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NORMAN LAMM

December 13, 1987

"PEACE AND PRINCIPLE"

(Yeshiva University Hanukkah-Dinner)

I begin with a personal comment to our guest for the evening, Mrs. Jehan Sadat.

I know that the press of the Egyptian opposition parties -- and even, to an extent, the government party -- has been critical of you for agreeing to speak before Jewish gatherings, and that they will be equally or more critical for appearing tonight at a Yeshiva University dinner, people who are not only Jewish but actively pro-Israel and Zionist.

We too have been criticized -- both here and in Israel -- by people who are exercised by our invitation to you. There is a symmetry that shapes our relations.

It is to both of these groups, as well as to those of us here, that I address my remarks when I make the following historical observation: today is the thirteenth of December. It is on this very date on the secular calendar, exactly 783 years ago, in the year 1204, that there died in Fostat, the old capital of Egypt and a suburb of Cairo, one of the most authentic geniuses and most influential figures in world history. Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, known by his Hebrew acronym RAMBAM, or the Greek name Maimonides, or the name Arabs use for him, Abu 'Amran,

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passed away in his 70th year after a uniquely illustrious career as Rabbi, Talmudist, philosopher, physician, community leader, and literary stylist. In each and every one of these disciplines he became the leading light of his generation -- and in some of these he remains the preeminent authority today, after almost eight centuries.

But when he died 783 years ago today, not only did Jewish communities throughout the world mourn, not only did Jerusalem declare a public fast, but in Fostat both Jews and Moslems joined in declaring an official three-day period of mourning.

Such were Moslem-Jewish relationships in Egypt eight centuries ago.

And ten years ago, it was President Sadat who made his historic pilgrimage of peace to Jerusalem and, subsequently, with Prime Minister Begin and President Carter at Camp David fashioned an Israeli-Egyptian pact that has kept the border quiet and introduced the first note of sanity into the tumultuous relationships that characterize the Middle East. And for these ten years, not a single soldier lost his life on the Israeli-Egyptian border!

I like to think that Mrs. Sadat's presence tonight at Yeshiva University's most important public gathering on this highly significant date speaks to the same universal thirst for peace and respect for human life.

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This leads me to a message for the YU family itself as well as to the Jewish community not about relations between Jews and Moslems, or Jews and Christians, or Israelis and Arabs -- but between Jews and Jews.

In a way, the polarization of the Jewish community is one of the most pressing and distressing problems that confront us, and one that directly concerns Yeshiva University's educational mission.

I begin by pointing to our position in the religious calendar of Jewry.

Yesterday, we read the fascinating and tragic story of the brothers of Joseph who sold him into slavery. The signal for the breakdown of relationships which precipitated this dreadful tragedy of fraternal betrayal in Biblical days comes in the words of the Torah about the brothers: ve'lo yakhlu dabro le'shalom, they could not bring themselves to speak with him in a manner of shalom or peace. When brothers cannot speak in shalom to each other, only disaster must follow. Peace is the absolute prerequisite for felicity, for fraternity, for a future free of strife and grief.

Two nights hence, we shall light the first Hanukkah candles. Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the handful of Jews over the Syrian-Greeks who defiled the Temple. It was a war (we praise God al ha-nissim, for the miracles, and al ha-milchamot, the



wars), a hard-won battle for the sake of a holy principle, a transcendent ideal. If the battle had not been fought, if the principles had not been maintained even at the cost of life, we would not be here tonight. Hanukkah embodies that value of principle, of risking life and limb to achieve great ideals.

These two messages seem to be diametrically opposed to each other. Yesterday's Torah reading about Judah and his brothers against Joseph seems to negate next Tuesday's Hanukkah message about Judah Maccabee and his brothers against Antiochus.

Can these two ideas of peace and principle be reconciled?

Not only can they, but they must be resolved.

If you abandon principle, then the resulting peace is a sham. A Judaism without Hanukkah, without dedication to principles, would be pleasant and peaceful -- but pagan, pointless, and phoney.

And a Judaism without the lessons of the Joseph story -- principle without peace -- would be so rigid, so contentious, so angry and menacing, that it would tear our people apart. And what is Judaism without Jews?

So we must oscillate between these two poles of peace and principle, seeking the best and wisest accomodation between them and never fully abandoning either one.

Interestingly, both of these ideas are symbolized by candles.

The Shabbat candles represent shalom bayit, domestic peace

and tranquility. And the Hanukkah candles stand for the high principles of faith and freedom.

And that is what Yeshiva University stands for. Our whole educational mission is directed to loyalty to high principle combined with dedication to service, to peace, to the harmonious functioning of society, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

In the radicalized, polarized atmosphere that has recently gripped the Jewish community, I see Yeshiva University as representing the sanest, most moderate approach -- but moderation as an ideal, not merely as a compromise.

Our teaching, learning, research in Torah are such as to make our fealty to principle clear, self-evident, and unambiguous. I have no patience for the catchwords of unity and pluralism when they are empty of the overarching ideals of Judaism or which require all sides to sacrifice their integrity on the altar of good fellowship.

And I have even less patience with the call to arms on behalf of principle with no concern for communal peace, no respect for those of differing opinions, no sensitivity to Judaism's stress on the wholeness of our people. Without wholeness there will be no holiness. Without am Yisrael there can be no Torah Yisrael. Without peace, our principles will destroy us instead of elevating us and making us a blessing "for all families of the earth."

Ten years after Sadat and Begin made peace in Camp David, and the year in which Reagan (President of the Capitalist Monster) and Gorbachev (head of the Evil Empire) spoke to each other civilly, it is time for Jews to follow suit in their growing communal dissonance and disputes. It is not only possible for us to achieve this marriage of peace and principle; it is impossible for us to continue without doing so.

Remember that this coming Friday afternoon where you light both your Shabbat and Hanukkah candles. We must aspire both to truth and tranquility. We must yield neither on peace nor on principle.

These are the two ideals which form the larger context in which Yeshiva's educational enterprise is carried out. They spell out our communal mission.

It is not an easy one. But it is a glorious one.

And we invite you, our friends and supporters, to share both the difficulty and the glory. And may there be more of the latter than the former.

It is in this spirit that I wish you all not only a happy but also a peaceful Hanukkah.