

By the Grace of G-d
16th of Iyar, 5739
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Joseph Shestack, Esq.
Philadelphia, Pa.

Greeting and Blessing:

This letter has been long overdue, especially considering its subject matter. But it is also the subject matter of this letter, more precisely the emotional aspect of it, that is the prime reason for the delay. For it is not easy to express in words, much less in writing, very deep personal feelings, and I kept on delaying it for a calmer disposition. However, since these feelings have not subsided, there is no point for further procrastination.

I refer, of course, to your truly Yidisher endeavor in the matter of restitution of the manuscripts and books that belong to the Library of my predecessor, my father-in-law of saintly memory, which you initiated with the help of friends, and have already had considerable success in regard to a substantial part of them, having them restored to their rightful place and "home."

As you know, this Schneerson Library included not only a collection which my saintly father-in-law had acquired personally during his lifetime, but mainly manuscripts and books that were the legacy of his saintly forebears, some of them going back to the Alter Rebbe, Founder of Chabad.

There is surely no need to elaborate on what these manuscripts and books meant to him, as to all the Lubavitcher Rebbes before him. He had a very special, profound and soulful attachment to them, over and above his attachment to books and manuscripts of similar sacred content. And many of them represent the heart and soul of the sacred Chabad literature.

You can therefore well understand how deeply moved I was, and will always be, and the feelings of all the friends of Lubavitch about your great and noble endeavor in volunteering your time and effort and prestige to "bring home" these sacred manuscripts and books. It is truly a case of Pidyon Shvuim, since only by being at home can these spiritual treasures resume their full vitality, not only for the benefit of those who are directly associated with the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, but also for the benefit of all our Jewish people, through the dissemination of the teachings of Chabad Chassidus and Pnimius Hatorah.

If "the reward of a Mitzvah is the Mitzvah itself" and requires no human "thank you," your noble endeavor clearly transcends any expression of gratitude. Nevertheless, I am impelled to express, however inadequately, in my own behalf, and in behalf of the movement which I am privileged to head, as well as in behalf of all who have an actual or potential stake in this matter - our gratification and heartfelt appreciation.

Permit me to add a further point, by way of a deeper insight into the subject at hand. This, too, is based on the teachings of Chabad, which with all its philosophy is, a part of our Torah, Torah Emes and Torah Chayim. This calls for a foreword, and, to put it briefly:

One of the fundamental doctrines of Chabad, which the Alter Rebbe expounds in, among other sources, the Shaar haYichud vehoEmunah section of his basic opus, the Tanya, is that in every thing, even in inanimate material objects, there is a "soul," or a vital spiritual core. To quote from the first chapter of the above-mentioned section:

וְאֵל בְּדוֹמָם מַסַּד, כִּסּוּ אֲבָנִים וְעֵצִי וְכֵסִים, יֵשׁ בְּחִינָה נַפֶּשׁ וְחַיּוּת רוּחָנִית.

Of course, there are gradations in this spiritual soul. There is, to begin with, a plain material object that, simply by the fact of being a created thing, contains a "spark" of the Divine Creative Force that keeps it in existence; on a higher level, there is a material object which has served a good purpose; higher still is an object that is used in the performance of a Mitzvah. It is explained in Chabad that when an ordinary material thing is used for a good purpose, especially in the performance of a Mitzvah, it undergoes a "refinement" and "spiritualization," to the extent of becoming a Dovor Shebikedusha (e.g. Tefillin made from leather and parchment).

Applying the above principle in our case - manuscripts and books of the most sublime content, written by Jews whose whole life was dedicated to Torah and the Jewish people, and studied with heart and soul, enriching and illuminating Jewish life - clearly there, albeit "material" and "inanimate" aspect is imbued with eternal light and life of the highest order. Thus, when they are taken from their natural environment, from their "home," they are indeed in "exile" and "captivity," however well treated. They are, in a real sense, like Shvuim - people held in captivity - who can never be fully happy even if well provided for with their material, and even spiritual, needs, for they long to return home, to be united with their family and friends and whole milieu in which they belong. This is why Pidyon Shvuim in the ordinary sense is such a great Mitzvah. Hence, it is impossible to overstate the great Zechus that you and your associates in the endeavor have in the "Pidyon Shvuim" of these manuscripts and books.

I am aware that there may be those who may say that these are mystical ideas, that should not be taken into account in consideration, etc. Needless to say, I do

Jerry Shestack, Esq. * Page Three

not include you and your friends in this category, but you may perhaps come across a person, or persons, who may attempt to argue in this vein, even though inwardly not very convinced. Be it as it may * in light of Jewish experience in our own eventful times, eventful from one extreme to the other, now brilliantly bright, now dimly bleak * I doubt if anyone can truthfully deny the truth of what has been said above on the ground of it being intangible or mystical. ~~Not, for that~~

I am pleased about the timing of this letter on the eve of your departure on the second stage of your endeavor to return a further substantial part of this library that are still in "exile." I trust and am confident that you will not encounter difficulties, since you will be dealing with fellow-Jews, children of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, especially those whom Divine Providence has privileged to be the custodians of this part, after it had been pillaged during the war and Holocaust, miraculously survived, until they finally came under that custody of the present guardians, in order to be restored to their rightful owners and rightful home in the true sense of יְשׁוּעָה בְּנֵי לֵבְיָלָם. Indeed, the Zechus of having taken care of them in the interim will stand them in good stead, and make them even more responsive to their pleasant duty in the realization that they can now complete and bring to the culmination point their guardianship.

Reiterating my heartfelt appreciation of your achievement in the past, I extend to you ~~prayerful~~ wishes for Hatzlocho in your present trip, and all good wishes to your associates in the endeavor, as well as to the esteemed present guardians, who will surely extend to you their kind and fullest cooperation.

The merit of your great mission will certainly stand you and all yours in good stead for additional generous blessings in all your personal affairs, materially and spiritually.

With esteem and blessing

P.S.

In accordance with time-honored Jewish custom to make one who sets out on a journey a "shliach-Mitzvah," in addition to whatever great mission one's journey is connected with, by giving him some money for distribution to Tzedoko on arrival at his destination, I am taking the liberty of enclosing an amount for Tzedoko to distribute in the Holy Land, and, if not too much trouble, a part of it at the Western Wall.