

# Memorial Tribute to Dr. Norman Lamm זצ"ל

## Broyde

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ship between Western thought and Jewish law was just one such example.

Rabbi Lamm once explained his perspective to me: if Rambam and Tosafot argued about a matter 800 years ago, and this argument continued to be debated to this day, the best “truth” was a view or conduct that allowed both views to be manifest. He understood that while the idea of *Torah Umadda* – the value that Yeshiva University was built upon – was worthy and valid and historically supported by many, it still was not the only possible view of the rabbinic tradition, and Rabbi Lamm supported many different kinds of Torah institutions. He

wished that more people were pluralistic and that fewer were fanatics (by which he meant “convinced beyond any doubt that their view was exclusively correct”).

This aspect of his thinking and personality was both a function of his intellectual humility and his intellectual rigor. He frequently understood that both sides of a debate were reasonable, and that our community needed to allow many voices to be considered. He thought that suppressing reasonable alternative views in favor of one single view rarely worked and created unhealthy communities. Intellectual compromise created more productive dialectic tension in which numerous, somewhat conflicted truths could be manifest and ultimately synthesized. Frequently, the compromise itself created novel ideas and prac-

tices. Rabbi Lamm relished that role personally and that model intellectually.

Rabbi Lamm liked to observe that “communities get the leadership they deserve,” and there is much to that aphorism. But happily, that aphorism was not true for our own community. Our Modern Orthodox community was blessed to be led by Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, זצ"ל, a leader much better than we deserved. May his memory be a blessing to us all.

*Michael J. Broyde was twice ordained by Rabbi Lamm. He is a law professor at Emory University. He has held a variety of rabbinic roles over the years, from director of the Beth Din of America to rabbi of the Young Israel in Atlanta to Rosh Kollel of Atlanta Torah Mitzion.*

## Teshuvah

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He was a deeply committed religious Zionist, who hesitated to make religious Zionism contingent on messianic fervor. He was among the first in America to have special *tefillot* for Israel’s Independence Day, but he was simultaneously least inclined to word these prayer along the lines of the arrival of the redemption or the heralding of the messianic era. Indeed, he was not a fan of the standard Prayer for the State of Israel (commonly recited in our community) because the words “*reishit tzemichat ge’ulateinu*” (“the beginning of our redemption”) can be understood as a call for messianic Zionism. Rabbi Lamm has stated that he favors using the British version of the prayer in many contexts because, “it is less ideologically demanding; it makes no assumptions about the Messianic nature of the State of Israel. Thus, even those who are hesitant about committing themselves to clear knowledge of our position in God’s redemptive process can join in thanksgiving for his benevolence in reestablishing our national dignity.”<sup>1</sup> That is exactly the view he takes in this letter to me, if you read it closely. Rabbi Lamm’s theological perspective was always deeply hesitant to speak for the Divine and he refuses to do so here as well.

There is so much to say about Rabbi Lamm and his accomplishments. There is a great deal of truth to the idea that a thirty-year period of Modern Orthodoxy in America could rightly be called “the era of Rabbi Norman Lamm.”

Like many rabbis of my generation, I considered Rabbi Lamm to be an important teacher, advisor and mentor. As one whose formative yeshiva education came entirely within the confines of YU and RIETS, I remain particularly indebted to Rabbi Lamm and the institution he shepherded. None of us would be in the same Torah space we are now without him. In truth, many of us have dearly missed his wisdom over the last few years, and we are sure that our community is further impoverished by his passing.

His memory should be a blessing.

Here is what he wrote to me:

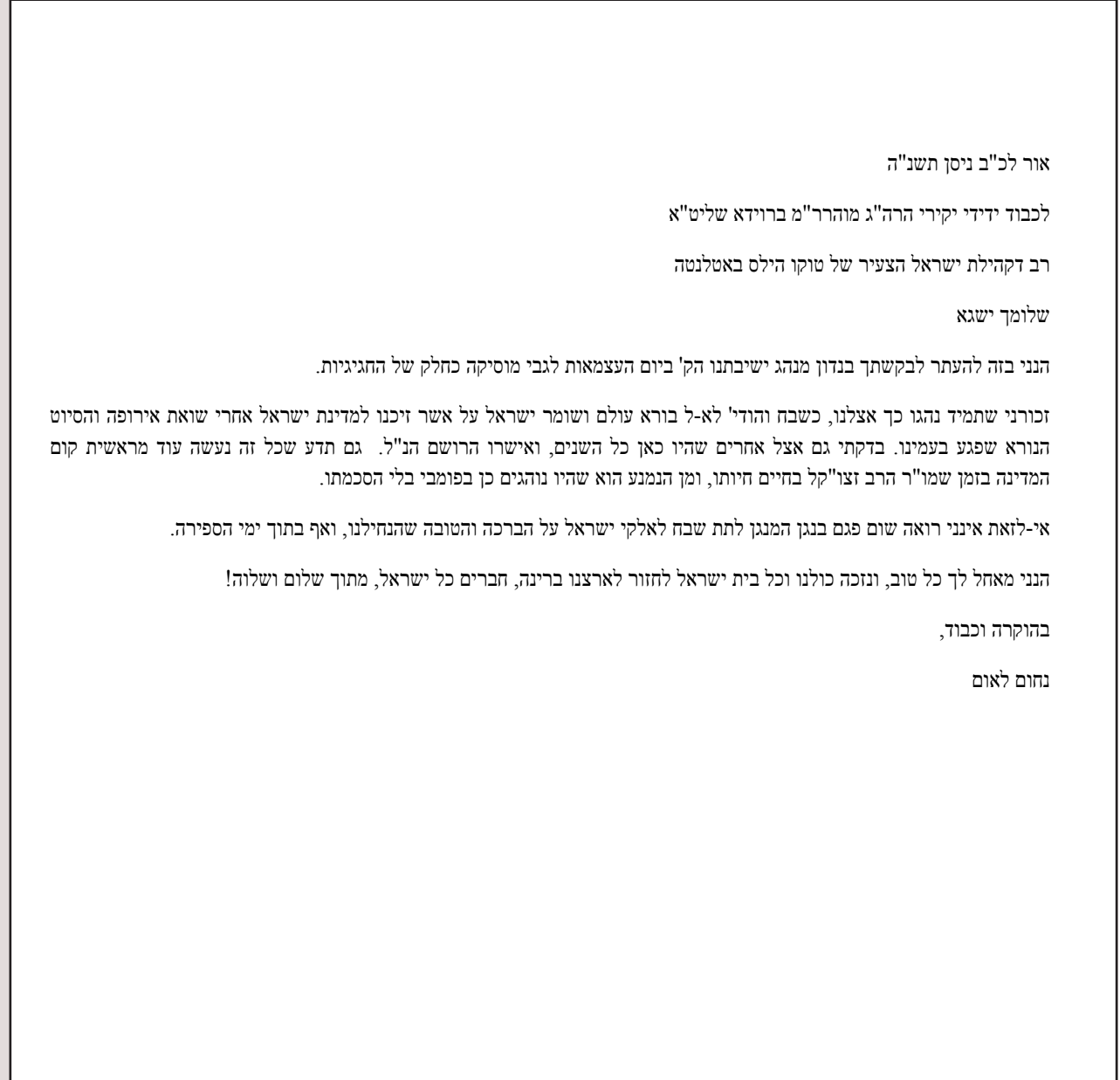
Night of 22 Nissan 5755 (April 22, 1995)

To my dear friend, Rabbi M. Broyde,

Rabbi of Congregation Young Israel of Toco Hills in Atlanta

May your peace only increase,

With this letter, I am responding to your request



אור לכ"ב ניסן תשנ"ה

לכבוד ידידי יקירי הרה"ג מוהרר"מ ברוידא שליט"א

רב דקהילת ישראל הצעיר של טוקו הילס באטלנטה

שלומך ישגא

הנני בזה להעתר לבקשתך בנדון מנהג ישיבתנו הק' ביום העצמאות לגבי מוסיקה כחלק של ההגיגות.

זכורני שתמיד נהגו כך אצלנו, כשבה והודי' לא-ל בורא עולם ושומר ישראל על אשר זיכנו למדינת ישראל אחרי שואת אירופה והסיוט הנורא שפגע בעמינו. בדקתי גם אצל אחרים שהיו כאן כל השנים, ואישרו הרושם הנ"ל. גם תדע שכל זה נעשה עוד מראשית קום המדינה בזמן שמו"ר הרב זצו"קל בחיים חיותו, ומן הנמנע הוא שהיו נוהגים כן בפומבי בלי הסכמתו.

אי-לזאת אינני רואה שום פגם בנגן המנגן לתת שבח לאלקי ישראל על הברכה והטובה שהנחילנו, ואף בתוך ימי הספירה.

הנני מאחל לך כל טוב, ונזכה כולנו וכל בית ישראל לחזור לארצנו ברינה, חברים כל ישראל, מתוך שלום ושלוה!

בהוקרה וכבוד,

נחום לאום

concerning the tradition of our holy yeshiva [Yeshiva University] on Yom HaAtzmaut [Israel’s Independence Day] with regard to music as a part of the celebration.

My recollection is that such was always the custom for us, as an expression of praise and thanksgiving to the Almighty, Creator of the world and Guardian of Israel, for bestowing upon us the State of Israel after the European Holocaust and the terrible tragedy which struck our nation. I also checked among those who have been here for many years, and they confirmed this impression. You should also know that all of this was done already at the start of the establishment of the state at the time when our teacher the Rav [Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik],

may the memory of this holy *tzaddik* be for a blessing, was still alive and vigorous. And it is impossible that they would have conducted themselves publicly in this way without his assent.

Aside from this, I do not see any problem with the playing of musical instruments as a way of giving praise to the God of Israel for the blessing and the good fortune that He bequeathed upon us, even during the days of the *Sefirah*.

I wish you all the best. And may we and all of the house of Israel merit to return to our land in joy, all of Israel as friends, in peace and harmony!

With appreciation and respect,

*Nachum Lamm*

<sup>1</sup> See the Rabbi Norman Lamm, Editor “Supplement for the Days of Remembrance and Thanksgiving” [prayers for Yom Hashoah, Yom Ha’atzmaut, and Yom Yerushalayim] (The Jewish Center, 1973), page 6.