

Letter to Mrs. Miriam Sachs, Rosh Chodesh Sivan, 5715 (May 22, 1955)

Na'aseh V'nishmah as the key to dealing with anxiety;
Connection to the days of Sefirah

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By the Grace of G-d
Rosh Chodesh Sivan,
5715, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mrs. Miriam Sachs
11 Seaman Avenue
New York 34, N.Y.

Blessing and Greeting:

This is in reply to your letter of May 1st, in which you mention your intense inner struggle, etc., which was the subject of our conversation when you were here.

It is surely unnecessary to elaborate on the close relationship between the physical and the spiritual, which even modern science has become convinced of it.

Physically, at this time of the year, we find Nature again in full bloom. After a period of hibernation, it springs back to life with renewed vigor and vitality, faithfully reproducing the same elements which characterized the same period a year ago, and two years ago, and all the way back to the first seasons of the Nature cycle.

In our religious and spiritual life, also, we have the seasons and festivals which recur year after year, and reproduce the same spiritual elements which first gave rise to them. Thus, at this time of the year, with the days of Sefirah connecting the festival of Passover ~~wikk~~ (physical freedom) with its culmination in Shavuoth (spiritual freedom), we can - if we are sufficiently prepared and attuned to it, relive the experiences of our ancestors who actually witnessed the Revelation and accepted the Torah at Sinai. What a long way our ancestors covered in the course of but 50 days; from the abominations of Egyptian "culture", in which moral depravity and polytheism reigned supreme (as recent archaeological discoveries have amply brought to light) - to pure monotheism at Mount Sinai, where the Jew receives the Torah with the call of Na'aseh v'nishma, Na'aseh first, i.e. complete surrender of man to G-d. Through the medium of the Torah, G-d 'descends' on Mount Sinai, and the Jew ascends to G-d; the soul is released from all its fetters tying it down to earthly things, and on the wings of fear of G-d and love of G-d unites with the Creator in complete communion. It is then that it can fully appreciate the inner meaning of 'I am G-d thy G-d, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage,' and the rest of the Ten Commandments, till 'Thou shalt not covet,' i.e. not only refrain from taking what is not yours, but not even desire it.

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This great rise from the abyss of Egypt to the sublime heights of Sinai was attained by pure and simple faith in G-d, from the day when parents and children, women and infants, several million souls in all, set out on the trek through the desert, not dismayed by the irrationality of it, but simply obeying the Divine call with absolute trust. This won special Divine favor, in the words of the Prophet: 'I remember unto thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thy betrothal, thy going after Me into the wilderness.' It is this faith that carried the Jews through the ages, an insignificant physical minority in the midst of a hostile world, a spot of light threatened by an overwhelming darkness. It is this absolute faith in G-d that we need nowadays more than ever before.

It is said, the whole sun is reflected in a drop of water. And so the whole of our nation is reflected in each individual, and what is true of the nation as a whole is true of the individual.

The core of Jewish vitality and indestructability is in its pure faith in G-d; not in some kind of an abstract Deity, hidden somewhere in the heavenly spheres, who regards this world from a distance; but absolute faith in a very personal G-d, who is the very life and existence of everything and everybody; who permeates ~~and~~ everything and everybody, and who is close at hand, no matter where one is, ~~xx~~ or what one does. Where there is such faith, there is no room for fear or anxiety, as the Psalmist says, 'I fear no evil, for Thou art with me,' with me, indeed, at all times, not only on Shabbos or Yomtov, or during prayer or meditation on G-d. And when one puts his trust in G-d, unconditionally and unreservedly, one realizes what it means to be really free and full of vigor, for all one's energy is released in the most constructive way, not only in one's own behalf, but also in behalf of the environment at large.

The road is not free from obstacles and obstructions, for in the Divine order of things we are expected to attain our goal by effort; but if we make a determined effort, success is Divinely assured, and the obstacles and obstructions which at first loom large, dissolve and disappear.

I wish you to tread this road of pure faith in G-d, without overly introspection and self-searching, as in the simple illustration of a man walking: he will walk most steadily and assuredly if he will not be conscious of his walk and not seek to consciously coordinate the hundreds of muscles operative in locomotion, or he would not be able to make his first step.

Wishing you success in all above, and hoping to hear good news from you and yours,

With the blessing of a happy Yomtov
of Receiving the Torah with inner joy,

Sincerely *M. Schmerson*

Letter to Mrs. Miriam Sachs, 18 Sivan 5715, (June 8, 1955)

Simplicity and unity is the foundation of complexity, both in science and in Torah;
Mitzvos are a prerequisite to understanding

By the Grace of G-d
18th of Sivan, 5715
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Dr. Miriam Sachs
11 Seaman Avenue
New York 34, N. Y.

Blessing and Greeting:

...I received your letter of May 31, in reply to mine, in which I dwelt on the subject of simple faith, as emphasized by the festivals of Pesach and Shavuoth.

In your reply you refer to what seems to you a contradiction to the beauty of “simple” faith in the fact that the complexity and multiplicity in nature, particularly in the world of plants and animals, rather add to, than detract from, the beauty of things, and you wonder if the same may not be true of faith.

The argument would be valid perhaps if we were speaking of the “superficial,” and not of the innermost and essential aspects of things. Actually the analogy from nature only confirms what I wrote to you in my previous letter.

For, needless to say, I did not mean to imply that a person, especially a Jew, should content himself with faith alone, or that our religion is a simple matter. As you know, the Torah contains 613 different and varied precepts, and each one has a variety of facets, and G-d expects every Jew and Jewess to reflect them in their daily life according to circumstance. This certainly makes for a variety of religious experience and practice. I say, “to their best ability,” etc., for as our Sages ruled, “a rich man bringing a poor man’s offering has not fulfilled his duty,”¹ which, of course, applies to the realm of the spiritual as to that of material. However, all this religious practice and experience, in all its variety, has to be based on, and permeated by, the same basic faith in G-d, a simple and absolute faith.

The analogy in nature is to be found in the fact that with all the complexity and multiplicity of plant and animal life, their basic and ultimate components are single cells, though the cell itself has a variety of components which science has by no means fully

unraveled. It is only when these elementary cells behave properly in their simple functions of growth, division and multiplication, without interference of foreign elements, etc., that the complex organism is properly attuned and can carry out its most amazing functions.

Even in the inorganic world, and also in the organic world, the great complexity and multiplicity of things have been reduced to a small number of some, one hundred basic elements, and the endeavor in science is to reduce even the complex of their nuclear composition to a minimum, in order to get closer to the secrets of nature. Here, too, the basic function of nature is determined not by the principle of complexity but by that of simplicity, the small particle, the atom, the core of things, and more deeply by its very few components.

You write that although you believe in G-d and His closeness, you are endeavoring to find your own way of serving Him. This is a long and round-about way. It is analogous to the person searching for the secrets of the functions of the physical body, e.g. how food is converted into blood, tissue, energy, and sustains life; it would surely not be the right approach to stop eating and drinking, pending his arrival at the conclusions of his study. Even a reduction in the necessary calorie intake would weaken his powers of reasoning and research and handicap him in his ever attaining his objective. Similarly, in an effort to find a way of serving G-d, one must not postpone such service until one has completed one's search, and, moreover, the absence of the religious practice itself handicaps the powers of the intellect to grasp the truth. Furthermore, since the human intellect is by its very nature limited, while the subject it desires to grapple with is related to the Unlimited, it is only with the aid of the Infinite G-d that one can hope to be lifted across the unbridgeable chasm separating the created and the Creator, and such Divine aid can come only through Divine service.

Finally, there is obviously no contradiction here to the principle of the freedom of personal choice. The real issue here is the proper approach and method to be undertaken now, until one has arrived at the stage where one's intellect becomes sufficiently clear to confirm the established truth. The key to the solution is "Na'aseh v'nishma," where "Na'aseh," practical religion in daily life, is the prerequisite condition for "Nishma" study and understanding.

With blessing,