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By the Grace of G-d
16 Tammuz, 5743
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greeting and blessing:

This is in reply to your letter of June 20.

I must say that it is one of the most "amazing" letters I have ever received, based on a most amazing conclusion of a person who, after following the Jewish way of life for 17 years, has now decided that it was wrong because he did it for the sake of his wife and family. Hence he feels impelled to make a radical change, although by his own admission the conclusion is not based on irrefutable proofs, but is solely motivated by "strong doubts" and insufficient knowledge about G-d and the need of observing His Mitzvos.

Curiously, as strong as his doubts are about the past, there seems to him no doubt whatever about his future course; so much so that he has already initiated steps to put an end to his past 17 years' life and family.

Surely there is no need to point out that however wise a person may be, it is not always wise to rely entirely on one's judgment, since the wisest person may sometimes make a mistake, especially in a case where one is personally and deeply involved.

Moreover, by your own recognition, your conclusion is based on doubts, albeit strong doubts, but doubts nevertheless. If so, why all this haste to carry out your decision? Surely, before taking steps that even from your viewpoint could possibly be destructive to yourself and your family, don't you think you ought first to discuss your doubts and conclusions with knowledgeable friends, both frum and (if you so desire) not frum? After 17 years, a little more time wouldn't make all that difference.

After all, when a Jew is in doubt - lacking strong convictions about the need to do Mitzvos, the logical way of thinking is as follows: If after further intensive study his convictions are strengthened, all the better. On the other hand, should he come to the conclusion that what he was doing was unnecessary, then the most he could regret would be the "inconvenience" of having spent a few minutes on putting on Tefillin every weekday morning, or having deprived himself of non-kosher food, having kept Shabbos and Yom Tov, and so on. But if he recklessly gives up his Jewish way of life, and eventually, sooner or later, he is bound to realize that the Torah and Mitzvos and Jewish way of life are indeed "our life and the length of our days," both in this life and in eternal

life - then he will never forgive himself for having treated it so "lightly!"

As for your doubts about the basics of Yiddishekit - there is a whole body of literature, classical and contemporary (including in English) that deal with the subject. Much of it is based not on faith but on fact. Suffice it to mention here, by way of example and because of its timeliness (having recently celebrated Zman Mattan Toroseinu), that the Divine Revelation at Sinai, when G-d pronounced the Decalogue and gave us the Torah, is one of the most scientifically established events in human history. It is based on the evidence and personal experience of 600,000 male adults, besides women and children, which has been transmitted in identical form from parents to children throughout the generations in an uninterrupted chain of tradition, further authenticated by virtually identical daily observances of the same Mitzvos by Jews in all generations and in all countries of the world, and with such devotion and commitment that they were ready to make every sacrifice, even martyrdom, in their loyalty to the One G-d, One Torah and One Jewish people.

Needless to say, the layman cannot be familiar with all the sources and has no way of verifying the facts. But what does a layman do in other areas, medical science for example? A patient may well have his doubts about the efficacy of a drug prescribed by his physician. Will he refuse to take it until he has been able to attend medical courses and learn all that his doctor has learned in his lifetime studies and experience? Will he not rely on the authority of the medical specialist? If he has doubts about the expertise of one doctor, he can obtain a second opinion, and a third; but when all agree that he needs that medicine and the prescribed medical regimen, would he refuse to take that expert advice even if he still has "strong doubts" about it?

By the same token, if you will ask any "specialist" in Yiddishekit - a person who has dedicated his life to the study of Torah and actually lives by the Torah and Mitzvos in his everyday life and conduct, what is the right thing for you to do, the answer will be the same, because Jews have only one Torah and one Halachah. Indeed, if in matters of physical health it is logical that na'aseh must come before nishma - how much more so in matters of the eternal soul (with which the wellbeing of the body is also intimately connected).

I have taken time out to write to you at some length, even though it is also common sense, and it is not original with me, for you can find it, and more, in such sources as the Kuzari and other works of our great Jewish philosophers, because I have in mind the saying of our Sages, "There is no point in bemoaning the past." I trust that the wrong actions you are contemplating and have already initiated as a result of your woefully erroneous conclusion, may yet be reversed, and that this letter may help you see your way clear to do what is good and proper, good and proper also for you and your family; which is also why this letter is being sent via Special Delivery.

Incidentally this letter is being written on the day before the Fast of the 17th of Tammuz, commemorating the fateful breach in

the wall of Jerusalem under siege, which eventually led to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh. It reminds us, everyone of us, to do our utmost to eliminate the cause that led to the Destruction and Golus, the sole cause being, as we say in our prayer Umipnei chato'einu - "Because of our sins we have been exiled from our land." It particularly reminds us how careful one must be not to let anything make even a crack in the wall that protects the "inner Beis Hamikdosh" which is the most cherished possession of every Jew - the indestructible counterpart of the physical Beis Hamikdosh that stood in Jerusalem of old. This inner Sanctuary is what G-d desires most, as implied in His order and request, "Let them make Me a Mikdosh and I will dwell among (in the midst and within) them"; within them - within every Jew and every Jewish home.

With blessing, *M. Schwartz*

✓ "Jerusalem"
 פתח-הקדש
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