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Dear Rabbi Lamm,

I have composed this letter in my mind numerous times though inevitably, my most eloquent phrasing comes either late Friday night or in the middle of class. When I heard of your impending retirement my first thought was to write to you. In the following satisfaction over my brilliant idea I conveniently avoided a few details. As reality sunk in, the difficulty of the task I had set for myself only moments earlier began to dawn upon me. What would I write? How could I say everything that I meant to? The doubts continued to accumulate and a trip to the local Hallmark looked increasingly appealing. But somehow, my thoughts continuously returned to the letter that I had firmly decided not to write. I felt compelled to try, even if the only product I would be able to offer was the silent tribute of discarded papers attesting to my effort.

I will strive, as my English teacher often says, "to Strunk it." Pithy and precise will be my goals though I may, in my quest to include everything, bore you with mundane details. If this occurs feel free to skip ahead to the more exciting aspects of the letter. It is strange because I am literally the queen of brevity. Circumlocution annoys me and I cannot stand the use of a paragraph when a sentence or a word would suffice. Yet suddenly I find I cannot say enough so I apologize in advance for any extraneous information I may include.

My journey began at the start of my junior year. Inquisitive by nature, I found something lacking in the religious viewpoints that were supported my school. I was unable to accept their position without first understanding it though my teachers often refused to tolerate what they viewed as criticism of their belief system. An avid reader, I looked through my father's library in search of relevant literature. I studied the Rav, Heschel, Weisel, Buber, and more. I enjoyed some more than others but there were none that I could wholly accept. Torah Umaddah was different. I can't really explain what it was, but, for the first time, my suspicions of what Judaism was really about

were substantiated, explained, and developed. I read Faith and Doubt, The Shma, and back issues of Tradition. I was fascinated by your ability to convey complex thoughts and concepts in a clear yet though provoking manner.

As I learned more about your work at Yeshiva University I began to respect you not only as an author and teacher but as a leader. I was in Stamford, CT, one weekend when I learned you were visiting. When I had the opportunity to meet you I was further impressed by your friendly and attentive demeanor. There were undoubtedly others vying for your attention yet you made me feel like you were genuinely interested in what I was saying. I was exhilarated at having met you, as my opinions of you had been confirmed first hand.

The Gemara in Bava Batra explains that if someone lives on the field of the Reish Galuta for three years, he does not have a chazaka. The Rashbam explains that the Reish Galuta is so busy with the needs of the community he might not notice a squatter on his land within three years. I am sure that your professional demands hardly allow for much free time. The fact that you took the time to call me is something I am unlikely to forget. The ability to discuss my question with you was an opportunity for which I will always be grateful. Your actions called to mind Rabbi A. J. Heschel who, on his return from marching in Selma, Alabama, said that he was praying with his legs. You took the sum of all your writings and concretized it, in action, in a single moment.

I don't really know what sort of letter one sends on news of a retirement. Congratulations sounds trite, We'll miss you seems superficial, and Bon Voyage is probably completely off base. To be honest, I'm not really sure how your change of position affects me personally, though I will be attending Stern next fall. Nonetheless this opportunity seems fitting to express the gratitude I feel for everything you have done, for the effort you have extended, and most importantly for acting as a role model for me outside the pages of your books. You have inspired me and will continue to do so, through your literature, through your lessons, and through your life.

Thank You

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Devora Whitman', with a stylized, flowing script.

Devora Whitman