

מזכירות
 כ"ק אדמו"ר מנחם מענדל שליט"א שניאורסאהן
 ליו באוויטש

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Excerpt from the Lubavitcher Rabbi's שליט"א Letter
on the Question of the Regents Prayer

By the Grace of G-d
 24th of MarCheshvan, 5723
 Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

...The following is in reply to your request to state my views on the question of the Regents Prayer which became the subject of a controversy when the U. S. Supreme Court declared it, not unanimously but by a majority opinion, to be unconstitutional. I reiterate my views in writing, although I stated my position at greater length at a public gathering some months ago.

I want to make it quite clear at the outset that my views are based on the following aspects of the problem:

(a) The question relates specifically to the non-denominational Regents Prayer, which reads:

Almighty G-d, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee,
 and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our
 teachers and our country.

(b) The procedure of the recitation of this prayer being that the students read it together with the teacher.

I am approaching this question from the viewpoint of our Torah (though I firmly believe that this position coincides with the best national interests of the United States in general).

It is important to bear in mind that the question concerns a vast number of children in the Public Schools who do not receive any other religious training or instruction in the morning; the majority of them not even in the afternoon, and many of them not even in Sunday school. This assertion will be borne out if we compare the statistics of children attending afternoon classes of religious instruction plus those attending Sunday school, (both forms of instruction being very minimal), with the number of children in the Public Schools; the enormous proportion of children receiving no religious instruction whatsoever will at once be revealed.

The following factors have to be considered from the viewpoint of the Torah and Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law):

1. Prayer as a Divine Commandment.

According to all our authorities, it is a positive commandment to pray to G-d daily. The text of the prayers has, of course, been formulated and ordained, but the law also provides that under certain circumstances (e.g. where personal safety is a factor, and distractions of a like nature) - a short prayer should be recited and the commandment is fulfilled thereby. (I have discussed the matter from the Halachic viewpoint in my letter to Rabbi J., which is available in Hebrew). Accordingly, the Regents Prayer is a valid prayer, especially as it contains two basic elements of prayer: acknowledgment (praise) and request.

2. Submission to the Kingdom of Heaven (Kabbolas Ol Malchus Shomayim).

Recognition of the Divine Authority and obedience to it, is also one of the imperatives of the Torah, which is to be fulfilled every day. This is the basic purpose of our daily reading of the Shema. While the actual reading of the verses and portions of the Shema is required for the fulfillment of the precept, the element of "Submission to the Divine Authority" contained therein can also be expressed in any appropriate form (as this point has been more fully treated in the said Hebrew letter).

Thus, those Jewish children who do not recite the Shema daily could, at least, fulfil that part of it which expresses recognition of the Divine Authority - by means of the Regents Prayer.

3. There are certain precepts which are incumbent upon Jews not only every day, but every moment of their life, such as the belief in G-d, the love of G-d, reverence of G-d, etc., (as enumerated and explained in Sefer haChinuch, in the Introduction).

Precisely in the case of a very great number of children of the Public Schools and their parents, Jewish and gentile, it is likely, sad to say, that many days, weeks and months might pass by without their giving a thought to G-d in some personal way, not to mention any thought of love and reverence for G-d.

(The widespread disinterestedness in religion and religious education among parents of Public School children seems to be borne out by the fact that so many children of the Public Schools receive no religious instruction whatever, as mentioned above. Some parents attempt to defend their neglect of religious instruction on financial grounds, but this excuse is not supported by their way of life, in which matters of lesser importance are given priority). much

Therefore the Regents Prayer, expressing as it does the acknowledgment of, and dependence upon, G-d, and that the welfare of this country and of the parents, children and teachers depends on G-d's benevolence, offers in many cases the only opportunity for the children to make some personal 'contact' with G-d every day.

4. The hope expressed in some quarters that the banning of the Regents Prayer will somehow be compensated eventually by the introduction of more religion into the home, is very doubtful, in the light of the prevailing parental attitude, in those circles as mentioned above, towards religion. Be this as it may, it is certain that the immediate result of outlawing the Regents Prayer is that hundreds of thousands of children have been

precluded from mentioning G-d's Name - in many cases the one and only opportunity they had of ever mentioning G-d's Name every day of the week.

5. As for the argument that the Regents Prayer has little religious value because it would tend to become mechanical and would not reach the heart of the child reciting it, the same argument can be used, and with greater justification, in the case of adults and in regard to any daily prayer in any place. It is, unfortunately, true that attendance at houses of worship sometimes*degenerates into a social function rather than serving as a deep religious experience, but it is not necessarily the fault of the environment; and the same is true of the Public Schools.

As a matter of fact, children are usually more sincere and more receptive than adults. A great deal depends on the teacher, and the Regents Prayer need not degenerate into a mechanical recitation if the teacher will put some feeling into it.

6. Consecration and Desecration of the Divine Name (Kiddush HaShem and Chilul HaShem).

Whatever justification there may be for it, but the fact is that broad sections of the American people, and of people all over the world, see the attempt to suppress the brief non-denominational Regents Prayer as an attempt to eradicate religion, even G-d's Name, from Public School education and thus also from the personal lives of the vast majority of American children, inasmuch as their character, personality, world outlook, etc. are largely formed in the Public Schools.

With the exception of a small number of secularists and atheists, there is no parent who could in all conscience object to a non-denominational prayer per se. Inevitably, there has been formed in the public mind the impression that it is the atheists and secularists that are the ones who strenuously object to the Regents Prayer, or any mention of G-d's Name, and those circles which identify themselves with the opposition to the Regents Prayer are quite naturally placed in the same camp with the secularists. There is thus an obvious case of Chilul HaShem, the Profanation of G-d's Name, and also of the good name of the Jewish people (that is, Chilul HaShem in the eyes of the gentiles).

7. There is an additional point to be considered: The responsibility which the Jewish religion imposes upon its adherents towards the non-Jew in the matter of dissemination of the belief in G-d; certainly not to weaken that belief in any way, directly or indirectly, which comes under the Biblical injunction: "Place not a stumbling block before the blind".

8. From every aspect of Jewish Law, it would appear clear that every Jew, for whom the Torah is a guide, is dutybound to use every legal and constitutional means to see the majority-decision of the Supreme Court on the Regents Prayer reversed.

9. It is surprising to see that there are some people who are under the impression that inasmuch as the Supreme Court is the highest court in the land, its decision is final and there is nothing that should be done about it.

Needless to say, this is not so, for the Constitution provides the ways and means of enacting or repealing laws, and of amending the Constitution itself. Constitutional ways and means can be found, should public

* in some such places

opinion demand it, to rectify a situation. Indeed, this is one of the basic foundations of the democratic system of which this country is so justly proud. It is of particular interest to the Jewish community since it is the basis on which it can justly and legally claim the repeal of the so-called Sunday Blue Laws, which are unfair and discriminatory for Jewish Sabbath observers.

10. The apprehension has been expressed in some quarters that the recitation of the Regents Prayer in the Public Schools in the manner in which it was carried out (bare-headed, and limited to only twenty two words, etc., etc.) might create an erroneous impression among those students who are completely devoid of Jewish knowledge, even of the fundamentals of our faith. Such children might conclude that this prayer and the manner of its expression satisfies all the requirements of our Torah and the Jewish prayer; that it is permissible for Jews to pray bare-headed ; that no synagogue attendance is necessary, etc., etc.

In my opinion, however, these apprehensions do not justify at all the elimination of all the positive aspects of the Regents Prayer as enumerated above.

To be more exact: The said apprehensions do not at all justify the prevention of scores of thousands of Jewish children from fulfilling the Mitzvoth enumerated above, all the more so since they are basic Mitzvoth.

Needless to add, it is necessary to seek appropriate ways and means to eliminate, or at least reduce, the danger of those apprehensions being materialized. One such solution should be, first and foremost, the enrollment of all Jewish students of the Public Schools into Talmud Torahs, in the post school hours at least. But regardless of all this, it is a vital necessity that they should pray every day, even if only the Regents Prayer. * * * /(and in the morning),

So much for the strictly Halachic aspects of the problem under discussion.

I venture, however, to address myself also to the sentiments and imagination of everyone whose heart is alert to what is happening around him, and is especially sensitive to the problems of the growing generation, to view the problem as an image projected against the background of our critical time.

In our present day anlage of rising tension and insecurity under the threat of a nuclear war; of the steadily growing might of communism making ever greater encroachments upon the free world, steadily extending its influence not only over newly captured territories, but also over the minds of people living in the free democracies; of mounting juvenile delinquency -

America has been blessed with hundreds of thousands of children, boys and girls, Jewish and gentile, throughout the width and breadth of these United States, who daily raise their youthful voices in prayer to G-d, acknowledging that He is the Master of the Universe, invoking His blessings upon their country and all who are dear to them, and expressing their confidence in His benevolence.

With this image in mind, can anyone raise his hand to silence this vast body of American youth, saying: "Stop praising G-d! Stop praying to Him! It is forbidden to do so in the American Public School!"

What would be the effect of such an order on all these youths? Can anything explain away to their young minds, far removed from Constitutional Law, the impact of such a prohibition in this country, where the free exercise of religion is one of its most cherished values?

I sincerely hope that every Jew who is conscious of the great heritage of our people, the people who brought the idea of One G-d to the world, will uphold the only position compatible with this tradition - to disseminate G-dliness and the observance of the Divine commandments everywhere and at all times, especially among the youth of today, the builders of our future.

With blessing

/Signature/

Correction:

Page 1, line 13	(from bottom)	- word national, to be omitted.
" " " 8 "	" "	- after word statistics, add: about the number
" 2 " 6 "	top	- word like - should read: similar
" " " 10 "	" "	- after word (praise - add: of G-d)
" 3 " 2 "	2	- after word every - add: school
" 3 " 12 "	" "	- words adults. A - should read; adults, and a