

February 13, 1974

[REDACTED]

My dear [REDACTED]:

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Please forgive me for the delay in responding to your two letters. They were sent to me at Yeshiva University, and for a number of reasons I have not been in school for several weeks.

I read the material with considerable interest. You certainly seem to be an unusual person, and I admire your ambitiousness and pluckiness -- and the ethical sages of Israel always considered zerizut as an enviable trait.

In keeping with your request, I am mailing your material back to you.

Now, to the point of your request: my professorship in Jewish philosophy at Yeshiva University is effective in the undergraduate schools. I therefore do not sponsor any doctoral dissertations, and it is not within my competence to award doctorates in my field. Unfortunately, therefore, I am incapable of helping you in this respect.

Since you have confided in me so many details about your career and scholarship, as well as personal matters, permit me to react in an equally personal way, and I trust you will take my words in the very genuine spirit they are intended. I can very well understand that after having spent a lifetime striving for a certain goal, namely the doctorate, you should feel disappointed and frustrated that it still proves elusive. Nevertheless, for one who has such a wide background in Jewish learning and in classical wisdom, I wonder what a man of such erudition would say about the personal problem. In other words, if you divide yourself into two people, one with your scholarship and wisdom of experience, and the other the man who failed to achieve a specific goal which has value only in the eyes of certain segments of society, would not the first say to the second something of this sort:



"Take my advice and look at things with a broader perspective. Status symbols are evanescent, they have no ultimate meaning, and therefore do not deserve to become a source of anxiety for a thinking man."

Once again, forgive me for my temerity for suggesting this inner conversation to you...

With all my best wishes.

Cordially,

RABBI NORMAN LAMM

NL:cw