



August 22, 2001

Rabbi Dr, Norman Lamm, President,  
Yeshiva University  
500 West 185th Street  
New York City  
U. S. A.

Dear Norman,

The packet of materials--especially the essay on Past and Future--brought home very forcibly the fact of your imminent retirement as President. of Yeshiva. You certainly fought a good--in both senses of the term-- fight.

I found the essay (which I read as soon as it arrived) very touching, to tell the truth. You describe many aspects of our life as Jews both eloquently and profoundly. There are two points I would like to relate to, one in support and one in disagreement.

I think you are too gentle on haredim. Perhaps your perspective is natural in the US, but not for me, and others like me, here. Many issues come to mind, but primarily the non-service in the army. I have now reached the point where it is clear to me that "learning Torah" is often camouflage (I would have difficulties with it as an argument anyhow), and the real reason is not even a negative attitude towards the State but simply the unwillingness to take the risk (and the time), when you will be defended by others. It is a simple case of דמא דידי סומק טפיר, with all that implies. It is simply a horrible posture. A relative whose son does not serve said to me in explanation (!) that his son "is not really a military type". As though my children were raised as bloodthirsty killers. So there is a profound moral divide, and it divides communities, not merely individuals.

I can support your story of the rosh yeshiva who identifies YU graduates by the dual attache case. One told me the same thing, in different terms (perhaps the same rosh yeshiva?), though he spoke of students of the rav. I'm not sure the description is really accurate--spiritual grass is also greener on the neighbor's side. But he may be right, and I would share the explanation I like to give for the phenomenon. Since at YU you never spend all your time learning kodesh, you are also trained to the habit of learning when you are also occupied with something else--secular studies, and then later, business, profession, what have you. The total learning schedule may communicate the idea that you learn only when you can only learn.

I don't know when your retirement actually takes place, but I am sure you will make your voice heard, as you should. Perhaps freed of the Presidency, you will be able to make it be heard in different ways, too.

Best wishes for a בתיבה וחתחמה טובה, especially as you enter a new dimension.

Arnold