

By the Grace of G-d
11th of Adar, 5726
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter in which you question the wisdom of the Issur to study Apikorsus, in view of the fact that it seems to you right that G-d should want everyone to study all he can about theology and every point of view, even to the extent of doubting the very existence of G-d, etc.

Needless to say, a letter is hardly the proper medium to discuss such a matter adequately. This should not be necessary, inasmuch as there are many Rabbonim and Roshei Yeshivah in your neighborhood with whom you could discuss this and similar questions at length.

However, inasmuch as you took the trouble to write to me, I will attempt to answer at least your first question, as briefly as possible. I will do so by referring to the well-known saying of the Rambam, who, as you know, was the great Codifier (including in his Code also the above mentioned Issur), and at the same time was also one of the greatest physicians that ever lived. As the Rambam expressed it, the body and soul have very much in common insofar as treatment of diseases are concerned.

Bearing the above in mind, let us now consider the fact that when one is desirous of ~~studying~~ doing research in a highly contagious disease, it is of course necessary first to have the proper preparation and training in order not only to hope to achieve anything, but also in order to prevent contacting that disease. Moreover, this kind of research is not done for the sake of curiosity or just as a pastime. Only that person is justified in placing himself in certain danger to his own health (for with all precautionary measures, there is always an element of risk involved), who can hope to bring some good to humanity, and thereby alleviate the suffering of others or even eliminate the disease. This calls for certain qualifications, and one would not expect a boy who is just out of high school to begin such a dangerous research. And even after many years of study and preparation and maturity, it is not everyone that is qualified to do this kind of work.

What has been said above in regard to diseases of the body is also true in every detail in regard to the diseases of the

soul. Especially when it concerns Apikorsus, since this is directly and essentially connected with the very well-being of the soul, to such an extent that it could possibly undermine and cripple one's faith in HaShem Chaim, and lead to the very opposite of Chaim.

It would be possible to elaborate on the above a great deal, but I trust that what has been said will suffice to answer your question. I will add, however, another point. It is unnecessary to emphasize the relative importance of the body and the soul, since the former is temporary and the latter is everlasting, but there is a further simple consideration: Any physical disorder can be easily discovered, and if caught in time, can be cured, since a physical disorder is immediately connected with physical discomfort, which serves as a warning and signal. However in a spiritual disorder, it is possible that years may pass by without being aware of the dangerous course upon which one has embarked or drifted. So much so that there can be a total disorientation and distortion, to the extent of "calling light - darkness, and darkness - light," which is the height of spiritual disease.

I note what you write about your being brought up in an orthodox environment. I trust that you are continuing this golden chain of tradition. And although you write that you have been exposed to "contemporary thought," I trust that you have also made a study of Jewish history. If so, you will have seen that what is generally considered as "contemporary" Judaism, namely Reform and Conservatism, is nothing really new. As a matter of history, we have had in every generation deviationist movements trying to break away from the mainstream of Torah Yiddishkeit, yet hoping to remain within it. As early as Mattan Torah, and only a few weeks afterwards, there were already the Golden Calf worshippers, and so it went from generation to generation, down to Mendelsohn, the father of Reform. However, as you thumb through the pages of Jewish history, one can see at once what happened to all deviationists. Either they completely returned to the Jewish fold, as was the case with the majority of the Golden Calf worshippers, or they were completely lost, as was the case with the minority. Similarly with those who came under the influence of Mendelsohn. Many of them returned to the traditional faith of their ancestors, while the minority completely assimilated and converted.

There is a well-known and wise old saying that the past should serve as a lesson for the future. It is easy to see where deviation from the right way, the way of the Torah and Mitzvoth, leads. Even if one wishes to make a change insofar as one is personally concerned, and argues that this is his own personal affair, this still does not preclude all others to try and help him. The analogy would be of one who wishes to jump from a bridge and claims that this is his own personal affair. In that case no one would question the duty of everyone within reach to try to help him, and to mobilize the police

- 3 -

and fire departments to save that person. All the more so where there are children. Unfortunately, many parents do not realize how they are using their own children as guinea pigs for dangerous experimentations, etc.

As we are about to celebrate the festival of Purim, the history of those days can, again, serve as a lesson for the present day. In those days of Mordecai and Esther, the Jews had attained a high degree of self determination and freedom, and high positions in the State. Mordecai, for example, was a favorite of the royal Court. The freedom which the Jews enjoyed at the time brought about a situation where many Jews were eager to participate in the great royal Feast. Many Jews felt that they were in no danger of any kind. The results of this attitude are related in the Megillah. The point that is of main concern to us here is: The non-Jews know, as Haman declared, that Jews are a unique people, with unique laws and customs of their own. No amount of effort on the part of some assimilationists will deceive the non-Jew, or conceal the fact that a Jew is always a Jew. One can only delude oneself. At the same time the story of Purim emphasizes that when a crisis comes and Jews desire to turn back and return to the fold, nothing stands in the way of Teshuva, and it brings to a reversal of the situation from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to festivity. It is only a pity that a crisis must come before some Jews realize where they belong.

Wishing you a truly happy and inspiring Purim,

With blessing,

By