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Dr. Norman Lamm...

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PERSPECTIVE  
FOR THE  
EIGHTIES



Yeshiva College  
50th Anniversary  
Golden Jubilee  
Celebration  
May 20, 1979

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**Address to Alumni  
by Dr. Norman Lamm, President of  
Yeshiva University**

*On May 20 Dr. Norman Lamm presented a perspective for Yeshiva University in the 1980's at the Yeshiva College Alumni Association's Golden Jubilee celebration. Examining the role of the University in the current epoch, Dr. Lamm stressed the need for a climate of intellectual vibrancy and commitment.*

*Identifying this period as one of economic and demographic decline, Dr. Lamm cited the fundamental questions that must be asked about the role of the University at such a time. For Yeshiva University, in which the fundamental mission is Torah U'Mada, the synthesis of Western culture and Torah studies, the most responsible policy, he said, is to preserve the undergraduate core of liberal arts and sciences and Jewish studies.*

At this time of jubilee reunion, instead of being satisfied with reviewing the past and indulging in self-gratulation over what we have accomplished in American and world Jewry and in the community-at-large, it is more constructive for us to turn to the future and speak about what we are planning for the years to come. It simply is too much to plan for the next 50 years, but we can and have planned for the next decade, for the 1980's.

A vibrant institution must always plan, must always revise, must always reorganize. It may not, can not, dare not stand still. And even if we do not accept this as a general institutional virtue, it is, under the present circumstances, an absolute necessity.

American higher education, as we all know, has come upon very difficult times, and Yeshiva University has not escaped this "plague of the generation." If anything, our situation is more serious because of our dual undergraduate program where, in effect, we give two educations for the price of one—or less.

The key to the survival of this institution is financial stability. There are times when the "bottom line" must go to the top of the agenda. At such times we are called upon to be realistic, which means, in this context, to appreciate that we cannot do everything. This is truly regrettable; I wish that I could respond affirmatively every time an alumnus or a community leader or student calls me with a great idea. But if I responded affirmatively to all, we would get nothing done. What we must do is establish priorities—priorities that express and reflect our institutional goals and our institutional mission.

You all know full well the mission of Yeshiva University, and it requires no iteration or elaboration by me at this time. Our mission is *Torah U'Mada*, "synthesis," the full and total commitment to the study of Torah—the entire scope of Jewish studies—and the concomitant commitment to education, culture, and research. We hope that somehow in the hearts and minds of our students the interaction between the two will create a person who will go on to make a creative contribution and thus carry on in this great tradition of *Torah U'Mada*.

If, indeed, the ideological mission of Yeshiva University is *Torah U'Mada*, then what is its essence institutionally? The programmatic core of the University includes all the undergraduate schools, both Jewish studies and liberal arts and sciences; Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary; Bernard Revel Graduate School; and, perhaps, graduate Jewish education in Ferkauf Graduate School. This does not denigrate any of the other schools that form part of the University. But this is the core because it most clearly expresses what Yeshiva University is all about. The size of this core, or the number of students and faculty in what I have identified as the core, is irrelevant. The heart, after all, is not the largest organ in the body. Or, to use another metaphor which I borrow from Maimonides, the essence of Judaism is monotheism, yet this explicit teaching is contained in only one verse in the entire Torah.

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It is in these areas that the years ahead will see the greatest development.

During the past year we launched two new

programs. The Chaver Program is an innovation; this is the first time it has been done in centuries. The Yadin Yadin Program is preparing young rabbinic scholars to serve the entire community. Greater support for our Kollel and in the training of rabbis has, paradoxically, simultaneously moved these scholars toward more professionalism and toward greater concentration in *Torah Lishmah*. Although the Division of Communal Services will have its budget trimmed in some areas, we will expand one of its operations, that of founding new communities. It is astounding to learn that out of the approximately 300 positions that our rabbinic alumni hold, some 100 were created through Yeshiva University's New Communities effort. Similarly, we now are planning for a reinvigoration of the graduate Jewish education department at Ferkauf.

*Torah U'Mada* comes into focus not only in the core, but also in the institutions that are just outside it, namely, in the graduate and professional schools. Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law is a new entity holding its first graduation on June 10, 1979. In it we now have a full-time member of the faculty who teaches *Mishpat Ivri*, Jewish legal research. We hope to be able to expand this element of *Mishpat Ivri* in the only law school outside the State of Israel in which it will be formally acknowledged and kept as an important part of the curriculum.

At the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the *sheur* in Jewish medical ethics—really, the Halakhah that deals with medicine—given by Dr. David Bleich, attracts some 50 to 60 students every week. Beginning this September, the College of Medicine will give credit for this course as an elective.

But most of all, this emphasis on the core touches the undergraduate schools. The schools are where *Torah U'Mada* is most directly expressed and manifested because of the dual program, in which our students are immersed in both *Torah* and *Mada*.

Permit me to explain this new focus on undergraduate and Jewish education. In periods of economic decline, abetted by shrinking demography, certain tensions that are inherent in the life of the American university come to the surface and become exacerbated. Thus, the problem of liberal arts as opposed to



professional training suddenly assumes a new and almost ugly significance. We are forced back to ask ourselves fundamental questions: What is the duty of the University? To assure the economic future of its students and the fiscal stability of society? Or to raise a generation of educated citizens and to enhance the culture of our civilization? Which do we choose as expressing our implicit priority?

This is not merely an abstract, theoretical question. In Albany this week the legislature will be debating the question of the future of "Bundy" funding. This is the system whereby New York State encourages higher education by giving universities a certain amount of money on a sliding scale for every degree offered—so much and so much for an associate of arts, more for a bachelor's, more for a master's, most for a doctorate. These amounts have not been raised in some time and, because of inflation, the question has arisen whether and how much they should be scaled upward. One of the great questions that the legislature and the entire educational community is confronting is, should the state continue to support with Bundy funds private institutions granting the doctorate? And if the answer is yes, should the rate be kept where it is, revised downward, or revised upward? The prediction that is now troubling informed circles is that there will be an insignificant increase, or none at all, in Bundy funds for the doctorate, with the possible exception of those areas where the New York State economy requires an infusion of new Ph.D.'s, which means primarily in the areas of technology. This may turn out to be a misplaced fear, but even so the very pessimism itself is a significant spur to serious rethinking.

Under the circumstances, the most prudent and responsible thing for a university to do, both for its own viability and its mission as a center of culture and education, is to distinguish between undergraduate and graduate education. If there is to be any continuum in the general culture, any passing down from one generation to another of the tradition of learning for its own sake, then at the bare minimum the undergraduate core must be preserved. It is here that the missions of all the universities, taken as a

whole, will be tested. Of course, it is necessary for humanistic education, for education in the liberal arts and sciences, to advance beyond the bachelor's degree to areas of research and academic pioneering. But if one is forced to sacrifice because of economic needs, then that sacrifice should be limited to post-graduate work, while the core of undergraduate education—which constitutes, after all, the foundation—is held sacrosanct.

At the same time, graduate education in the professions should be undertaken by universities where there is a societal need for it. Hence, at Yeshiva University, graduate and professional schools will be enhanced where, because they answer such needs, they are viable and do not constitute a drain on the undergraduate schools of the University. In the undergraduate schools, the liberal arts and sciences in conjunction with Jewish studies must be maintained and strengthened, since our *special* mission transcends undergraduate studies *per se*.

This does not mean that the undergraduate curriculum will be combed free of all pre-professional courses. There are cogent, practical reasons—fostered largely by the economy and a series of sociological phenomena—why we cannot do so. In addition to the much vaunted and overpopular pre-med and pre-law programs, we shall, in response to increasing students' demand, be offering accounting and nursing programs this coming semester.

I confess that this requires some apology by us; that is why I just offered it. In the best of all possible worlds, *le'khat'hilah*, I would prefer to see our students taking classics, philosophy, theoretical sciences, music, art, pure math, and so on. But, *bi'de'avad*, in the world in which we live, we simply have to accommodate the needs of students and their families.

This happens to be less troublesome at Yeshiva than at any other university. After all, in addition to pre-professional training we have stiff requirements in liberal arts, which broaden the vista, the scope, and the cultural horizons of a young man or woman. Moreover, cannot the same be said for the Jewish studies on which our students spend about half a day? There are many reasons to assume that these

Jewish studies—considering that professionally most of our students will not make practical use of them—certainly are part of this liberal arts education that is necessary to give students a wider intellectual scope and horizon.

All other programs will have their *raison d'être* here at Yeshiva University only if, in addition to satisfying external societal needs, they do not constitute a drain—and preferably add support—to the core that I have outlined.

I have identified undergraduate education as the central core because that is where the *Torah U'Mada* philosophy is most relevant, effective, and manifest. But in the coming years, much more must be done to enhance the concept and practice of *Torah U'Mada* in direct and explicit ways. When I was a student and complained, "Why don't you tell me how to combine the two worlds?" Dr. Belkin, of blessed memory, told me, "Our job is to give you the materials, your job is to let them interact within you." I disagreed then. But I agree now. You simply cannot spoon-feed a way of life. You can give the ingredients; the cooking—the internal fermentation—has to be done by the person involved. That will always remain true. Nevertheless, I do believe, and this has been enhanced by my experiences of the past two-and-a-half years, that we as an institution have to do more direction-giving. We must give our students more effective guidance, so that this confrontation between the Jewish and the general world will take place for them in a more well defined way. Again, I do not recommend the educational equivalent of cookbook recipes, but rather intelligent assistance ensuring that they do not become cultural schizophrenics, being Jews in one way and general citizens in another—a personification of Yehudah Leib Gordon's Haskalah motto, "Be a Jew at home, and a man in the street." That formula is no less unwise now that it was then.

We have to offer our students guidance in becoming whole human beings. This is why I recommended to the faculty last year a series of capstone courses whereby every senior student will be encouraged to take courses given by the best of our professors and deans, perhaps in the form of team teaching, in the



humanities, the social sciences, the natural sciences, and Jewish studies, when all of them are treated as interacting parts of a whole. Toward the end of the students' college careers, when their anxieties about being accepted into professional and graduate schools are over, when they feel relaxed and have leisure time, we must help them bring together the various worlds and undergo the fascinating experience of this cultural confrontation of which I speak.

We also must break down the barriers between individual schools and disciplines in order to encourage interaction between *Torah* and *Mada*. This effort is not easy in the present socio-ideological climate in the Jewish world. The greater the assimilatory trends and the greater the hedonism and the permissiveness of society, the greater is the "swing to the right" in the Orthodox Jewish community and the lower the tolerance and the degree of adventurousness and openness necessary for effective creativity in the realm of *Torah U'Mada*. Synthesis thrives best in a climate of ideological moderation and courage, not defensiveness and extremism. The establishment of such a climate within Yeshiva University is a difficult task, but educational leadership here will have to respond courageously.

I submit that this brief outline of our directions for the next decade demonstrates that, at least to some extent, we know what we are doing and where we are going. All this will take time. We cannot do everything at once. There are certain natural resistances, but the effort is a "must" on our agenda.

The era of physical expansion is over. Our times call for consolidation and restraint in that area, with only an occasional expansion where a very good case can be made for it.

Our main efforts have to be focused on recreating in Yeshiva University a sense of intellectual ferment and excitement, of spiritual growth, and a commitment to excellence and profundity in all areas, both of *Torah* and *Mada*, and in all our divisions—from the high schools and undergraduate schools, to RIETS and Revel, to Einstein and Cardozo, to Ferkauf and Wurzweiler, throughout every part of this institution. This emphasis on depth must take place not only in the curriculum but also in administration, in



relationships between students and faculty and administration, in morale, and in communal support, especially by the alumni. More than ever we need a deep commitment and loyalty from our alumni. That is why I have tripled the number of personnel that relates exclusively with alumni.

I would like this new vigor to be the clearest and most characteristic feature of our endeavors as we march into the 1980's.

If we are going to make it—and we *are* going to make it—it all depends on how. If we are going to succeed through the 1980's in being what Yeshiva University really can and ought to be, if we are going to fulfill our potential as a great Yeshiva, a great University, and a great combination of both, if we are going to assume leadership in the world of Torah and the Jewish community, and in the world of education and research throughout America, it requires of us a new and radical sense of dedication and identification: You are us, you are Yeshiva.

With a commitment that is deep and unshakable, with aspirations for excellence that are firm and uncompromising, we shall overcome, we shall abide, and we shall endure.

*Additional copies may be secured from:*

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