

November 16, 1964

[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. and Mrs. [REDACTED]:

Although writing and talking is supposed to be my stock and trade, I confess to very great difficulties in writing this letter.

I was shocked much beyond words and grief-stricken beyond any expression by the terrible, dreadful news of the premature death of your beloved boy [REDACTED] 28.

Your feeling of loss needs no confirmation by myself, nor will it do much good for me to affirm our total ignorance in the face of what fate dealt you. Having known [REDACTED] during his formative years, having loved this precious child and always having had the warmest feelings for his parents, I suppose that I am one amongst the many who shared such affections to remain helpless in trying to offer my consolations.

It does no good to try to seek explanations at a time of this sort. No answers really suffice; no questions are really relevant. All of Jewish thought and tradition teaches us that the period of mourning was instituted not to increase grief but to express it and to get it out of your system; to learn -- however hard the lesson might be -- to reconcile yourself with the new facts; above all to talk out all your hidden feelings and to devote your energies, dreams and ambitions to the life that is ahead of you and your family.

It is quite normal over such occasion to think back to the things we did that we think we should not have done, and to those things we did not do which, in retrospect we think we should have done. Especially in the case of a child, such thoughts plague the mind and destroy whatever peace we seek for ourselves. Please, therefore, take the advice of a friend: after having expressed such feelings -- and they should be talked out -- forget them. It is no use mulling over the past. No human being is perfect. No parent, no child, no brother, no sister. But it is a terrible mistake to allow grief to degenerate into bitterness and mourning into self accusation.



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Now is the time to begin that difficult period of reconciliation and of looking to the future. Now is the time to give all your love and devotion to [REDACTED] and to each other.

May the Almighty grant that you find in [REDACTED] true comfort and source of consolation; may he grow up to be the sort of human being and the sort of Jew who will reflect great credit and glory upon his parents and also upon the memory of his dearly beloved brother Allen.

*Yehonatan ben Eliezer*

Most sincerely yours,

RABBI NORMAN LAMM

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