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When Rabbi Gillman retires, there will be only one active member of the Faculty of the Seminary who has been on it longer than I. We old timers remember the departures and retirements of many of the great names of the history of this institution. When they retired we missed them greatly, but we always found that we could handle it more easily than we thought we would be able to. Their scholarly contributions remained accessible, and we became the midgets standing on the shoulders of the giants.

On rare, and I mean very rare, occasions, however, the retirement of a member of the faculty left a huge void in the institution, a void that could not be and never was filled. I know with absolute certainty that Rabbi Gillman's retirement will head that very short list, and I would like to share with you a few thoughts about why that is so.

This place has had many scholars whose teaching has challenged students to think and confront difficult issues. But, truth be told, very few of them were mentors to their students both during and after the initial challenge. Not so, Rabbi Gillman. He, like the others, felt his mission to include the challenge he presented to his students. But, unlike most, he was eagerly there for them as they grappled with the challenge. When one walks by his office on the sixth floor of Unterberg, one can be sure of two things: that the *reiah nihoah* of his pipe will be unmistakable, and that there will almost always be a student sitting there with him, and they will be talking, confronting, and challenging each other. Often these are not

students currently in his class, but students of the past, or even students of the school who have never been in his class but who know that his door is always open and that he is genuinely interested in them personally and individually, and in their *neshamot*. Rabbi Gillman has been challenging students and colleagues for as long as I have known him. He challenged me when I first knew him in 1956 in Ramah Wisconsin, and then six years later when I entered Rabbinical School and came to him for a preliminary interview. His first words to me were another challenge: “Well, Joel,” he said, “do you still really believe in direct verbal revelation of the Torah?” And, he has been challenging me ever since, including as recently as last week when he and I spoke together at Mathilde Schechter. But for me, as for all others who have been his students, friends, and colleagues, the challenges were always understood to be expressions of his personal interest in us and in our answers. It didn’t matter to him whether he agreed with our answers or we with his, as long as they were the result of honest, sophisticated, and rigorous thought. He wanted to be our guide and helpmate, our mentor, not our master. And, he has succeeded for generations to serve this critical function, which so few others were either willing or able to undertake. He may have been our “professor” too, but he was always first and foremost our “rabbi.”

The Gemara in Ketubbot (106a) says that when students of a specific mentor found themselves no longer in his ongoing presence, they called themselves *yatmei* or *yatmei de-yatmei*—“orphaned” or “bitterly orphaned.” My dear friend, Neil, with each year that passes from now on this institution will have more and more *yetomim* whose loss at not having you as their mentor and rabbi will be immeasurable, whether they know it or not. That is the void that your retirement will create.

And now, please allow me to share one more thought about this wonderful man. I believe that Neil Gillman came to JTS in 1954, was ordained in 1960, and began immediately to serve this institution and the movement which it headed. This movement and this institution are the main foci of his life, second maybe, only to his family! Service to the movement and the Seminary was not his job—it was his mission! And it is a mission from which he has never slacked, and from commitment to which his energies have never flagged. How many others can you name who are as concerned as he that the laity of the Conservative movement should be able to read,

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with comprehension, the fruits of his philosophical and theological thought? How many others can you name who have gone to as many Conservative synagogues and conventions as he, and not primarily because they provide a source of income for underpaid academics, but because he perceived himself to be, and was, a missionary for Conservative Judaism and the Jewish Theological Seminary? Our movement and our institution are his life. I believe that he has raised up almost as many generations of Conservative rabbis, lay leaders, and laity, as Mordecai Kaplan. To Neil can surely be applied the dictum of Rabbi Akiva recorded in Midrash Tanhuma: “*Ba-boker zera et zarekhah ve-la-evev al tanah yadekhah,*” *Im he’e-madta talmidim be-na’ arutekhah, al teshev mi-le-ha’amid aherim beziknutekhah.* Quoting the verse from Kohelet: “Sow your seed in the morning, and don’t hold back your hand in the evening.” Rabbi Akiva interpreted: “If you have raised up students in your youth, don’t back off from raising others in your old age.” The generations of students raised up by Neil Gillman in his youth and in his old age are all in his eternal debt. The movement and the institution to which he has devoted his entire life owe him a debt beyond their ability to ever repay.

Neil, my dear friend, your retirement will leave us *yatmei de-yatmei* because you will be creating a void not soon, if ever, to be filled. But, you have earned your retirement by your life-long dedication and your untiring efforts to teach us, to challenge us, and to mentor us. Take with you into retirement our unending gratitude and our unceasing love. And, even in retirement, we expect to see you around here, to hear your voice of challenge and to benefit from your mentoring *ad meah v’eserim shanah*. Neil, *aleh ve-hatzlah!*

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