths, ethnic backgrounds, but which is largely sponsored by the Jewish community—would make an institutional effort in research and medical education and basic science that would constitute a genuine contribution to America and to all of mankind.

I think that Einstein is doing that in a splendid way that speaks volumes for those who support it, and for the scientists and the teachers and students who populate the school itself. The combination of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine as a research

institution, as a training institution for physicians and for scientists, with the unique educational mission of Yeshiva University, spells out that special distinction that we may be so rightly proud of—that we have made a contribution called the Albert Einstein College of Medicine to the well-being of America and of society in general.

We who are here are those who are further called to participate in this historic effort. Those who can—those who have the training, the academic equipment, talent and the personal proclivity for it—are the scientists, the clinicians, the researchers, the educators, the physicians. And the rest of us who understand it, who feel for it, who have a sense of the values that are involved—we are the ones who support it with our material assistance.

In this connection, I know that all of you will join me in a most heartfelt tribute to that glorious guest of honor this evening, Irwin S. Chanin.

Mr. Chanin, when I first met you, after I became President during that hot summer last year, I went to visit you and I remember we discussed that odd name that you bear—"Chanin." And I ventured a guess as to its derivation and you confirmed it. Let us share with your friends the source of your name.

The word Chanin is derived from the Hebrew, and more accurately pronounced *Chanun*, which means gracious, compassionate, kind. And what better word to describe Irwin Chanin than his own name, *Chanun*, a man of grace!

Rarely was a name more fitting for a man. There are people who give; many people give to charity, though never enough. But there is such a vast difference in the ways a man tends to his benefactions and his philanthropies, to his *tzedukah*, or charity. You can do it with a hard attitude, begrudgingly, or you can be a Chanin, a *Chanun*—gracious. Irwin *Chanun* is a model for all of us, one whom we will gladly want to follow.

A more basic question remains: What does all our assistance accomplish? Or, more subjectively and radically phrased: Why

do we do it? Why do we help? I am sure all of us could have had dinner at home and be finished with it faster, yet we have come here to this festive evening, and we work, and even when we go on vacation we're at it, trying to do something for Albert Einstein. Why do we do it? Is there anything more to it than appears at the surface? Why is Irwin Chanin so interested in a cancer institute? Why are all you good people here to help support this particular effort? I am not speaking of this building only, for it is more than merely bricks and mortar that we are celebrating here. This is only the shell in which so much activity in science, so much creativity in brain power, so much exercise of intellectual energy is going to take place and be invested in the frontiers of science.

Why do we do it? It is not only because if you help and if you contribute that buys a piece of research. It is not only because we are all somehow geared to the world of higher education and science and medicine. It is not only because some of us are tradesmen by nature, and we have a mercantile attitude, and we know that if we give a little bit, then the government will give more, and our gift is therefore a lever for government subsidies. It is not only because our benefactions are a tribute to these gallant and brilliant scientists of the College of Medicine, though they deserve it. Surely it is not only because our donations are tax deductible gifts. How sad it would be if American education and Jewish education were merely something that was tagged to a tax shelter! Why then are we here, and why do I personally feel I am on the same frequency with all of you with regard to this Chanin Cancer Institute? I think there is a very profound psychological spiritual reason.

The Governor earlier today spoke of a "mythology of cancer," and he is right. This is a mythology which has a very real basis in fact. Who of us hasn't known or doesn't now know someone who is a victim of this dread disease—one of those whose chances are not too good? And who of us who knows such a person—and all of us do—does not emphatically participate in the sense of dread and panic and, most of all, in the sense of simple helplessness and hopelessness? You

murmur to yourself, "But what can be done?" And you sense that with all your strength and your brains, your talents and your money, your family and your love and everything that God has given you, you are overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness, of despair. It is an agonizing inadequacy that eats into one's heart. What can I do? What can anyone do about it?

The answer we give here, now, is that there *is* a way of fighting back! It is not true that there is nothing that can be done about it. We can do something about it! If we are men and women of high resolve and of determination and intelligence and of good will, we don't give up the fight immediately. We realize that this scourge of mankind is a challenge to us to unite all our efforts. Those who have the technical knowhow must give their brainpower. The rest of us must give our direction and our assistance and our cooperation and our participation. We cannot give up. We dare not submit to that feeling of helplessness and hopelessness. We have each of us got to make this effort. When we are here, and when we help support this kind of effort, in this kind of Institute, in this kind of building, in this distinguished medical school, then we know that each of us is doing something. We are fighting back, and we are not helpless.

So, what we are doing here is—we are asserting our vanity. We are recovering our humanity. I mean that in a most sincere and deep way. We shall not permit future generations to fall prey to this disease. We shall certainly not allow ourselves to do nothing. We are here to determine that we are going to do something, something valuable and decent and noble—and effective. We are going to fight back.

So I congratulate you, my friends. I welcome you to this great effort, and I hope that all of us will be Chanins—*Chanuns*—and do what we must do and want to do, with the graciousness and compassion for which the Albert Einstein family has always been noted.

God bless you all.