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FROM comment...  
Date: Thu, 2 Feb 1995 16:46:31 -0500 (EST)  
From: Shalom Carmy <carmy@yu1.yu.edu>  
To: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Re: A request and a question

12/2/95  
BLIND Copy

Dear [REDACTED],

Rabbi Lamm was very appreciative of your taking the trouble to contact us. He remains puzzled, however, by the unwillingness of individuals to correct distortions. A contemptuous falsehood perpetrated in public, he holds, should be rectified in public. It would be "more realistic and more efficient" (his words) if a letter were attempted to the Jewish Observer, even in the knowledge that it would most likely never see the light of day. I find myself in agreement with both his logic and his judgment.

Speaking for myself, I wonder why individuals in a position of leadership cannot undertake to improve the moral climate in which they flourish. The most charitable explanation I can think of is a sense of insecurity so keen that it overwhelms the impulse to decency and truth. It is a baleful commentary on contemporary Orthodoxy that those high up in its presumed authority structure are so intimidated by the hot blood of their admirers.

Perhaps it is felt that slandering and misrepresenting does no harm. Our people are no doubt accustomed to abuse, and should have developed thick skins by now. In any event I doubt that sermons on bein adam la-havero will do much to alter the situation.

It seems to me that the men of invective and abuse, and those who fail to restrain them, have not taken into consideration the chillul haShem that is caused by their actions and delictions. For better or for worse, the relation of most (all?) people to Torah and to the Ribbono shel Olam is connected to their experience of talmidei hakhamim. Rabbi Wein, in a JO article someone just brought to my attention, extols Daas Torah because it represents a source of guidance that transcends the cynical, self-interested marketplace of "politics as usual." He is more right than he imagines. For without the example of spiritual Gedolim, neither our faith in the truth of Halakha, nor our belief that each and every one of us can exercise free will and respond authentically to the divine imperative, can genuinely flourish.

But what happens to Rabbi Wein's thesis, and what happens to faith in Torah, when important talmidei hakhamim, or even minor talmidei hakhamim, act in the spirit of "politics as usual," when they take advantage (or even initiate) falsehood and slander, when they discover a hundred and one excuses for not amending the public religious atmosphere? It is impossible to read Rabbi Wein's romantic picture of Daas Torah, in the light of the actual function which this ideology serves, without laughing out loud. It is very difficult, at least for me, to reread his words, without wanting to weep.

I have recently sought out many opportunities to chide and tweak the modern Orthodox community for failing to benefit from the criticisms and example of the Haredi world; and I will continue to do so. And yet, as much as I am heartened by your decency in trying to limit the pain caused by the distortion of Rabbi Lamm's statement, I cannot help being reminded of the areas in which my Yirat Shamayim, and that of my talmidim, is best cultivated by keeping a safe distance from the influence of the Haredi mentality.

Shabbat shalom,