In Memoriam: Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

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A Memorial Tribute to Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm
from Rabbi Marc D. Angel

We join the Lamm family in mourning the passing of Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, one of the great American rabbis of our generation. His leadership to Yeshiva University and the wider community was marked by wisdom, eloquence, and courage.

My personal and professional friendship with Dr. Lamm goes back nearly fifty years. To me, he was a mentor, a friend, and a model of what a rabbinic scholar ought to be.

The Talmud (Ta’anit 4a) cites the opinion of Rav Ashi that “any Talmid Hakham who is not hard as iron is no Talmid Hakham!” A rabbi must have strong principles, must be courageous in upholding these principles, must not bend under pressure. Dr. Lamm was a man of integrity and high principles. He was authentic, he knew who he was. In a world where so many rabbis (and others!) adopt artificial personae to pass themselves off to impress others, Dr. Lamm was genuine. He could not be pressured or intimidated by the “right” or by the “left.” He was a proud upholder of centrist Orthodoxy.

Shortly after Rav Ashi’s statement, the Gemara goes on to quote Ravina: “Even so, a person must teach himself the quality of gentleness.” While it is vital to be strong in one’s principles, it is equally important to be gentle. One teaches not by threatening or coercing, but by demonstrating a spirit of love, kindness and gentleness. Dr. Lamm was strong and courageous…and he also was a model of gentleness. He always seemed to have a smile on his face, a sparkle in his eye; he always seemed to have a kind word to share; he carried himself with dignity and humility. He was admired for his eloquence, his wit, and his ability to communicate with clarity and warmth.

Dr. Lamm will long be remembered and respected for his outstanding service as a synagogue rabbi; as President of Yeshiva University; as a scholar and author; and as a cherished friend and leader.

Zekher Tsaddik livrakha: The memory of the righteous is a blessing. We pray that the memory of Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm will be a source of blessing, strength and happiness to his family, his community and to all who value a dynamic, thinking Orthodox Judaism.

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