

RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON

Lubavitch

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מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן

ליובאוויטש

770 איסטערן פארקוויי

ברוקלין, נ. י.

By the Grace of G-d

8th of Tammuz, 5725

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Miss Pnina Gutnick
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Gateshead-on-Tyne, 8, England

Blessing and Greeting:

I am in receipt of your letter.

It seems to me that you are devoting too much attention to the matter of argumentation concerning the policy of Lubavitch. Moreover, as I see from your writing, some of the critics of Lubavitch, judging by their arguments, do not seem to look for the truth, but rather are trying to justify their own conduct, which deep in their hearts, they feel is not as it should be.

It is not easy to adequately clarify in a letter the problem which you pose in your letter, namely the relative importance of self advancement in Torah vis-a-vis efforts to bring Jews closer to Yiddishkeit. Actually there is no need for me to do this, inasmuch as you can discuss the matter with Anash in London when the opportunity presents itself, for it is, of course, easier to discuss such a matter personally, back and forth if necessary. However I will attempt to clarify this matter for you briefly by means of the well known story of Hillel the Elder (Shabbos 31a), where he formulated the essential gist of the whole Torah in the words, "What is hateful unto thee, do not do unto others." Accordingly, suppose we ask the student of the Kolel, who claims that it is right for him to sit and study the Torah, disregarding the plight of his fellow Jew who is in need of help to be brought (closer) to Yiddishkeit, on the basis that he will help him some years later: How would you feel if the situation were reversed? This is to say, suppose you were born in a non-religious family, and under the influence of the circumstances you are not only unaware of a Kolel, but even of a Yeshiva Ketano; yet you have reached a stage where you feel that you want to identify yourself with the Torah and Mitzvoth and Jewish way of life; no one is taking an interest in you, but there is a boy who is sitting in a Kolel, desiring to advance his own knowledge of the Torah; you appeal to him to help you, but he says: "Sorry, I still wish to advance my own knowledge of the Torah; I will see what I can do for you a couple of years from now."

Now, if the Kolel boy, not of the illustration, but the real one, will justify the attitude of his counterpart in the illustration, then he will be truthful to the principle of Hillel the Elder. If, however, when "The shoe presses his own foot" he would cry out in pain, but is prepared to ignore the plight of his fellow Jew, then he ought to do a great deal of

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serious introspection.

I am aware of the argument that no such policy existed some 50 or 100 years ago, when there was no doubt that the primary duty of a Jewish boy was to sit and learn Torah. But we must not forget that the situation was quite different two or three generations ago. In those days the Jewish home was a Kosher Jewish home, the street was also Jewish, and there was no immediate danger of assimilation, intermarriage, etc. Under such circumstances the important thing was to make a Torah scholar out of the ignoramus, and a greater Lamdan out of a smaller Lamdan. In our days unfortunately it is not a question of raising the level of Torah knowledge among Jews. It is rather a question of Pikuach Nefesh, actually saving Jews that they should remain Jews in the very plain sense of the word. Obviously Pikuach Nefesh takes precedence over everything else.

Sometimes when one hasn't got the time to study a particular movement or Shita, it is possible to get an insight into the meaning and significance of the Shita by its founder. The Lubavitcher Shita to help a fellow Jew, even at self sacrifice, began with the Alter Rebbe, author of the Shulchan Aruch which has been accepted by all Jews, not because he was the Rebbe of Chabad, but because he was one of the most outstanding Torah scholars of his day. This Shita has been continued from generation to generation, down to my father-in-law of saintly memory, who received Smicha at the age of 17 and who was also a great Torah scholar, though he never boasted about it. He too would have preferred, under other circumstances, to sit and learn Torah day and night. Yet when a terrible crisis arose in Russia, and a new regime took over power, a ruthless regime which openly declared war against religion in general, and the Jewish religion in particular, and when almost everybody else fled for his life, leaving Jewish communities without spiritual guidance and support, it was my father-in-law of saintly memory who rose single-handedly to the defense and preservation of Torah and Mitzvoth in Soviet Russia, and he was the only one who supported Yeshivos, regardless of whether they were Chassidic or non-Chassidic, and who provided facilities to teach even a child of a communist parent in some remote place. And if at this time there are thousands upon thousands of Jews Shomrei Torah and Mitzvoth in Soviet Russia, it is only due to the real self-sacrificing efforts of my father-in-law of saintly memory and his disciples, who actually suffered persecution and torture, as is well known.

As a matter of fact you can also cite your own father as a living example of this Shita. For, he too, had a choice of either sitting in a Kolel and advancing his own knowledge, or to go out and do what he is now doing to help save scores of Jewish families that they should remain within the Jewish fold. And, with G-d's help, many boys of those families are now sitting in Kolelim and are learning Torah.

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Finally, one simple test as to the sincerity of the critics of the Lubavitcher Shita is this: Are they indeed dedicating 100% of their time to the study of the Torah, or are they taking time out to carry on debates and argumentations, to read newspapers and to do other things, which, though innocent in themselves, are time consuming, and this time could be applied to helping other Jews in need of help? I venture to say that the argument that they do not wish to join in any such activities as Lubavitch is engaged in, by reason of their devotion and dedication to the study of the Torah, is rather questionable.