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900 Jefferson Street
P.O. Box 6249
Hoboken, NJ 07030-7205
(201) 963-9524 • Fax (201) 963-0102
info@ktav.com

September 26, 2002

Dr. Norman Lamm
Yeshiva University
500 W. 185th Street
New York, New York 10033

Dear Norman:

The enclosed should please you.

Sincerely,

KTAV PUBLISHING HOUSE, INC.


Bernard Scharfstein

BS/js
encl.

*Hopefully your successor will
follow your design*

1-Fe: modest to top

~~2-Fe: modest to top~~

Adam Bengal-2

From: JackRiemer@aol.com
Sent: Wednesday, September 25, 2002 3:07 PM
To: editor@ktav.com
Subject: my review of norman lamm's book

dear bernie, as per your request, i have reviewed the norman lamm books...it will go to Moment, and if they say no, to the Jerusalem Report, and to half a dozen Jewish newspapers around the country...I hope it helps, you are right, it ought to be studied in every Orthodox shule...

can you let me have a copy of Hillel Goldberg's From Slobodka to Berlin, if it is still around. I seem to have misplaced my copy.

a gimar tov and a good moed to you. jack riemer

RABBI LAMM TAKES HIS STAND

SEVENTY FACES, Articles of Faith, by Norman Lamm, Two Volumes, Ktav Publishing Co. Hoboken, N.J. \$29.50 each, 2,002,

Reviewed by Rabbi Jack Riemer

Norman Lamm's achievement are impressive.

He became president of Yeshiva University at a time when it was on the brink of bankruptcy. He leaves it a powerful institution with a large endowment. And for this alone, he deserves gratitude and praise.

And while doing this, he somehow squeezed in the time to do serious, substantive scholarship. His studies of the concept of 'Torah Lishma' in the thought of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, his study of the meaning of the Shema in Jewish Thought and his studies of the Religious Thought of Hassidism would be enough in themselves to define him as a scholar of stature. To have done these books on the side, while administering a major institution is a remarkable achievement. And for this he deserves respect.

But the verdict is still out on what must be seen as his major challenge, which was to be not only the head of an academic institution, but, ex officio, the spiritual spokesman for Modern Orthodoxy. It is still too soon to say whether he has raised a generation that shares his values and that will continue the principles that he has fought for or not. The answer will depend in part on how this book of his collected essays on the issues of the day is received.

It ought to be required reading in every Orthodox synagogue in the

land, and it should surely be studied intensively within the Yeshiva University community. For these essays make the case for Modern Orthodoxy as cogently as it can be made. What I fear is that the book will simply be ignored, even within his own institution, that it will seem to the pietists who now dominate the school to be a curious relic of the way the world was years ago, and not a program for our time. If that happens, woe to Modern Orthodoxy. It will become an oxymoron, -to everyone's detriment.

The key to Rabbi Lamm's understanding of Torah is in the title of this book: *Seventy Faces*. There is a rabbinic teaching that the Torah can be understood from seventy different perspectives. If that is so, then no one has a monopoly on Truth, and different understandings of Truth have an obligation to listen to each other, to learn from each other, and to respect each other. That teaching has not been taken seriously by many of the leaders within Orthodoxy, who have not only derided the non Orthodox but denied authenticity even to each other. But this is the credo by which Rabbi Lamm has lived his rabbinate. He has insisted that the rabbis of all the groups are to be treated with respect. They are each part of Klal Yisrael. They are each committed, in their own ways, to Jewish survival. And they are entitled, not only to de facto recognition, but to spiritual dignity. He has endured more than his fair share of invective from both the right and the left but, to his great credit, he has never answered back in kind.

A second principle that he has fought for is 'Torah Umada', the motto of the institution that he heads. What it means is that Torah and culture, Torah and science, Torah and secular knowledge, need not be adversaries. If the One True God created the world, then to study the world is a way of comprehending the work of God and should be considered a mitzvah of the highest order. It is hard to believe that in this day and age, this proposition needs to be defended, but evidently it does. There are evidently some Orthodox Jews who are willing to concede that it is permissible to study those parts of secular knowledge that will help a person earn a livelihood, but who resist studying secular knowledge of any other kind. If that group wins out, it will produce a generation of scholars who will be unable to understand or respond to the challenges of modern thought and who will only be able to teach the kind of Judaism that lives in isolation. And it will produce a generation, here and in Israel, that can only live on public handouts, which brings no honor to the Torah.

And a third principle that he has fought for is the place of Israel and Zionism in our lives. Again, it seems hard to believe that these are still debatable issues more than half a century after the creation of the state but evidently they still are. It is permitted and sometimes necessary to argue against policies and practices of the Israeli government, but can anyone in this age still question that, now that we Jews have learned the awesome price of being powerless, we need to affirm the power that the Jewish state embodies?

What has brought about the swing to the right within Orthodoxy? There are many reasons. One is that the right wing yeshivot have turned out teachers, teachers who are willing to go anywhere in order to reach young people, and the moderate Orthodox have not, at least not in such great numbers. And so Modern Orthodox day schools end up with faculty from the far right. Another reason is that it has become standard practice for the graduates of the modern yeshivas to go for additional study in Israeli institutions, and many of them come back from this experience with a very different perspective. There are other reasons that can explain the change as well.

And yet Rabbi Lamm and those who are like him are not to be counted out for they are still arguing for what they believe is right. They insist that it is good and heartening to see so many 'ba'aley teshuvah,' but that we need to have 'ba'aley sheylah' as well. (The pun here is that 'ba'aley teshuvah' means both 'repentant Jews and Jews who know the answer, and 'ba'aley sheylah' means those who care about questions.) The validity of religious movements is not determined only by numbers. And pendulums, by their nature, swing, and so we may yet see a return to the principles of Modern Orthodoxy. Who can predict? This book may be read more intently by the next generation than by this one.

In the meantime, one of the things that impresses me most in this collection of essays and addresses is the forthright and yet respectful tone with which Rabbi Lamm makes his case. There is never a word of ridicule, never a line of invective, never a statement that polarizes. Whether he is making his argument against the excesses of Reform or of the Haredi world, Rabbi Lamm never engages in insult or uses harsh language. Would that his opponents on both sides would show as much *derech erez* as he does!

And another thing that impresses me about these essays and lectures is that Rabbi Lamm does not only argue for the need of Torah and Mada to address each other--he demonstrates how it can be done. Halachah, for him, is not just a collection of stringencies that are binding on Jews. It is a worldview that has much to say to the rest of the world. So, for example, at the present time, when the United States is struggling over how to reconcile civil liberties with security, over how to spy on and control potential terrorists while at the same time protecting the constitutional guarantees of free speech, free assembly, and privacy, Rabbi Lamm has studied the Halachic sources that deal with these issues and has made them available in a clear and comprehensible form to the American public.

This book, and the career that it reflects, demonstrate that one can integrate the best of Torah with the best of secular knowledge in one personality. It proves that one can be a part of, and yet apart from, other schools of thought within the Jewish community at the same

time, cooperating for the general good where possible, withdrawing for the sake of one's integrity where necessary. And it demonstrates that one can express what one stands for and where one disagrees, with dignity and respect. These are values to which the observant and all Jews should be called back to, and therefore we hope that this book will be studied carefully and respectfully, as it deserves to be.

Rabbi Jack Riemer is the editor of Jewish Insights Into Death and Mourning, published by Syracuse University Press, and of The World of the High Holy Days, published by the National Rabbinic Network, and the co editor of So That Your Values Live On, published by Jewish Lights.