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מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן

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Brooklyn, N.Y.

ב"ה

The Study Group
Worcester, Mass.

Sholom u'Brocho:

I was pleased to learn of the formation of a study group in your community, and I wish you much success.

Although the name - "Study Group" - implies that study and the acquisition of knowledge are the main objectives of your group, the first step to real understanding of G-d and the deeper aspects of life is the realization that we cannot and must not make our own understanding a prerequisite condition of our practising the Divine precepts. In other words, we cannot say to G-d, Let us first understand your laws; then we will follow them.

When our people came into being, on receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, they declared: *נשמע ונעשה* - "We will do (first), then we will (try to) understand." This proclamation has remained our guiding light for all times and at all places. The Jew must observe the Mitzvoth whether or not he understands their deeper significance; his experience of the Mitzvoth eventually will develop the faculties of his understanding, and in this he has Divine assistance.

Jews have, likewise, always realized that our history is not shaped by understandable natural laws or forces, but by Supreme Providence, which is above and beyond our understanding.

A case in point is the festival of Purim which we celebrate today. Ahasuerus, an absolute ruler, had signed, sealed and

delivered the decree to annihilate the entire Jewish population in all the 127 provinces of his vast empire. There seemed not a glimmer of escape. The Jews could not logically understand why such a terrible decree was hanging over their heads. Haman had accused them of adhering to their own laws and way of life. But, if he was right, then precisely for this reason they should not have become exposed to such mortal danger, inasmuch as the Torah is a Torath-chaim, a law of life and a way of life, not death.

Yet, during the entire year that the decree was pending, the Jews remained steadfast in their faith and loyalty to G-d, although there was but one avenue of escape from certain death, as our Sages tell us, and that was precisely the opposite: abandonment of their way of life and merging with the non-Jewish population. But not a single Jew or Jewess chose this apparently "logical" solution.

Their salvation also came through a miraculous chain of events which completely turned the wheel of fortune from destruction to renewed life, physical and spiritual, and from mourning to gladness.

Now the words of the Megillah, "These days shall be remembered and practised," can be better understood. Remembering our relationship with G-d must immediately lead to our practising His precepts. Through practising G-d's precepts, despite any inclination to the contrary stemming from one's inner enemy (Yetzer-hora) or external hindrances or influences, the Jew remains rooted in G-d's Torah and His Mitzvoth which make our people indestructable.

I trust that you will follow this true approach, and will extend your good influence throughout your community.

With Purim greetings and blessing,

M. Schneerson
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson