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מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן
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By the Grace of G-d
Rosh Chodesh Kislev,
5740. Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter of the 24th of Cheshvan.

In reply to your questions in the order of your writing:
While giving Tzedoko for Jewish causes, is it desirable or optional to give charity also to non-Jews in need of help?

In general, you are, of course, right that this is not only permissible, but also desirable. Indeed, our Sages of the Talmud have ruled that non-Jewish poor should be helped along with the Jewish poor (Gittin 61a). As to the proportion to which such charity should be distributed, especially under certain conditions, this is a Shaala which you should consult with a Rov in your community, since each situation has to be considered on its own merits.

With regard to your second question - I trust second only in your letter, but surely first and foremost in importance - pertaining to advancement in Yiddishkeit, etc., it should be borne in mind that the basic approach in matters of Torah and Mitzvoth is that the usual "rational" approach to things would be "irrational" in the case of Torah and Mitzvoth, which are essentially beyond full human comprehension, being Divine in nature. In other words, prior comprehension of the Divine precepts must not be a condition of their fulfillment, or - Hatzch ("doing") must come before y'v'chma ("understanding"). Moreover, the actual fulfillment of the Mitzvoth makes it easier to understand them subsequently. By way of illustration, one does not expect a small child to understand either the thinking or the ways of a professor, even though both are human beings and the difference between them is only relative in terms of time and education. and it is even possible that the child might one day surpass that professor in knowledge and wisdom. But the difference between a created human being and the Creator is, of course, absolute and incomparable in any manner or degree.

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I will mention one further point, namely, that inasmuch as a human being cannot know the future, and frequently has no complete knowledge even of prior events in a particular situation,

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human judgment of any happening which he sees cannot be perfect without having complete knowledge of all the causes and effects. Here, too, there is a simple illustration: If a person, who has no knowledge whatever of the function of a hospital, should enter the operating room, where he sees someone bound and unconscious on the operating table, surrounded by people who are cutting him up, etc., he would think that they are a group of sadistic murderers. But he would have a different judgment when it is explained to him that these people are surgeons who are removing some foreign body or injury, with a view to curing the patient and restoring him to good health.

It is difficult to elaborate on this subject in a letter, and if you still wish to obtain further clarification, you can surely discuss it with the persons with whom you are in contact in matters of Torah study and Yiddishkeit.

With blessing *M. Schwartz*