

RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON
Lubavitch
770 Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn 13, N. Y.

HYacinth 3-9250

מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

770 איסטערן פארקוויי
ברוקלין, נ.י.

Excerpt from a letter

Greeting and Blessing:

...You write that you are at a loss to find answers to such questions as What is the purpose of life? What is the meaning of a Jew? etc., and that doubts and confusions are sorely afflicting you.

As you write that you have attended college and have studied science, you are probably aware of what the approach should be to an intricate problem. If we want to verify a certain system, as to the laws and principles prevailing in it, we begin by verifying the parts of it that lend themselves more easily to analysis and verification. When we have, step by step, verified the greater part of the system, we can then safely assume that if the greater part of it has been found to conform to certain specific laws, the rest of it is also ruled by the same laws. Even common sense justifies the assumption that if a certain law holds good in the vast majority of cases, it is true also in the case where it cannot be verified with certainty.

Applying this approach to the universe as a whole, we are increasingly convinced, year after year, of the law and order that rules in nature, including inert matter; to the minutest atom and even smaller particules. Nuclear science has discovered undreamed of harmony and order in the some one hundred elements known to this day. In a universe of such orderliness and harmony, obviously man too must be subject to order and purpose.

* * *

Going a step further, the conclusion is inevitable that since there is such law and order in the universe, there must be a Higher Authority responsible for it. The analogy is well known: When we get hold of a printed book, of hundreds of pages, containing a connected story, or philosophy, we cannot by any stretch of the imagination assume that a bottle of ink has been spilled and has accidentally produced the book. Still less, and infinitely so, is it admissible that our universe, with its infinite number of atoms, molecules and particles, all arranged in perfect order and harmony, could have come into existence by accident. Obviously, there is a Creator and Architect, Who arranges and relates all the various parts of the universe in perfect unity and harmony, in conformity to the set of laws which He

creates and supervises. It is plain that the whole system is beyond our comprehension, since our comprehension, as our existence as a whole, is but an infinitely minute part of the entire cosmic order, and certainly in no degree comparable to the Creator Himself. It is, clearly, absurd to expect to comprehend the Creator, and even more nonsensical to deny His existence by reason of our inability to comprehend Him. Can "one" contain an infinite number of "ones"? And here at least there is some relationship, for both the one and the infinite number of ones are the same objects - numbers, while there is no such community between the created and the Creator.

* * *

Carrying the analogy from science a step further: In physics, chemistry, etc., when a law is deduced from a number of experiments, and verified by different people, under varying conditions of pressure, temperature, humidity, etc., thus eliminating the possibility of error, side-effects, etc., such a law is accepted and becomes valid also for the future.

This scientific 'rule' holds good also with regard to events and phenomena in the past. Where a certain event or phenomenon is attested to by many historians, and reported in an identical manner, there is no 'scientific' doubt that that is how the event actually took place.

Such an historic event was the Revelation at Mount Sinai, which has been reported in an identical way by millions of people, men, women, and children, people from all walks of life and backgrounds, who had witnessed it themselves, and then faithfully reported to their children, generation after generation, without interruption to this day. At no time, even during the worst pogroms and massacres of Jews, were there less than millions of Jews faithfully maintaining this tradition. It is well known that at no time in Jewish history was there a break in the chain of Jewish tradition from Sinai down to the present day. This makes this event the most authenticated of all historical events in human history!

* * *

This means that the Torah we have and cherish is G-d given, and it contains not only our way of life, but also the key to our existence for all times, since it is eternal, as its Giver. It is not a book of theory, philosophy and speculation, but a practical guide for our daily life, valid in all places and at all times, including 20th century America.

Here, in the Torah, the Written and the Oral Law, the purpose of man's life on this earth is clearly indicated. To put it in a nut-shell: It is to live in accordance with the Torah, by fulfilling its positive commandments (Mitzvoth-assey) and abstaining from its prohibitions (Mitzvoth-lo-taaseh).

The Torah has also made provisions for man's frail nature, and the temptations and trials which he, as a creature of flesh and blood, faces in life. It is difficult, almost impossible, for man never to fail, and the Torah has indicated that should this happen, there is no need to be discouraged. There is always Teshuvah - return to G-d and to the right path, and the very failure can be made a spring-board for a leap forward and further advance .

*

*

*

It may be asked: If all the above is so plain and logical, how is one to explain the comparatively small number of those who conform to the Torah and Mitzvot, while transgressors are so numerous?

The answer to this question is also simple enough, " I see it from my own flesh:" When one reflects upon his conduct and deeds, particularly in his every-day life (not during periods of special spiritual elation, such as during the days of Yom Tov, etc.) - it is not hard to see that a very great number of one's actions are motivated by one's desires and inclinations, not by one's intellect. This is particularly true where the conflict does not raise the immediate threat of "reprisals". The farther removed is the threat of sanctions, the weaker becomes the intellectual motive, and the more strongly is the conduct influenced by desire and emotion; even more so when the sanctions are of an "abstract" nature. For the fear of physical sanctions (imprisonment or fine, etc.) is more effective than admonition, or argumentation, in the name of morality, justice, humanity, etc.

There enters also an additional factor of human nature. When man succumbs to temptation and commits a 'sin', he may experience one of two kinds of reaction: If he is honest and courageous, he will recognize his act for what it is, a failure, as well as a breach of his own true will and conscience. Recognizing his failure as a sign of weakness, he will seek to overcome it and to do better next time, and "G-d has compassion with, and forgives, him who concedes his mistake and resolves to correct it."

One, however, who is afraid to face the truth and its consequences in the case of a failure, begins to find excuses for himself and to justify his negative action. Moreover, as "one transgression brings another in its train," the guilt complex and need for self-justification will become ever more persistent and pressing, both in order to pacify his own troubling conscience, as well as to square himself in the eyes of others. "Love covers up all offenses," particularly self-love, and "bribery blindeth the eyes of (even) the wise," especially the self-bribery that goes with vanity. He will thus become biased in his own favor, and in his befuddled thinking will "devise" a "personal philosophy," or even a "Weltanschauung," to fit his conduct, which will not only "justify" it, but even turn vice into virtue.

*

*

*

Needless to say, it is difficult to enlarge upon these aspects in a letter. I trust, however, that the points mentioned will serve as starting points for you to reflect upon and realize that the world is not confusion, and that everything and everybody has his place and purpose. If you can consider yourself objectively, freed from preconceptions, environmental influences, and the like, you will discover your own place and purpose in life, in the light of what has been said above...

With blessing,

/Signature/