LEHRHAUS

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Articles:

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Women's Talmud Study and the Value of Choice

Jack Bieler

I have followed The Lehrhaus discussion regarding women's Talmud study, beginning with Rabbi Saul Berman's recollections upon the fortieth anniversary of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's lecture at Stern College for Women. As someone who has championed women's *gemara* study throughout my day school and synagogue career, it was an opportunity to gain some context of the field and where things stand today.

Even though a number of respondents are well-known and experienced educators on different levels of Jewish education, it was interesting to me to note that the discussion has not at all taken into consideration the different levels of interest and ability reflected in a typical day school's student body.

I believe, similar to Rivka Kahan, that studying personally appropriate subject matter is not only an issue that affects women, but men, as well. Just as many boys for one reason or another find it difficult to enthusiastically and deeply appreciate Talmud, there are girls who most probably would thrive were more Talmud included in their courses of study.

In other words, a fundamental question that this topic engenders is: is *every* student equipped or even motivated to focus on "*Lomdus*," as Rabbi Ezra Schwartz put it, or "advanced, serious Talmud study" as others have stated? If the principle of "*hanokh le-na'ar al pi darko*" (Proverbs 22:6)—educate the youth in accordance with "where he is at"—is to be properly followed, then a uniform Jewish studies curriculum including intense amounts of high level analysis of talmudic sources, will simply not engage all students equally.

In contrast to yeshivot, seminaries, and collegiate environments, where the population is often self-selected and therefore highly motivated, even denominational high schools in the United States draw a heterogeneous collection of students, and usually depend on a broad student body to finance their operations.

Furthermore, Jewish high schools are made up—for the most part—of survey courses in which students can sample different subject matter, approaches, and teaching methods. While there are honors classes, nevertheless—as has been pointed out in several of the essays—the amount of time devoted to individual subjects even in these classes is usually insufficient to allow for high-level mastery.

The high school experience assumes that a student will only be able to truly specialize within the context of extracurricular activities, what she or he does during spare time, weekends, and vacations, and during his/her post-secondary educational life.

In one of the schools in which I worked which had separate classes in Jewish studies, girls were never afforded the same quantitative opportunities as boys. The extra Talmud period that was added for boys—usually replacing either Navi or Hebrew language classes—was not an option offered to girls. In another school in which I taught, the opportunities for boys and girls in honors Talmud study were the same but the total number of hours simply were insufficient for them to achieve significant Talmud acumen. As for my synagogue, I explicitly opposed single-sex *Shiurim* or learning opportunities, feeling that it was important to make the statement to all that anyone was welcome at these venues, including all Talmud presentations.

The option for women's Talmud study is an option that must exist and it should begin as early as possible to allow those interested to study on an advanced level, if that is their inclination and deep desire. We need not be concerned that the number of individuals who take advantage of such opportunities may be small, or that the sound of the *beit midrash*—assuming that it is single-sex—will not be as strong as an all-men's study setting.

What is of greatest importance, in my opinion, is that *choice* is made available so that every individual can find his/her place within Torah learning, whatever form it may take.

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Playing Dreidel with Kafka and Rabbi Nahman

Joey Rosenfeld

Sometimes, two great souls, separated on the pages of Jewish history by great distances in time, space, and disposition, are shown to have a certain closeness at their root and enter into dialogue with one another. One need not establish a historical or even theoretical relationship in order to discern a point of convergence between two witnesses to the particularly Jewish experience.

Two such souls are Rabbi Nahman of Breslov (1772-1810) and Franz Kafka (1883-1924), whose narrow bridge of similarity has not been traced outside of overzealous attempts at biographical parallelism or reductive comparisons of certain themes. However, as Rabbi Nahman writes, at times one *tzaddik* asks a question without an answer only to be answered by another *tzaddik* from a distant time and place. Their dreamlike correspondence across the void of time is written in air, neither one knowing that their questioning and answering relates to the other. In this essay, I would like to imagine a dialogue between Rabbi Nahman and Kafka about the *dreidel*, the spinning top that gyrates at the edge of the abyss in the dim Hanukkah candlelight.

In the rabbinic imagination, the celebration of the Jewish triumph over Greece goes beyond the historical Hasmoneans and their war against the Seleucids to commemorate the distinction between Judaism and Hellenism, between the analytic tradition of Athens and the non-rational tradition of Jerusalem.

In the eyes of the rabbis, the transient triumph of Hanukkah represented much more than the military, political victory emphasized by history. The war was over more than the right to practice Judaism openly, more than a resistance to the temptations of Hellas; it was a battle for a particularly rabbinic way of thinking, for knowledge that cannot be tested by logic because it lies beyond the limits of logic and reason.

Described by Maharal of Prague as the "interiority" of thought ("*pnimiyut ha-sekhel*"), the rabbis' attention to the contradictions and paradoxes at the heart of logical thinking led them beyond Greece's dependence on observation of empirical reality, which typifies what he calls the "exteriority" of thought ("*hitzoniyut ha-sekhel*").

In an attempt to occupy a middle path excluded by Aristotelian logic, rabbinic thinking attunes itself to the gaps and breaks that disrupt the absolutist pretensions of a thinking that self-assuredly claims to grasp the absolute. Human reason contains a violent, reductionist impulse, which seeks to view everything through the lens of the empirically knowable and dismiss all else as nonsense. It denies the existence of the transcendent and attempts to demonstrate that beyond the immanent order stands nothing but the immanent itself. The supernatural is domesticated by the laws of nature; rational thought is confined to the measurable and observable. It believes only in what it sees, reducing all else to the realm of illusion, imagination, and the irrational.

Operating outside the laws of non-contradiction, the rabbinic mind can occupy the non-place where opposites coexist in their mutual opposition. In contrast to the Platonic mind, wherein

external identity veils an inner duality of form and matter, the rabbinic mind hears the murmuring of an internal unity within an external duality.

Instead of the static space of Greek truth we find the dynamic unfolding of "these and those" ("*eilu va-eilu*") perpetually spoken in the sustained utterance of revelation. If the Greek quest of Odysseus is the nostalgic homecoming to some originary truth, the Jewish wandering of Abraham is a movement towards the ever-receding limit of thought where faith is born.

Something happens, however, when reason breaks down. The origins of philosophical thought can be said to lie in the human subject's effort to know, with absolute clarity, the nature and identity of that which is perceived. Knowledge, thus defined, provides thinking subjects the necessary grounds to engage reality with certainty and self-assuredness. Rational categorizations demarcating the boundaries between one thing and the other create the semblance of an ordered world in which the laws of logic dictate the true and the possible. When the internal limits of rationalism are exposed, the ordered nature of things is undermined, throwing the thinking individual into a state of confusion and doubt.

In the ruins of reason the thinker peers into the vestiges of knowledge with hopes of discovering some trace of certainty, only to find contradictory fragments, which only deepen the doubtful nature of things. Arrested at the limit of thought, the thinker gazes out towards the coming abyss that surges in the absence of rational order. The systems that once operated assuredly now malfunction, substituting one in place of the other and the other in place of the one. In the morphing of self into other and center into the borders that demarcate it, the parameters that define things waver, revealing the void of meaninglessness that undergirds all meaning.

This tittering on the edge of reason, this crack-up in laughter at the crack-up of rationality, produces anxiety within the Greek hero, the lover of wisdom, the philosopher. In the throes of en*light*enment's darkening, the philosopher feverishly grasps at the remnants of reason in hopes of catching a part that will arrest the movement of imagination's play. In Kafka's parable, "The Top", we find the philosopher in the grips of madness trying, in spite of his incessant failure, to retain a vestige of rational certainty that in his mind promises to restore reason to its initial prestige:

A certain philosopher used to hang about wherever children were at play. And whenever he saw a boy with a top, he would lie in wait. As soon as the top began to spin the philosopher went in pursuit and tried to catch it. He was not perturbed when the children noisily protested and tried to keep him away from their toy; so long as he could catch the top while it was spinning, he was happy, but only for a moment; then he threw it to the ground and walked away. For he believed that the understanding of any detail, that of a spinning top, for instance, was sufficient for the understanding of all things.

For this reason he did not busy himself with great problems, it seemed to him uneconomical. Once the smallest detail was understood, then everything was understood, which was why he busied himself only with the spinning top. And whenever preparations were being made for the spinning of the top, he hoped that this time it would succeed: as soon as the top began to spin and he was running breathlessly after it, the hope would turn to certainty, but when he held the silly piece of wood in his hand, he felt nauseated. The screaming of the children, which hitherto he had not heard, and which now suddenly pierced his ears, chased him away, and he tottered like a top under a clumsy whip.

Kafka's philosopher gravitates towards the children at play. The carefree attitude of young playfulness evokes a certain uneasiness within the philosopher. The meaningless rotation of things symbolized in the spinning top brings the philosopher face to face with the metamorphic nature of things when stripped of their rational constraints. Ignoring the "noisy protest" of the youngsters, who intuitively know the power of nonsensical play, he seeks to violently arrest the movement-of-thought so as to "catch the top" in its spinning, thus shedding enough light, "sufficient for the understanding of all things."

The paradoxical spinning, wherein the specific coordinates of the top remain indeterminate, results in the top's impossible presence both here and there at once. In eluding the here-and-now, the top occupies a space of simultaneity that moves in both directions at once, frustrating the efforts of the philosopher to catch it. When he does manage to catch the top, the illusory promise of reason's gift fades in his hands leaving only a "nauseating" reminder of the limits of rationality.

The philosophical quest sets out from the primordial ground-of-being and seeks to return back to its point of departure with a newfound grasp of the whole. Guarded by the laws of logic, the eagle-eyed philosopher sees a totalized whole whose laws of homogeneity dictate an equivalency between each and every thing. To understand the intelligible principles of the ideal is to grasp the sensible qualities that constitute the real, like Kafka's philosopher who believed that "the understanding of any detail, that of a spinning top, for instance, was sufficient for the understanding of all things."

Yet despite the philosopher's repeated failure in his quest to arrest the movement of the top, Kafka's antihero cannot free himself from the bounds of reason. The "hope" that persists in spite of the failure, the sense that could have led the philosopher beyond the path of rationality, is just as quickly transformed into the drive towards "certainty". The "breathlessness" of the chase, the suffocation of wonder, reignites the philosopher's craving for absolute knowledge, perpetuating the circular drive towards knowing, whose ending returns to its beginning, the "nauseating" sense of that which remains beyond reason.

For Kafka, life in (t)his world is marked by a certain type of invisibility. The pervasive sense of being watched, gazed at from a faceless beyond, introduces a sense of anxiety particular to the Kafkaesque gesture. Never certain of who or what is surveilling, the anonymous characters are always already under a judgment about which they have no say. The dreamscape of K's journey towards the unassailable castle morphs into the nightmarish impotency of the subject with respect to a faceless bureaucracy. There is lawlessness at the heart of the law, capriciousness at the heart of order. The "flawless bureaucracy" that executes the ordering, regulating, functional laws of existence is shown to be a system of flaws that accumulate around a gaping hole at the heart of being.

Law, for Kafka, represents not only the man-made laws of judges and governments but also the laws of nature, history, and even selfhood. In the collapse of law, the boundaries that separate order from disorder, fairness from cruelty, and self from other, are erased, resulting in an upheaval that displaces everything from its proper place. Nowhere is this upheaval more apparent than in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, wherein Gregor "woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, and found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin".

More unsettling than the absurd morphing of human into insect is the mutability of categories and species assumed to be absolute, which is disclosed in the morphing of one into the other. As the order of law comes undone in, and is replaced by, the lawlessness of order, like a spinning top where up is down and down is up, where center is marginalized and margin is central, the philosopher loses hope in rationality, himself becoming "like a top under a clumsy whip."

For Rabbi Nahman, the limit of rationality is a given, not only in the external sense that the thinker's capacity to think is limited and thus incapable of grasping the essence of thought, but even in the inherent sense that the secrets of existence remain beyond the confines of the imperfect tool of reason. For Rabbi Nahman, the point where reason reaches its limit and breaks down is the transitional point from which the individual can transcend rationality and move on to where faith alone grasps that which remains beyond reason.

Deeply aware of the philosophical questions that the great Jewish rationalists raise in their various works, Rabbi Nahman was less impressed by the questions themselves and more concerned with their rationally-derived answers, which remained contingent at best. Demanding of his adherents a strict attention to the pitfalls inherent in the rational approach to the world, Rabbi Nahman called for a sacred ignorance that led the spiritual seeker beyond rational knowing towards a sort of mystical "unknowing," which is "the apex of knowledge" and could be realized only through faith.

In contrast to Kafka's philosopher, who saw the metamorphosis of the sensible into the nonsensical as an allusion to the disorderly abyss that lay beneath the semblance of order, Rabbi Nahman saw the maddening gyrations of existence as a hint towards the unity of faith and the faith of unity that undergirds the natural order of things. Like Kafka's philosopher, who tried to grasp the spinning top so as to arrest the disappearance of reason, Rabbi Nahman saw the spinning of the very same top as the vertiginous dance that leads the spinner to the palace of madness where faith becomes reason.

Describing his irrational system of faith that is born in the breakdown of reason, Rabbi Nahman writes:

Their books contain questions as to the order of Creation: How is it that a star merited to be a star, or that a constellation deserved to be a constellation? What was the sin of the lower creatures, animals and all the rest, that consigned them to their lowly state? Why not just the opposite? Why is a head a head and a foot a foot?

… This entire pursuit, however, is a vain one. One should not ask such questions of God, who is righteous and upright. For in truth, the entire universe is a spinning top, which is called a *dreidel*. Everything moves in a circle: angels change into men and men into angels; the head becomes a foot and the foot a head. All things in the world are part of this circular motion, reborn and transformed into one another. That which was above is lowered and that which was below is raised up. For in their root all of them are one.

There are separate intellects, which are angels, completely separated from matter; there are spheres, which are composed of the most refined matter, and there is a lower world, which is fully corporeal. Even though each of these is surely derived from some particular place, in their root they are all one.

Therefore the universe is a spinning top, on which everything turns and is transformed. Right now one thing may be highest, and it is considered a head, while that which is at the bottom is called a foot. But when they spin around again, the head will become a foot and the foot a head, men will become angels and angels will be men.... Everything in the world is a *dreidel*, moving in a circle, for in truth they are all one in their root (*Sihot ha-Ran*, no. 40; translation from Arthur Green, *Tormented Master*, 309-10).

The instability of things, the spinning mutability of seemingly stable identities, discloses the fragility of this-worldly order. The very progression that brings the philosopher, the lover of wisdom typified by the rationalism of Athens, to the brink of the abyss where the "breathless" and "nauseating" chords of meaninglessness threaten to drown the mind of reason leads the rabbinic mind, in its embrace of the paradoxical truth of being, to find a path that leads beyond.

For this reason, writes Rabbi Nahman, we celebrate the spinning madness, the random rotation of this world, specifically on Hanukkah, when the faith of Jerusalem takes shelter from the reason of Athens in the opaque clouds of unknowing:

This is why we play with the *dreidel* on Hanukkah, as Hanukkah is linked to the Temple, and the essence of the Temple is linked to this element of the rotating wheel...of "the elevated degraded and the degraded elevated"; for God embedded His presence in the Tabernacle and in the Temple, which is the aspect of "the elevated degraded", and the opposite, wherein the form of the Tabernacle in its entirety is traced above, is the aspect of "the degraded elevated". This is the element of the *dreidel*, the element of the rotating wheel, where everything returns, repeats, and reverses" (ibid.).

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Creation in a Chaotic Decade: Rabbi Lamm in the 60s

Lawrence A. Kobrin

Editors' Note: This is one of three articles in a Lehrhaus series in honor of Rabbi Norman Lamm's ninetieth birthday, observed on December 19, 2017. In addition to Lawrence Kobrin's essay, we also invite you to read Tzvi Sinensky's and Zev Eleff's contributions.

Any reflection on the career of Rabbi Norman Lamm must start with his efforts in the 1960s to reinvigorate Orthodoxy on the Upper West Side and more generally in New York City. A proper account of that era and Rabbi Lamm's efforts and achievements must start with an understanding of the condition of Orthodox Judaism in New York City when, in 1958, Rabbi Lamm returned to New York to become a rabbi at The Jewish Center. In that same year, he founded the journal *Tradition*.

The Upper West Side in the 1960s

In the 1960s, The Center struggled with an image of exclusiveness or worse, *bar* or *bat mitzvah*s were rare occasions, and there were few toddlers or grade school children. The earlier vibrancy of the community which had prompted Rabbi Leo Jung to attempt establishing a day school in the 1930s had waned. Rabbi Jung himself was still a leading figure in the Orthodox world, as one of the small group of rabbis who had rescued Orthodoxy in America in the pre-World War II world from disappearance. But he could not maintain the vigor physically or intellectually that had been his. More importantly, he could not fight the demography of the area. The area was no longer the attraction to Jews, and particularly to Orthodox Jews, that it had once been.

The leadership of The Center recognized the problem and sought by various means to attract a greater number of young people to The Center. Committees were formed, special home evenings were created, dues structures were altered, all with the hope that more young families would come to The Center and find an area where they would be comfortable. The image that The Center services projected, the "optics," if you will, did not help. Coming into a synagogue where officers and rabbis wore striped trousers and top hats—as they still do—was not what young people wanted. Matched with the formalism—which Rabbi Lamm himself later termed the "sacred choreography"— was a "club-like" feeling ("you're sitting in my seat"). As a result, young people looked elsewhere.

The West Side was poised for some kind of change. Rent control had kept most people locked in their apartments with their unimaginably favorable rents, but there was area deterioration. By way of example, the Hotel Endicott on Columbus and 81st Street, a structure dating back to the Civil War, had descended to single room occupancy where on the average a murder a month took place.

It was thought simply dangerous to walk up Columbus Avenue. We joked that the new Police station on 82nd Street was to make response to the murders easier, but no one let their children walk to the bus past that block.

As a result, families started to move from the area, primarily to the upper East Side, but to the nearby suburbs as well. If one needed an emblem of this trend, one could point to Temple Israel, a Reform congregation with a huge structure on 91st Street and Broadway, which was sold to Young Israel at a bargain price.

As further indication of the demographic dismay facing the area, at one point, The Center explored the possibility of itself moving to a new location on the East Side. A later "fantasy" during Rabbi Lamm's tenure involved a plan to have the City condemn a large super block which would house a relocated Yeshiva University and revitalized residential buildings, similar to what had been accomplished for Fordham University in the lower "60s" on the West Side. Neither plan came to anything, but they serve to demonstrate the feeling of many in the community of the downward trajectory of the area.

Rabbi Lamm and The Jewish Center Revival

My credentials to recall this story are as follows. I was privileged to know Rabbi Lamm first as congregant when he served as assistant rabbi at Kehilath Jeshurun, then as congregant and officer at The Jewish Center to which he returned from Springfield, Massachusetts in 1958, and concurrently as the first Managing Editor of *Tradition*, the journal which he founded in 1958. The two achievements of the 1960s era of Rabbi Lamm were his rabbinate at The Jewish Center and his editorship of *Tradition*.

It was to a somewhat struggling institution that Rabbi Lamm arrived in 1958, serving as second in command to Rabbi Jung. He set about to do everything possible to revitalize the synagogue and make it attractive to young people and young families. Beyond establishing a variety of educational programs, he did so primarily by strong and popular Shabbat sermons. The sermons dealt with every contemporary topic imaginable and did so in a style drawing on *midrash* or halakhic sources which could be comprehended by all, even those with limited Jewish text background. This last point was crucial, as this was before the spread of day schools or the idea of a supplementary gap year program in Israel.

His sermons were well prepared and developed, up to preparation of the full written text. (I know because my parents badgered him each week for a copy of his sermon, the mass of which they retained and which I returned to Rabbi Lamm after my mother's passing. The collection managed to fill in the set ultimately housed on YU's Lamm Heritage website). The sermons covered events of the day, politics, social currents, challenges to Israel, challenges to religious observance, without limit. And they filled the synagogue week after week.

Rabbi Lamm's rabbinate was not without its challenges and tensions, as Rabbi Jung sought to continue his full complement of rabbinic and pastoral activity, sometimes eclipsing the position of Rabbi Lamm. As a result, the lay officers, with the strong leadership of Max Stern, were sometimes called in to "mediate" sermon schedules or other such matters, something which neither they nor either of the two rabbis relished.

As a result of his rabbinate, however, by the time Rabbi Lamm left for Yeshiva University in 1976, The Center was on the way to becoming the central place which it now occupies in the rejuvenated—in all senses of the word—area of the Upper West Side. It was a remarkable achievement and must be appreciated in its historical context.

The Formation of *Tradition*

Rabbi Lamm's other significant enterprise in that decade or two was *Tradition*. In the immediate postwar period, the academically educated and English-speaking Orthodox laymen did not have access to sophisticated journals and other sources, certainly not to the extent that they are available today. There were relatively few publications in English which would interest or sustain an educated reader who was interested in traditional Judaism and educated in secular skills.

It was in this context that Rabbi Lamm founded *Tradition* in 1958. He continued as its editor until 1962. It was not an easy task to find authors and articles who could be provocative and interesting without giving offense to one group or another. Circulation was always a struggle and financing—mostly from the Rabbinical Council of America—was not overly generous or sustained.

In starting the journal, Rabbi Lamm stated as its goal and function "to interpret the Tradition, the Word of God, the heritage of Torah and mitzvot in a manner and form that the modern, educated, thinking Jew can understand." He wrote some of the important articles himself and got other known scholars and rabbis to contribute, as well. While the circulation was never vast, its influence as the first such regular publication cannot be underestimated.

All that we have today (and maybe there is even too much of it) can be traced to the idea of the journal and its acceptance by the community.

A reflection on Rabbi Lamm and the 1960s would not be complete if it did not include the fact that it was during that decade that Rabbi Lamm obtained his doctorate under Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik's supervision, and managed to serve as effective father to a wonderful family. His later accomplishments at Yeshiva University extended and expanded the achievements which had been seen during the decade of the 1960s.

May Hashem give him further years of health and *nahat*.

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Rabbi Norman Lamm and His Crusade for the Jewish Home

Zev Eleff

Editors' Note: This is one of three articles in a Lehrhaus series in honor of Rabbi Norman Lamm's ninetieth birthday, observed on December 19, 2017. In addition to Zev Eleff's essay, we also invite you to read Lawrence A. Kobrin's and Tzvi Sinensky's contributions

Sometime in the 1960s, Rabbi Norman Lamm delivered a lecture to The Jewish Center's Young Marrieds Club. By his own account, his Upper West Side audience of twenty-somethings offered a "cordial and approving reception," convincing Rabbi Lamm that he ought to publish his remarks on the merits of marriage and family purity.

In short order, Rabbi Lamm's best-selling *Hedge of Roses* emerged as the go-to text for Orthodox marriage counselors, rabbis and young people. The book championed the "purity of the Jewish family" and its responsibility for the "perpetuation of the House of Israel." Its author looked to the Orthodox Jewish home as a sanctuary from an "environment where the breakdown of family life becomes more shocking with each year." For Rabbi Lamm, then, the home was more sacred, perhaps, than the synagogue.

His notions apparently resonated. Feldheim Publishers printed six editions of the short tract. The family purity manifesto was also translated into French, Hebrew, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

Rabbi Lamm's focus on the Jewish family endeared him to a generation of Orthodox young people that sought out a theologian and pastor to make sense of their changing American climes. These women and men were the first cohort of Jewish day school graduates. Owing to different backgrounds, their religious observance and intellectual expectations varied from their parents' way of life. They were eager to encounter a more sophisticated discussion and guidance on issues that mattered to them. These included Communism, Cold War politics, and Civil Rights.

Yet, none of these themes dominated Rabbi Lamm's sermons and writings more than family life. His concentration on the family is also striking for its socially conservative bent. On other religious matters like liberal education, Zionism, and interfaith dialogue, Rabbi Lamm held a centrist position, neither fully in line with the rightward Agudath Israel stance, nor the leftward point of view espoused by Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, among others.

The Jewish home was different. Rabbi Lamm's domestic conservatism bespoke a rigidness intended to keep Orthodox Judaism apart from a rapidly changing postwar American culture. His views fit neatly alongside other traditional-minded religious leaders of that age.

For Rabbi Lamm, the home represented a constant, an anchor of religious authenticity that permitted serious-thinking Orthodox Jews to responsibly experiment with ideas like Zionism and liberalism without loosening their foothold in religious traditionalism. The family was therefore the singular monument in Jewish life that could not change one bit, no matter how much modernity nudged it to move in that direction.

Tradition and Family

The challenges to the traditional family did not begin in the 1960s. Declining birth rates, increased instances of divorce, and more complex modes of sexuality loomed in American life long before the 1960s and the Sexual Revolution. Historians Riv-Ellen Prell and Rachel Gordan have shown that this was the case for Jews in the United States, as well. Nonetheless, the Sixties increased the commotion as social scientists tabulated steeper inclines and declines in directions that concerned—often terrified—advocates of the traditional family, Orthodox Jews included.

They also worried about the new environs of the American family. The untested suburban frontier and more upscale urban neighborhoods frightened Jews of all stripes. These places were beyond the supervision of the "old guard." There, religion could take on many hybrid forms. Expectations about social interactions and relationships were also placed on unsteady ground in these locales. For instance, Benjamin Steiner has shown that "radical" measures taken by Conservative leaders on behalf of *agunot* were motivated by concerns over the state of the postwar Jewish nuclear family.

Orthodox Jews were also deeply troubled by the moral values and religious ethos of the so-called crabgrass frontier. On occasion, Orthodox educators and rabbis indoctrinated their students with these fears. Here are the sentiments of a member of the Torah Vodaath High School Class of 1955:

But even in America Jews have and still are spreading out in remote cities and villages, thereby losing contact with the core of Jewish life which had been established in New York. In these small towns they are at present falling prey to the rapidly gaining Conservative movement and are forgetting the principles and ethics for which their parents and grandparents forfeited their lives a mere decade ago.

These feelings did not halt Orthodox migration to the suburbs. Nor did remaining in older neighborhoods prevent the permeation of family and sexuality discourse. Instead, many Jews—Conservative, Orthodox, and Reform—cautiously settled into their new environments, constantly reminding their coreligionists of the traditionalist ethic learned from their immigrant, urban experiences. Orthodox leaders were especially committed to this social conservatism. They

were compelled to fashion a rhetoric that "inoculated" their followers from the perils of a less prudish postwar American society.

Rabbi Lamm on the Family

Rabbi Lamm claimed that all of this was stirred by a maelstrom of cultural subjectiveness. It defied the Orthodox religious instinct to search for order and remain obedient to a system of Jewish law. Rabbi Lamm therefore viewed it as his mission to stymie the so-called New Morality and its doctrine, as he once defined it: "all that really counts in human relations is that the relations be human; that no relationship ever be such as to hurt or offend another and that, on the contrary, the purpose of all activity be the entry into 'meaningful personal relationship.'"

For him, the 1960s had ushered in a corrupt code of ethics, a "misguided cult of moral mediocrity only barely redeemed by its ethical motif." Orthodox leaders agreed that their flocks were less tethered to traditional sensibilities, ideas that, as an ideal anyway, most rabbis had taken for granted. Rabbi Lamm figured that it behooved his trendy West Siders to listen to these lessons, knowing that many of them encountered these forces, or might end up under the heavier influences of the "sophisticates of suburbia." Their Judaism, he reckoned, was far stronger if their homes conformed to a traditional ideal.

From the Pulpit

The major challenge to reach the rank-and-file was to create a more compassionate and less aloof Orthodox pulpit. Years after departing The Jewish Center pulpit, he recalled the state-of-affairs at the well-heeled congregation. Sermons and classes at The Center, he alleged, did not touch the personal and sensitive chords that Rabbi Lamm aimed to address.

The synagogue "was a very stuffy place when I got there," he remembered in the 1980s. Rabbi Lamm's response was to furnish a more welcoming atmosphere, to discuss the social issues that mattered most to an up-and-coming generation of Orthodox Jews. "I tried very hard to warm it up a bit," he explained, "without sacrificing the attractiveness of formality."

Focusing on the family offered that down-to-earth feel. His crusade on behalf of the family was evident. One of the five sections in Rabbi Lamm's first collection of sermons was dedicated to "The Family." There, he defended the "Jewish Mother," chastised the detached "Jewish Father," and railed against modern impulses to lighten up on child rearing. In May 1969, he fired lots of brimstone at Philip Roth and his new novel, *Portnoy's Complaint*. Roth's sexually provocative novel transformed him into an American celebrity, a notion that gave The Jewish Center's famed pulpiteer great cause to shut him out of the congregation's unofficial reading lists.

His efforts extended beyond The Jewish Center. Rabbi Lamm tried to do the same for the young people who encountered him at Yavneh intercollegiate programs at Columbia University, his frequent keynotes at Orthodox Union conventions, and in the classrooms of Yeshiva College.

Publishing a Message

Rabbi Lamm spent significant time writing on these matters. Perhaps his most important contribution on this score was on behalf of the Rabbinical Council of America and its organ. In the second issue of *Tradition*—a journal he founded in 1958—Rabbi Lamm defended the *mehitzah*. The seating configuration of the synagogue was crucial for Orthodox Jews. It represented one of the emerging points of division between theirs and the Conservative congregations. Orthodox advocates had expended much energy arguing for the *mehitzah*'s importance vis-à-vis Jewish law. Rabbi Lamm rehearsed these points, but his message, in the main, concerned the "social and psychological" aspects of separate synagogue pews.

The synagogue was a place for intense retrospection and holiness. Mixing the sexes was counterproductive. To him, "as long as men will be men and women will be women, there is nothing more distracting in prayer than mixed company." Instead, separateness, at least in the synagogue, was a means of negating the raging cultural influences of the world beyond its walls. It was a means of controlling the "frivolousness" and "bashfulness" that stood in the way of a sincere religious encounter with God.

What is more, Rabbi Lamm felt compelled to rebut the popular Christian adage: "The family that prays together stays together." For him, the home was the appropriate place to cultivate family togetherness:

During the week each member of the family leads a completely separate and independent existence, the home being merely a convenient base of operations. During the day Father is at the office or on the road, Mother is shopping, and the children are at school. At night, Father is with "the boys," Mother is with "the girls," and the children dispersed all over the city—or else they are all bickering over which television program to watch. And then they expect this separateness, this lack of cohesion in the home, to be remedied by one hour of sitting together and responding to a Rabbi's readings at a Late Friday Service! The brutal fact is that the Synagogue is not capable of performing such magic.

He therefore called on Jews to take advantage of their domestic realms to fix the ills of American family life. The synagogue's role—one of them anyway—was to inspire its worshipers to transport its messages to everyday home life. This was a lesson that Rabbi Lamm preached regularly from the pulpit.

Beyond Modern Orthodoxy

His reach also moved past his own Modern Orthodox enclave, stretching into the Orthodox Right and, in a very different direction, the general American Jewish public. In the pages of the Agudath Israel monthly, Rabbi Lamm expressed astonishment over the breakdown of the American family.

He dismissed Hippies and Yippies of distorting priorities of love and marriage. He also blamed American Jewish groups, particularly the non-Orthodox.

In line with the Agudah mission, Rabbi Lamm—not at all a card-carrying Agudist—cautioned his Orthodox colleagues, no matter how much they wanted to maintain good relations with their Reform counterparts, that they could not dismiss the "havoc wrought by Reform when it abandoned Jewish marriage law" (way back, in earnest, in the 1860s). He feared the loss of a values-centered foundation established by the guidelines of traditional Jewish marriage. To Rabbi Lamm—italics included—this, accordingly, was *"probably the most irresponsible act in the recent annals of the Jewish people."*

Rabbi Lamm's domestic conservatism also engaged the women and men who subscribed to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* yearbook. In the 1974 edition, Rabbi Lamm reinforced his views on homosexuality first articulated in a 1968 article in an OU magazine. In step with other religious leaders of conservative faiths at that moment, Rabbi Lamm pushed back against progressive Christian groups' reinterpretation of Leviticus 18:22.

Many Happy Returns

In December 2007, the Yeshiva College student newspaper dedicated space to celebrating Rabbi Lamm's eightieth birthday. Aptly titled, "Happy Birthday, Rabbi Lamm," the editorial was meant to offer an honest accounting of the newly minted octogenarian's legacy, of a Jewish leader who understood that satisfying everyone was not an option:

Creativity was his mark, and it led to both cheers and boos. He took original positions that made him a hero for many and possibly too original for others … His conception of Torah u-Madda has comforted many, while appearing elitist and impractical to others. Undaunted by conventionalism and critics from inside and outside Yeshiva, Rabbi Lamm has always made sure to be candid with his thoughts and remarks, and never too shy to offer comments to which he knows that some will scoff.

Ten years later, Rabbi Lamm is ninety and we might draw a different lesson. Most central to Rabbi Lamm's Orthodox creed were aspects of Jewish life that he had long ago tied to the home and family. Whether his 1960s conceptions of this theme jibes with modern sensibilities is besides the point. This was how he earnestly and boldly expressed religious authenticity to his congregants and young followers. That conviction earned him much respect. The rest was just commentary.

Happy birthday, Rabbi Lamm.

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Synagogue *(Oxford) and* Modern Orthodox Judaism *(JPS) were both finalists for the National Jewish Book Award.*

Dr. Norman Lamm's trailblazing talmudic methodology

Tzvi Sinensky

Editors' Note: This is one of three articles in a Lehrhaus series in honor of Rabbi Norman Lamm's ninetieth birthday, observed on December 19, 2017.

Two trends are particularly prominent in contemporary Modern Orthodox Torah study. First, the last two decades have seen a rise in the popularity of non-halakhic spiritual texts, particularly *hasidut*. The popularity of *Netivot Shalom*, *Sfat Emet*, the Piazescner, and Rav Shagar, to name just a few, bears more than adequate testimony to this striking development.

Second, particularly in Israel, there is an increasing tendency to integrate traditional Talmud study and a wide range of alternative methodological tools. Sometimes termed "Neo-Lomdus," these approaches mix Brisker Lomdus, historical tools, literary methods, *hasidut* and *kabbalah*, and even art and music, and have gained popularity among a cluster of *yeshivot hesder*. Rav Shagar, whose thought has been the subject of lively discussion on these pages in recent weeks, was at the forefront of these developments, stressing the importance of deriving personal meaning from text study.

In a more moderate vein, Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein has suggested that Brisk's emphasis on the defining essential halakhic principles can lead to a deeper appreciation of *halakhah*'s underlying values. In his terminology, the "what" can lead us to better understand the "why."

Best known for his mastery of Jewish philosophy, *hasidut,* and homiletics, Dr. Lamm also distinguished himself as a first-rate *lamdan*. As a youngster, Dr. Lamm first studied with his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Yehoshua Baumel, author of the Responsa *Emek Halakhah*, and later under Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. While President of Yeshiva University, he taught and published Talmudic discourses each year.

In elucidating his viewpoint, we will examine a variety of Dr. Lamm's articles and books, especially *The Shema*, *Torah Umadda*, and *Halakhot Va-Halikhot*, a collection of his Talmudic novella. A careful study will demonstrate that Dr. Lamm assigns significant weight to both *halakhah* and *aggadah*, and forcefully advocates the integration of classical Talmudic analysis with the study of Jewish thought. What is more, this advocacy of integration flows from Dr. Lamm's embrace of monism, a mystical position prominent in *hasidut* and the thought of Rav Avraham Yitzhak Kook. Taken as a whole, his ideas anticipated current trends in Talmud study by decades, and offer a bold philosophical foundation upon which to construct the synthesis of Jewish law and Jewish thought.

Weighing *Halakhah* and Jewish Thought

Alongside his attraction to *mahashavah*, Dr. Lamm regularly stresses the importance of halakhic study, insisting that they are to be viewed as equally important. While he points out that according to Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin "the highest value is assigned the study of *Halakhah*" (*Torah Umadda*, 162), Dr. Lamm refuses to privilege either Jewish law or Jewish thought in his own constellation of values.

In his introduction to *The Shema*, a work that explores the relationship between *halakhah* and spiritual experience, for instance, Dr. Lamm insists that both *halakhah* and spirituality are essential. As he puts it in the introduction:

The contrast between the two—spirituality and law—is almost self-evident … Yet both are necessary. Spirituality alone begets antinomianism and chaos; law alone is artificial and insensitive. Without the body of the law, spirituality is a ghost. Without the sweep of the soaring soul, the corpus of law tends to become a corpse … In Judaism, each side - spirit and law - shows understanding of the other; we are not asked to choose one over the other, but to practice a proper balance that respects and reconciles the demands of each" (*The Shema*, 6-7).

True, in response to social trends that he saw as troubling, Dr. Lamm variously lays greater emphasis on *halakhah* and spirituality. In response to the sexual revolution and the New Morality of the 1960s and 70s, for instance, Dr. Lamm emphasizes the importance of law as a bulwark against permissiveness. "Without law," he writes, "we cannot distinguish between licit and illicit love." Law also protects love from falling prey to its own excesses. Left unchecked, "love destroys all - including itself" (*Seventy Faces*, vol. I, 176-77). On the other hand, (*Seventy Faces*, vol. II, 94-107), Dr. Lamm also defends the sermon, which places great emphasis on Jewish thought and morality, bemoaning the devolution of the sermon into a *dvar halakhah*.

His larger point regarding sexual ethics and homiletics, however, is not to privilege law over spirituality or vice versa. He seeks, in the spirit of the Golden Mean, to restore a rightful balance that has been disrupted. Refusing to assign greater weight to the realm of *halakhah* or Jewish thought, he contends that both are indispensable.

An Advocate for Integration

So much for the theoretical balance between the study of Talmud and Jewish thought. But what should be the proper interaction between these disciplines? May there be any "slippage," for instance, between *Gemara* and *hasidut*?

In *Torah Lishmah*, Dr. Lamm elaborates what he terms Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner's "Dissociation Principle" (277). According to this rule, which Rabbi Hayyim formulated in relation to the study of *Gemara* and *mussar*, Talmud study must be pursued independently of any other discipline. This view is an outgrowth of Rabbi Hayyim's general position that Torah must be studied for its own sake and not for an ulterior motive, and that to cling to Torah is *ipso facto* to cling to the divine (279). Importantly, though, Dr. Lamm does not present R. Hayyim's view as his own.

Instead, in *Torah Umadda*, Dr. Lamm begins to present his own view on the prospects of synthesis. After tentatively proposing a middle ground between outright separation and complete synthesis, Dr. Lamm "admits, with appropriate professions of shame and inadequacy, that he has not (yet) come to a firm conclusion on the matter" (190). He goes on to explain that the hasidic approach to *Torah u-Madda*, to which we will soon turn, allows him to sidestep the question. He prefers to leave the question open, declaring that "every individual is free to follow his or her own judgment, talent, and inclination in choosing either genuine synthesis or coexistence" (190-1).

Elsewhere in *Torah Umadda,* Dr. Lamm is less equivocal. After citing Rambam's attempt to develop an overarching framework encompassing Jewish thought and Jewish law, Dr. Lamm refers to the potential value of such a project:

As long as halakhic Jews persist in isolating *Halakhah* from integration into *Hashkafah* (a larger theoretical framework or *Anschauung*), it runs the risk of becoming a form of religious behaviorism in inadequate relevance to the perennial problems of the human spirit (85).

Dr. Lamm's aforementioned *Halakhot Va-Halikhot,* a compilation of twenty-seven Talmud essays that Dr. Lamm previously published in Torah journals, forcefully presses and models this synthesizing methodology. As he observes at the outset of his introduction, roughly half the chapters in the book attempt to bridge *halakhah* and *aggadah*; the latter, he hastens to add, includes not just Talmudic and midrashic sources but also the Jewish mystical, hasidic, and philosophical traditions.

In a crucial passage, he explains that the goal of linking these areas is to reveal the spiritual and conceptual closeness between these two worlds, and to demonstrate that the giants of Jewish law who engaged in agadic thinking (as previously defined) did not possess bipolar souls, God forbid. Instead, there are basic notions that found expression in different ways, namely both regarding Jewish law and areas beyond Jewish law. This is what motivated me to entitled this book *Halakhot Va-Halikhot.* (*Halakhot Va-Halikhot*, pg. 12)

Herein, Dr. Lamm not only advocates for integration over coexistence, but also offers a theological framework for his position: *halakhah and Jewish thought are essentially one and the same*. They are merely different expressions of a single fundamental truth.

On the basis of this approach, Dr. Lamm explains a Talmudic teaching: "The school of Eliyahu taught: Anyone who studies *halakhot* every day is guaranteed to be destined for the World to Come, as it is stated: 'His ways [*halikhot*] are eternal': Do not read ways [*halikhot*]; rather, laws [*halakhot*]'" (*Niddah* 73a). The intention of the Gemara is that *halakhot* contain kernels of *halikhot*, namely wider motifs. One who integrates them merits a share in the World to Come (11-12).

Dr. Lamm cites precedents for this project. Rabbi Meir Simchah and Rabbi Yosef Rosen of Dvinsk, one a *mitnaged* and the other a *hasid*, sought to harmonize Rambam's legal rulings with his philosophy as presented in the *Guide to the Perplexed*. Rabbi Shalom Schwadron and Rabbi Yosef Engel sought to reconcile *halakhah* with *kabbalah.*

For instance, in his *Otzrot Yosef* (*Ma'amar Levanah*, *Ma'amar David*), Rabbi Engel seeks to account for the kabbalistic view that the moon is associated with the *sefirah* of *malkhut*, royalty. Rabbi Engel cites extensive sources from the Gemara in support of this kabbalistic contention. Furthermore, he marshals his halakhic position that the Sanhedrin sometimes functions not as an independent entity but as a proxy for the entire nation. Just as the Jewish people are associated with the *sefirah* of royalty, so too is the moon, which is sanctified by the Sanhedrin, the people's representative.

Remarkably, Rabbi Rosen possessed some twenty additional manuscripts in which he located the roots of the kabbalistic tradition in the *Bavli* and *Yerushalmi*; apparently, Dr. Lamm rues, these were ravaged by the Holocaust's inferno (14-15).

Similarly, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Bloch insists that "the difference between law and lore is only in their manners of learning and deduction; but regarding their content and form, they form a single, complete Torah. It is impossible to arrive at a complete understanding of one without the complement of the other." Moreover, Dr. Lamm's teacher, Rabbi Soloveitchik, often integrated the two domains in his public lectures, and "one is obligated to speak in the language of his teacher" (16). All these titans viewed *halakhah* and *aggadah* through a unified lens.

In Dr. Lamm's sweeping portrait, *hasidim*, *mitnagdim*, Briskers, and mussarists stand side-by-side in support of integration; the *Bavli* and *Yerushalmi* offer a foundation for mystical ideas. What is more, Dr. Lamm argues not just for practical synthesis but for the fundamental unity of *halakhah* and Jewish thought. As he puts it, "to what may the matter be compared? To a blind person who feels numerous branches, but does not know that they are all unified as part of a single tree, for there is a single root to them all" (12).

Monism for Moderns

Dr. Lamm's sympathy for the kabbalistic and hasidic doctrine of monism, which drives him to unify the various domains of Torah, is a central motif in his theology.

In "The Unity Theme and its Implications for Moderns," Dr. Lamm advocates for the contemporary necessity of such a worldview. In the modern world, "the Whole Man has faded into obscurity… Man's spiritual and religious life has become a true World of Disunity. Long before the atom bomb struck Hiroshima, the modern world sustained a historic atomization, the fission and dis-integration of man's heart and soul and mind, and the beginning of the end of his *uni*verse" (55).

Instead, the Zohar, hasidic thinkers, Rav Kook and even, to a degree, Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, promote a fundamentally monistic view of this world. Our entire universe, according to this theological view, is a part of the divine. God is not the equivalent of the world (pantheism) but He encompasses and transcends the world (panentheism).

Moreover, Rav Kook holds that there is a need for *yihud*, unity, in the "transcending of epistemological limitations" (56). All knowledge, unless one attaches oneself to God, the sole source of all knowledge, remains partial. Thus, for Rav Kook, all entities, whether material or conceptual, including the various components of Torah, are truly one. Prophecy and *halakhah* must be understood in relation with one another, for ultimately, they are one and the same. Much the same may be said, according to Rav Kook, for the distinction that has been artificially and harmfully drawn between *halakhah* and *aggadah*.

Dr. Lamm's colleague and fellow philosopher Rabbi Walter Wurzburger vigorously opposed the presentation of *halakhah* as a monistic rather than pluralistic system (pluralistic in the sense of permitting multiple voices and truths that must be balanced). Nonetheless, in an updated version of his own article, published as "The Unity Theme: Monism for Moderns" in *Faith and Doubt* (pps. 42-68), Dr. Lamm refused to cede any ground.

Further, in *Torah Umadda*, Dr. Lamm offers six models for the relationship between Torah and general wisdom. Two of the six, "The Mystical Model" and "The Hasidic Model," detailed in chapters six and ten respectively, are rooted in a monistic outlook. Indeed, the two models are so similar that Dr. Lamm dedicates chapter eleven of his *Torah Umadda* to justifying his decision to

treat them as two distinct views. The hasidic model is rooted in the doctrine of "divine immanence" (151). For the hasidic masters, God's presence permeates all of material existence. The doctrine of *avodah be-gashmiyut*, worship through corporeality, is one of the primary corollaries of this precept. Nothing in our world lacks divinity and the potential for sanctification. Similarly, for Rav Kook, the universe is comprised not of sacred and profane, but of holy and not-yet-holy. Through the encounter of Torah and wisdom, a higher truth emerges.

Indeed, *Torah Umadda*'s organizational structure, which concludes with the hasidic model and compares its implications with those of all previous models (chapter twelve), implies that Dr. Lamm favors this approach. In a published interview, Dr. Lamm makes the point explicit, stating in reference to the hasidic stance, "The last one is really the one that's my darling."

Dr. Lamm's attraction to monism, both on theoretical grounds and as a salve for modern wounds, offers a powerful account of his embrace of synthesis in *Halakhot Va-Halikhot*. If existence is monistic, all parts of Torah are similarly united. This provides a powerful theoretical foundation for an integrated learning methodology. It also helps to explain his refusal to assign theoretical preference to *halakhah* in comparison with other domains of Jewish thought: in the end, there really is no point in privileging one domain of Torah over others, for they are ultimately one and the same. Although a particular methodology is appropriate for each realm of Torah study, there is a single root to them all.

Dr. Lamm's embrace of monism offers an important starting point for a holistic model of *talmud Torah*. As practiced in his public *shiurim* and exemplified in his printed essays, Dr. Lamm put forward a theory of *lomdus* as "monism for moderns" decades before such an approach became popular in Israeli circles. In presciently anticipating key aspects of these developments, Dr. Lamm offers a model for an integrated model of *lomdus* to which today's interested Talmud student may readily turn for inspiration.

Postscript

From 2004-2007, my wife Tova (Dr. Lamm's granddaughter) and I enjoyed the exquisite opportunity to learn with Dr. Lamm once each week throughout the academic year. I vividly recall riding the elevator each Tuesday at 12pm up to the fifth floor of Yeshiva University's Furst Hall, where Dr. Lamm's suite was located. We stepped into his office, so inundated with *sefarim* that they spilled over into a fully-stocked closet next door.

Each year we chose another subject. We studied *Pirkei Avot* with a range of commentaries, R. Hayyim of Volozhin's *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim*, the subject of Dr. Lamm's dissertation written under Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, and selected sections from R. Meir Simha of Dvinsk's *Meshekh Hokhma*. Beyond the fond memories, two impressions are still etched in my mind. Taken together, they offer a personal perspective that enriches our analysis of Dr. Lamm's approach to *lomdus*.

First, Dr. Lamm's wide-ranging erudition was on full display. In relation to our study of *Avot*, for example, I recall him recommending multiple commentaries with which I was utterly unfamiliar. He recommended a commentary written by a hasidic rebbe who sympathized greatly with the Religious Zionist movement - an unusual combination, to say the least. In addition to his familiarity with eclectic *sefarim*, he also demonstrated a mastery of a remarkable range of interpretive approaches. I still recall his suggestion, to take just one example, that the Mishnah

(*Avot* 5:19) contrasting Avraham and Bilam can best be understood as a subtle polemic comparing Christianity unfavorably with Judaism. Throughout, his capacity to marshal philosophical, psychological and historical tools in the study of *Avot*, too often reduced to *vertlach* and not sophisticated analysis, thrilled and inspired.

Second, Dr. Lamm's unending love of learning was palpable. He would joyously share his favorite explanations. Even more striking was the look of unadulterated joy when we encountered a text or idea that he found enlightening. At ages 77-80, following an enervating career as a pulpit rabbi and university president, he still exhibited almost childlike energy. He was forever assimilating fresh material and updating decades-old ideas.

The weekly *chavruta*, in other words, demonstrated how a lifelong commitment to interdisciplinary learning can empower even the busiest of community leaders to continue developing as a Torah scholar. I saw first-hand how Dr. Lamm's passion and erudition enabled him not only to envision but also to implement his vision of an integrated model of *talmud Torah*. For that inspiration, I am eternally grateful.

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