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מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

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ברוקליין, נ. י.

By the Grace of G-d
20 Cheshvan, 5739
Brooklyn, N. Y.

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Greeting and Blessing:

For technical reasons it is more convenient to reply ~~to you~~ to your letter in English than in Russian. You may, of course, continue to write to me in Russian, but let me know if you prefer to receive the reply in Hebrew, Yiddish, or English.

Now to reply to the questions in your letter of 3 Cheshvan - which reached me with some delay:

Question 1. In a certain city there are Jews who converted to christianity, and some of them now feel an urge towards Judaism and would like to join a Torah-study group. What should be the attitude towards them?

Answer. In general, each individual has to be considered as a separate case, and the criterion for admission to the study group should be an assessment of the expected result: Is the individual likely to return to Judaism by attending the Torah study, or will it have the opposite effect?

In making such an assessment, two kinds of individuals should be borne in mind. There may be one who has become a missionary. In this case, he should not be judged in "the scale of merit". Moreover, it is in the nature of such a convert to seek "justification" for his conversion at every opportunity. Hence he will not stop at deliberately distorting and misrepresenting the truth.

A further factor is this: The Torah classes are attended by Jews, not all of whom are 100% firmly entrenched in Judaism; some of them are rather weak and have doubts. Consequently, if these were to meet with the said element in an atmosphere of Torah learning and discussion, the association may be very harmful to them in view of the weakness of their own convictions.

On the other hand, there is a second type of convert, namely, those who converted not because they have been brainwashed, but for some foolish external reasons, and more particularly those who come under the category of "Tinokos shenishbu." In this case, the prospect of helping them return to Judaism is, of course,

more promising.

The above are general guidelines, and each individual case should be considered on its own merits, as mentioned.

In addition there are other general points to be considered:

In view of the holocaust - which was largely an outgrowth of centuries-long animosity and persecution systematically perpetrated against Jews, if there is a Jew who, despite living in such close proximity in time and place to this atrocity, yet finds it proper in his mind and heart to become a part of, and be identified with, the creed and its proponents who claimed so many innocent Jewish victims, men, women and children, all in the name of christianity -- then perhaps it may be possible to bring him back to his senses in other ways, but hardly by means of Torah lessons.

At the same time, considering those among the study circle members who are so-called border-line cases, whose Jewish identity is still weak and who have to be strengthened in their commitment to Torah, it is easy to see how harmful it would be for them to come into close association with that element, all the more so since it would be difficult to limit such association to the periods of Torah study and preclude them from meeting afterwards in other situations.

Question 2. When inviting non-observant Jews, who had been brought up in non-observant homes, is it right to drink wine with them?

Answer: In view of the fact that non-observant Jews constitute a wide range from one end to the other, and, for understandable reasons, it is impossible to check everyone's Jewish credentials - why enter into a questionable situation, when there are many other drinks than wine that could be served in such company, with no "Shaalah" involved.

(See ADDENDA (1))

Question 3. There is a group of young women who would also like to learn Torah. Would it be permissible to admit them to men's study classes, or should separate classes be formed for the women. In the latter case, would it be proper to have male instructors for them?

Answer: In view of the extraordinary circumstances and difficulties in that country, I would be inclined to take a more lenient view to admit women into the men's classes. However, in order to emphasize the exception due to the extenuating circumstances, and also in order to be mindful of the Din, two provisions should be made: One, to teach in a co-ed class such subjects as are incumbent also on women, such as the basics of our faith, love and fear of G-d, prayer, and the like - subjects that are dealt with in Chasidus. Second, that separate seating should be arranged for the men and women. This would preclude also other personal associations, such as mixed dancing, etc. And although we are speaking of persons who, by reason of background, are not otherwise averse to mixed dancing and socializing, it is obvious that this should not be permitted in these groups, and no "hetter" should be given for

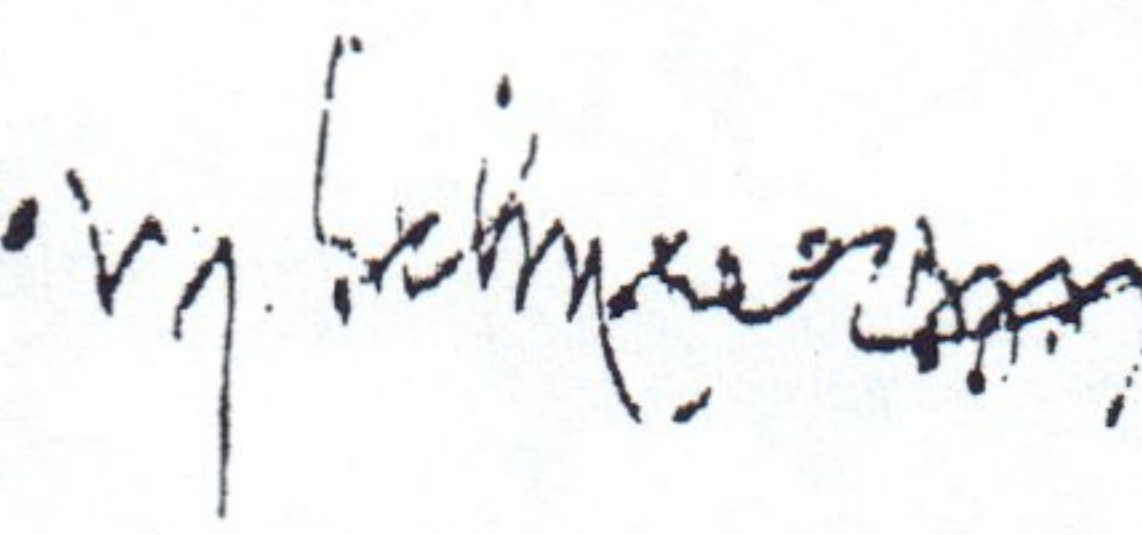
See
ADDENDA
(2)

such practices, explicit or implied.

I must emphasize again that the "hetter" mentioned above in regard to co-ed study is based on the special extenuating circumstances prevailing in that particular country, there being no other way to save them from assimilation and inter-marriage. It should in no way serve as a precedent for other countries where those circumstances do not prevail, nor continued even in that same country when the situation improves sufficiently not to have recourse to that "hetter."

Turning to the rest of your letter, I will remember in prayer those you mention, when visiting the holy resting place of my father-in-law of saintly memory, whose concern for his fellow-Jews, particularly in that country, knew no bounds, to the point of self-sacrifice. And, as our Sages of the Talmud tell us, the Shepherds of our Jewish people do not forsake their flock even after their Histalkus, and continue to intercede On High in their behalf.

By the way - indeed, more than that - you surely know that my father-in-law, when he was in that country, had organized a group of young Jews of higher learning, by the name of "Tiferes Bachurim," under the successful leadership of an academician named Kazhdan (working under the guidance of Rabbi Yaakov Landau, now in Eretz Yisroel). I would be interested to know if that Kazhdan is related to you.

With prayerful wishes and with blessing, 

ADDENDA:

- (1) Especially as the Shaalah (in most cases) involves also a question about the Kashrus of the wine.

Where there is no question about the wine, and the occasion is inviting a guest (or guests) for Shabbos or Yom Tov, when Kiddush is involved, it is advisable that the host alone make Kiddush, and limit the partaking of wine to Kiddush only.

- (2) ... laws obligatory also for women (kashrus, laws of Shabbos and Yom Tov, etc.), and, of course, also ...