

28 Menachem Av, 5749
August 29, 1989

Mr. Ludwig Jesselsohn
Chairman
Board of Trustees
Yeshiva University
500 West 185th Street
New York, New York 10033

Dear Mr. Jesselsohn:

This letter is long overdue. In early April of this year, I gave considerable thought as to how I might properly thank your president, Rabbi Norman Lamm, ~~for~~ for a simple act of chesed afforded to me on the occasion of my daughter's wedding. It then occurred to me that a letter addressed to you as chairman of Yeshiva's Board of Trustees would at least share with others the knowledge of a good deed that I'm sure Rabbi Lamm would modestly keep to himself. My rabbinic/teaching schedule often leaves little time for serious correspondence and so I sincerely hope that the lateness of this note in no way diminishes both my gratitude and your reception of the sentiments contained herein.

I am a graduate of the Yeshiva's high school in Manhattan (1960), an alumnus of the college (1964), and ordained from RIETS in 1967. Like so many young men and women, Yeshiva has been an extended family for me since my 13th birthday. Otherwise, though, I am in no way exceptional and have never considered myself deserving of any special considerations. Yeshiva has been good to me (and to my children), and I do my best to translate a formal education of some eleven-plus years into service and leadership for the communities that have retained me as their rabbi.

In the planning of my eldest daughter's wedding in late March, I sent an invitation to Rabbi and Mrs. Lamm. I knew full well that the probability of his attendance was highly unlikely. The invitation, however, was more than just a courtesy. Over the years, I have taken the time to read and study practically all of Dr. Lamm's scholarly writings. He was my Jewish Philosophy professor at Yeshiva and has been a seminal influence upon my evolving Jewish weltanschauung ever since. At rabbinic conventions, Rabbi Lamm's lectures were (and still are) eagerly anticipated, and his sermons--a nourishing delicacy for any rabbi to feast upon. And so, from afar, Rabbi Lamm became a critical orienting post in my religious and theological growth. The wedding invitation was thus an expression of profound gratitude and admiration to one who had become an intellectual and spiritual mentor.



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Some twelve years ago--at about the same time Rabbi Lamm assumed the presidency of the Yeshiva--I was undergoing a most difficult transitional period in my life. I read in one of Rabbi Lamm's initial communiqués that his door would be open to all who sought his counsel. Deeply in need of some objective and wise advice, I called to make an appointment fully expecting to be told that the new president's busy schedule understandably could not accomodate any meetings other than those relating to pressing University matters. You can imagine my pleasant surprise when I was told that Rabbi Lamm would be happy to see me upon my arrival in New York. We met soon after, and our appointment was neither rushed nor perfunctory. Rabbi Lamm's genuine concern for someone relatively unknown to him along with his sage advice (which, incidently, proved to be quite sound) helped me stabilize my priorities and inspired a resolve within to persevere and ultimately succeed. And so, in addition to the aforementioned admiration, there was no small measure of gratitude that accompanied my invitation to Rabbi Lamm.

Well, Rabbi Lamm acknowledged the wedding invitation with a handwritten note indicating that he would be honored to attend. I was simply overwhelmed. The day before the wedding, Rabbi Lamm's secretary called to say that Rabbi Lamm had just returned from Israel and that jet lag alone might preclude his coming. But, with rush hour traffic notwithstanding, Rabbi Lamm honored the entire assemblage with his presence. It was an unforgettable and incredibly proud moment for me to see Rabbi Lamm enter the reception area and witness everyone rise to greet one of contemporary Jewry's most celebrated sons.

Now, what I believe made Rabbi Lamm's gesture of kindness remarkable was the plain truth that there was no arguable reason for Rabbi Lamm to have attended the simcha. As I mentioned initially, I am only one of thousands of students who have passed through the portals of the Yeshiva. I consider myself no more worthy of attention than anyone else. My career has not been distinguished by any headline accomplishments, and yet, ...Rabbi Lamm came.

I wanted to address this letter to you because I felt it important to publicize a simple act of chesed by a truly modest man. All too often such deeds are overlooked or taken for granted during the tenure of a leader. In my humble estimation, such acts contribute to the greatness of a person no less than the more public profile of the man. And so, I felt you would want to know what an extraordinary president you have. Extraordinary, because of his concern for the ordinary; extraordinary, because of his tenacious dedication to principles and values that address themselves to the most precious of all relationships, that of rebbe and talmid, student and teacher. I doubt I can properly appreciate the multifaceted role of a university president. However, it does seem rather clear that nothing can compliment a president more than to say that he forever remains an intellectual and personal role model to students who continue to admire him as an exemplar of courage, wisdom and civility in a most demanding and noble mission.

If you deem it proper, I hope you will share my sentiments with the members of your Board, but with one request. Although I sign this letter, I would ask that my name not be mentioned at all. For you see, that is precisely the point. It

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mattered little who I was; I could have been any student or alumnus; Rabbi Lamm did for me what I believe he has and will continue to do for any member of what has become his extended and proud family--the men and women of Yeshiva University. May the Almighty continue to bless Rabbi Lamm's presidency with the success and strength it so deservedly merits.

With warmest wishes for a healthy and happy New Year, I remain