



Yeshiva University

Office of the President

Dear Friends,

We have all been in mourning this week over the loss of our teacher and leader Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm. I was privileged to offer words of eulogy at his memorial service and I share them with you below.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

Today is a solemn and sad day for all of us.

We have lost a leader and a legend, a friend and a father.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm's myriad achievements are well known and documented. His profound love for his wife and life partner, Mindy, and his enormous pride and dedication to his family will be addressed by others here today.

In my brief remarks, I will not attempt the impossible—to capture the full expanse of his sterling character and astounding brilliance, but rather hope to flesh out two distinct elements of his rich personality that distinguished him and contributed to his vast accomplishments.

It was my Chag ha-Semichah, the day that the Yeshiva celebrates its recent rabbinic graduates, and I was sitting on the stage as my class representative in front of a packed Lamport Auditorium. Delivering the keynote address to a spellbound audience was Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshiva University. Sitting next to me was Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, who was tapping his feet to the rhythm of Rabbi Lamm's remarks. And I thought to myself that with the thousands of people present in the room today that I was one of the few who truly understood what was happening at that moment. For in my years studying under Rabbi Lamm, he had initiated me into the small community of rabbinic artists.

My story with Rabbi Lamm began when I was 24. I of course knew of Rabbi Lamm and read his works throughout my life growing up in a YU family, but I really did not get to know him until I was 24. At 24 I began my tenure at The Jewish Center as rabbinic intern. And while I had anticipated learning much from its esteemed rabbi who has since become my Rebbe, Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, it was an unexpected blessing to forge a deep and personal student-teacher relationship with Rabbi Lamm.

It started with a minor request. After delivering my first sermon at The Jewish Center, I asked Rabbi Lamm for his feedback. He agreed and for years afterwards we met after every sermon or public presentation I delivered.

It was extraordinary. Rabbi Lamm was the premier expositor of our community's worldview. He was the most articulate, eloquent, compelling speaker in the Jewish world. His teachings and writings anchored modern life in Torah values and taught us how we can grow from the interchange of history's great ideas. And I had him to myself for hours. We would meet in his office and in his apartment, and he would impart to me his Torah and life lessons.

The context of the discussion would be to review my speeches. I remember once when we met, that he was having trouble remembering the content of my last speech. I remarked that it must not have been so good. And he said no – “it was not the content that was the problem, it was the opening joke. It was too good, it was too funny. Thinking back on the speech it was all I can remember of it,” he said. “You need to calibrate your humor. It’s not about getting a laugh, but the right laugh at the right time and at the right measure.”

You see, for Rabbi Lamm the speech was a work of art. Every word was selected, every moment was chosen.

Rabbi Lamm was a rabbinic artist, and he lifted the veil to show me how the magic was made.

He gave me reading lists, he suggested seforim to study and he taught me about form and content. I remember sitting in his apartment when he instructed me about cadence and rhythm. “There is a subconscious element to an excellent speech,” he said. “There is music and a beat. There is a moment to rise, to fluctuate, to crescendo and to descend.” I sat there stunned. Rabbi Lamm’s mastery was otherworldly. Everyone loved his talks, but they did not truly understand why. He was playing in another dimension that people did not even know existed.

But Rabbi Lamm was not simply an artist, he was also an architect.

His vast intellect and penetrating scholarship, bringing together sources from all fields of knowledge, wove together to create a tapestry that shaped the very way we experienced life in modern times. The ideas he invented, the concepts he clarified, the phrases he coined became part of the Jewish landscape and lexicon of the day: Spiritual Dignity, Centrist Orthodoxy and moderation, synthesis and Torah u-Madda.

He created the Jewish conceptual, spiritual and moral scaffolding that enabled our community to succeed and thrive as Torah Jews in the modern era.

But his architecture was not just conceptual. And this brings us to Yeshiva University.

Rabbi Lamm defined the presidency of Yeshiva University. For at its core, Yeshiva University is an idea. It is an idea about integration, about bringing our values out into the world, about serving God. It is an idea that he cherished and embellished, that shone and flourished under his direction.

He transformed our institution into his canvas, perpetuating and institutionalizing his artistic vision which inspired great philanthropists to donate their resources, great rabbis and academicians to partner in the project and generations upon generations of students to be shaped by his values and ideals.

The teacher, the poet, the man of words is not often the institution builder, the educational visionary and the man of action.

It is the rare artist who is also an architect.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously said that the principle of Gothic architecture is “infinity made imaginable.”

This is what Rabbi Lamm did for us. He translated the infinity - the Torah, wisdom, truth - into the imaginable - in terms and concepts and ideas we could understand and appreciate, and into institutions and communities that would perpetuate them.

Rabbi Lamm’s dual role as artist and architect is best captured in the image of Jacob’s ladder

וַיַּחְלֶם וַהֲגָה סֵלֶם מֵצֶבֶת אֶרֶץ וְרָאִישׁוֹ מִגֵּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהָנָה מִלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ:

Jacob dreamed of a ladder rooted in the ground, ascending to the heights of heaven with angels rising and descending.

Rabbi Lamm was our angel. As an artist he inspired us to soar to the heavens and as an architect he brought heaven down to us.

Rabbi Lamm, Rebbe - Today as yesterday, we continue to tap along to the rhythm and cadence of your wisdom and leadership.

Now sitting in the chair you once occupied and better understanding the responsibilities you shouldered, I have an even greater appreciation for your grace and elegance, for your enormous achievements and for the model you set for President Richard Joel and me to follow.

Your memory and example will always animate our Yeshiva University community.

Thank you, Rebbe, for carving out time in your incredibly packed schedule to develop a warm relationship with a young budding rabbi at the start of his career.

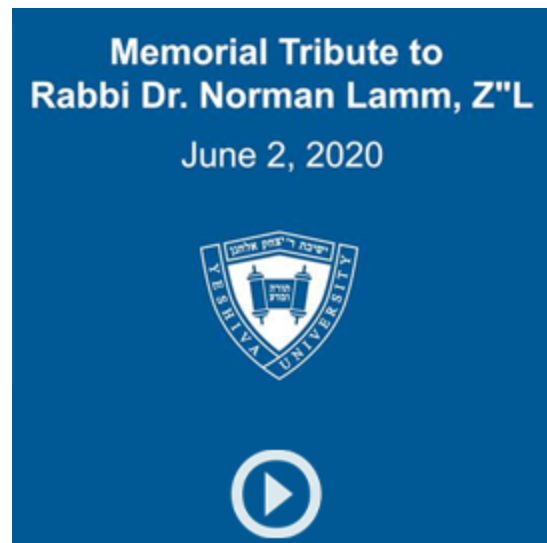
Thank you for your scholarship, your vision, your leadership, your love.

I will always remain your student. We will forever remain your disciples.

יהי זכרו ברוך



Dr. Berman's Eulogy of Rabbi Lamm



Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm Memorial

Share your memories and photos of
Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

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