

By the Grace of G-d
6th of Shevat 5731
Brooklyn N. Y.

Miss
London, England.

Blessing and Greeting:

I received your letter with some delay. In it you write about the uncertainty you feel regarding commitment to Yiddishkeit, inasmuch as you think that life in accordance with the Torah and Mitzvos is restrictive, and limits the individual in personal creativeness, particularly in the area of thinking and choosing for himself, etc., so that it is hard to reconcile such commitment with the idea of personal freedom.

Frankly, this attitude is somewhat surprising, coming from a thinking person. I suppose the difficulty here is due to the superficial understanding of the meaning of the "acceptance of the yoke of the Torah and Mitzvos", because the word "yoke" suggests restrictiveness.

In truth, however, there are many things in the daily life which a person accepts and follows without question, even if it be a highly gifted intellectual, with a searching bent of mind. Since you attend college, and have no doubt studied science, etc., you surely know that one does not go about starting everything in physics and technology from the beginning, by verifying everything through personal research and experimentation. For example, a person will board a plane without first having researched into aerodynamics, etc., to verify that it is safe to fly in it, and that it will bring one to one's destination at approximately the scheduled time.

Or take an example from the area of physical health. There are well established things which are useful or harmful to one's health. A person will not go about trying to verify the utility or harmfulness of a particular drug through personal experimentation. Even if a person has a very strong inclination to do some research and experimentation, he will surely choose such areas which have not previously been researched. This generally accepted attitude is quite understandable and logical. For inasmuch as experts have

amply researched into these areas and have determined what is good and what is harmful for physical health, or have established the methods as to further technological advancement - it would be at best a waste of time to try to go over all those experiments from the beginning. On the other hand, there is no assurance that he may not make some error, and arrive at wrong conclusions, with disastrous effects, as experience has shown in some cases.

What has been said above in regard to physical health is also true in regard to spiritual health, and how the Neshomoh can attain perfection and fulfilment. All the more so since spiritual health is generally related to physical health, particularly insofar as a Jew is concerned.

Now the Creator of man, Who is also the Creator and Master of the whole world, surely has the best qualifications that might be expected of any authority, to know what is good for man and for the world in which he lives. In His goodness, G-d has already provided us with complete and final results, having put us on notice that if a person will conduct his daily life in a certain way, then he will have a healthy Neshomoh in a healthy body, and it will be good for him in this world as well as in the world to come. He has also left some areas where a person can carry on his own experimentations in other matters which do not interfere with the rules laid down by Him.

In other words, it is quite certain that if a human being would live long enough, and would have the necessary capacities, to make all sorts of experimentations, without distraction and interference and without error, he would undoubtedly arrive at the very same conclusions which we already find in the Torah which G-d has given us, namely the need to observe Shabbos, eat Kosher, etc., etc. But, as mentioned above, G-d in His infinite goodness - and it is in the nature of the Good to do good - wished to spare us all the trouble, as well as the possibility of error, and has already given us the results beforehand, for the benefit of both the person who has the inclination and capacity to search, as well as for those who do not.

The expression of "yoke" in relation to accepting the Torah and Mitzvos in the daily life is to be understood in the sense that human nature makes it necessary to act on imperatives. For, human nature, and the Yetzer Hora, are such that an individual might easily succumb to temptation. Temptation is sweet at the beginning but bitter at the

end. But human nature is such that an individual may disregard the bitter consequences because of the initial gratification. We see, for example, that children, and very often also adults, may be warned that overindulgence in certain foods would be harmful to them, and make them sick later on so that for a period of time they might not be able to eat anything at all, yet they may nevertheless reject all restraint to gratify their immediate appetite or passion. In a like manner, G-d has given us the "yoke" of Torah and Mitzvos, telling us that whether one understands them or not, or whatever the temptation may be, one must carry out G-d's commandments unquestioningly.

There is a further point, and this is the most essential aspect of the concept of "yoke" of the Torah and Mitzvos. It is that although, as mentioned before, the Torah and Mitzvos have been given for the benefit of man, both in this life and in Eternal Life, there is an infinitely greater quality with which G-d has endowed the Torah and Mitzvos, namely the quality of uniting man with G-d, that is, the created with the Creator, who would otherwise have nothing in common. For, by giving man a set of Mitzvos to carry out in his daily life, G-d has made it possible for man thereby to attach himself to his Creator, and transcend the limitations of a limited being, living in a limited world. The Torah and Mitzvos constitute the bridge which spans over the abyss separating the Creator from the created, enabling the human being to rise and attach himself to G-dliness. Of course this quality can be attained if the person observes the Torah and Mitzvos not because of the reward that goes with it for the body, or for the soul, or for both, but purely because they are the Will and Command of the Holy One blessed be He. For this reason also, the text of the Berocho which a Jew makes before fulfilling a Mitzvah does not mention the utility of the Mitzvah, but rather the fact that "He has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us."

Much more can be said in connection with such a profound subject, but I trust that the above lines, though limited in quantity, have sufficient content to illuminate the true aspects of the matter. Besides, should you wish to discuss these matters further, you surely have friends among Anash in London who will be glad to enlighten you.

Finally, I would like to say that the fact that you have had some

doubts and uncertainties, should not discourage you at all. Indeed, the Torah desires a person to utilize all his capacities, including his mind and intelligence, in the service of G-d as long as the approach is right, namely accepting the Torah and Mitzvos first. It is quite natural and even desirable that one should understand everything that is within one's mental grasp. In your case this is of additional significance, because you have an opportunity to influence and benefit other young people who have the same bent of mind as you.

In the light of the above, you will also understand my answer in the matter of the Shidduch, that in my opinion it is as has been said before, namely that it is a suitable Shidduch, and may it be in a happy and auspicious hour, for a Binyan Adei Ad, on the foundation of the Torah and the Mitzvos with complete commitment to the Torah and Mitzvos in the spirit of the Berocho "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us." This will, as a matter of course, also be the channel for good health, both for the Neshomoh and the body, and all desirable benefits - though of what value are all rewards by comparison to the achievement of "Israel and the Holy One blessed be He, through the Torah, are all one."

With blessing

M. Schneerson