

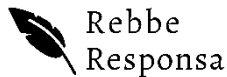
Letters from the Rebbe  
on Meditation

*Memento*  
*from the wedding of*  
*Zalman and Devorah Leah ש"י Pape*  
*18 Adar II, 5784*

By Rebbe Responsa

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FOREWORD

In honor of the joyous occasion of the wedding of Zalman sheyiche Pape, our dear co-founder, who has dedicated his life to spreading the Rebbe's Torah to thousands around the world,

We are proud to present a collection of letters containing the Rebbe's groundbreaking approach to therapeutic meditation in a kosher form. In this first-of-its-kind compilation we present a thorough and encompassing view of the subject through the lens of the Rebbe's own correspondence.

Included in this booklet are all letters of the Rebbe on the subject that we had available, as well as an introduction, and we have endeavored to present the letters with annotations and background to the best of our ability, with extensive references in the footnotes, including references to additional places this subject is discussed by the Rebbe. Several of these letters are being published here for the first time.

A large amount of the information used to annotate the letters were culled from the two articles in *B'Or Ha'Torah* on this subject (their full bibliographical references can be found in the footnotes below).

Being that the Rebbe's opinion on this matter is spread over a span of four years, and many of the letters have not reached us, we hope that we have not erred in the annotation of these letters. Even if we have erred in our explanations, we have published all the letters in full, so the reader can make their own judgment.

As in most letters of the Rebbe, the topics in these letters are not strictly about meditation but the letters also touch on the larger subjects of psychology and Judaism.

We call upon anyone who has more information or feedback on this matter to reach out to us so it can be updated in a subsequent version.

All letters published below are sourced from photocopies of the original unless otherwise noted; all footnotes were added by the publisher.

We would like to wish the Chosson and Kallah that they continue to spread the Rebbe's Torah in a growing measure and with much Hatzlocha giving the Rebbe much pride.

May we merit to the coming of Moshiach, when we will hear Torah from the Rebbe once more, תורה חדשה מאתי תצא, speedily in our days!

*The Rebbe Responsa Team*

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ברוקלין, נ. י.

By the Grace of G-d  
27th of Sivan, 5741  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mr.

Utrecht, Holland

Greeting and Blessing:

I received your letter of June 21st, in which you request a blessing for marriage.

No doubt both you and your fiancée have resolved to establish your home on the foundations of the Torah and Mitzvoth, which ensures that it should be truly a Binyan Adel Ad.

May G-d grant that it should take place in a happy and auspicious hour, and that it indeed be a Binyan Adel Ad in the fullest sense of this term.

Maxwell Magallon and  
With blessing *M. Schneerson*

## Introduction

### *The dangers of Oriental Meditation*

In the early 1970s, forms of meditation originating from the Far East such as Transcendental Meditation (T. M.), Yoga, and the like began gaining popularity within Western society. Young individuals attracted by the peace of mind that meditation offered were drawn to various seemingly innocent meditation sects and centers. The popularity of this movement also spurred scientific research into the benefits of meditation, producing studies proving its benefits, thereby creating even more public interest in the field. Noticeably, a disproportionate percentage of those attracted were Jewish, and many Rabbis began to condemn this phenomenon, on the basis that the meditations used were sourced from and infused with various idolatrous practices.

### *The Rebbe's position*

The Rebbe took a unique stance with regard to the issue. Looking at things with a nuanced perspective, the Rebbe did not attempt to merely publicize the dangers of meditation and its threat to Judaism, thereby completely discrediting it, as others had done.

Instead, the Rebbe saw meditation as something which is essentially neutral, and indeed can be a positive force of healing.

The Rebbe maintained that were the problematic aspects of meditation to be removed, and a form of "Kosher Meditation" be developed, there would be a twofold beneficial effect -

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saving Jews from the spiritual harm of Idolatry-influenced Eastern Meditation, and providing help and healing to those in need of relaxation from the myriad of stresses that face humanity.<sup>1</sup>

### Correspondence

The earliest extant letter from the Rebbe on this subject, dated 25 Tammuz, 5737<sup>2</sup>, is addressed to Rabbi Yaakov Landa,<sup>3</sup> Rabbi of Bnei Brak.

In the letter the Rebbe opines that meditation itself, stripped away from any oriental religion, can be therapeutic, and as such “should the world be lost because of the fools!”<sup>4</sup>

The Rebbe notes that in Eretz Yisrael a rabbinic ban has already been enacted<sup>5</sup>, but emphasizes that the problematic factors are only in the specific methods used by Gurus and that if a professional in this area learns how to extract the healing elements from the idolatrous ones, then meditation could be extremely beneficial.

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<sup>1</sup> See memorandum published below, letter dated 21 Adar II, 5738, and *Sichos Kodesh 5739*, vol. 3, pp. 314ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 32, letter 12,175 (pp. 266-267).

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Yaakov Landa (5653, Russia — 5746, Eretz Yisrael) notably served as Chief Rabbi of the city of Bnei Brak. A student of the original Tomchei Temimim, Rabbi Landa served as the Rav of the household of the Rebbe Rashab while it was located in Rostov-on-Don (5776-5680). Shortly after immigrating to Eretz Yisrael (in 5695) he was appointed Rav of Bnei Brak, a position he held until his passing.

<sup>4</sup> Paraphrased from *Avoda Zara 54b*. The Rebbe also used this phrase during his talk on 13 Tammuz, 5739 (*Sichos Kodesh 5739*, vol. 3, p. 315), explaining that the Talmud there refers to the Sun and stars which are a great benefit and necessity for the world. Should G-d not have created these crucial heavenly bodies because there are those that err and mistaken them as independent entities with powers of their own!?

<sup>5</sup> The first known public ban was of Chief Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef on 19 Adar 5737 (quoted in Natan Ophir, “[The Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Call for a Scientific Non-Hasidic Meditation](#),” *B’or Ha’torah*, vol. 22, 2013, p. 111).

For a more extensive list of Halachic sources dealing with this issue see Natan Ophir “*Meditatzya Bemabat Yehudi*” *Techumin*, vol. 18, pp. 408-418, part one, and as noted there; Avraham Steinberg *Encyclopedia Hilchattit Refuit*, vol. 7, p. 228.

The Rebbe mentions to Rabbi Landa that he is somewhat qualified for involvement in this venture, due to his research in this field while in Rostov.<sup>6</sup>

A number of months later, in Teves of 5738, the Rebbe took more concrete action in this direction, with a goal to produce immediate tangible results. The Rebbe prepared a confidential<sup>7</sup> memorandum outlining the plan of action which needed to be taken. Over the next few months this memo was sent to approximately fifty people<sup>8</sup> who were assumed to have an influence in this area.

Among the recipients were (above-mentioned) Rabbi Yaakov Landa,<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twersky,<sup>10</sup> and Dr. Yehuda (Judah) Landes.<sup>11</sup> As

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<sup>6</sup> The Rebbe mentions that Rabbi Landa looked into the Theosophical Society which Madame Blavatsky founded, which may be the predecessor to modern Eastern meditation.

<sup>7</sup> On each copy the word *Confidential* appeared and it was not signed. In the cover letters to Rabbi Dr. Twersky and Dr. Landes (published below) the Rebbe explained that it was done in this way to prevent unwanted outcomes.

We have nevertheless decided to publish this correspondence, and other letter relating to this subject, being that most of it has been widely published in the past. On the other hand, many interpret the Rebbe's opinion wrongly because of the lack of the complete picture. Therefore, through publishing this correspondence in a cohesive manner the Rebbe's opinion can be more crystalized (see Yehoshua P. Landes "[The Inside Story of the Founding of Jewish Meditation](#)" *B'Or Ha'Torah*, vol. 23 (5775), p. 173). To add to this, one can say that now there are many forms of meditation available that do not retain the *Avoda Zara* aspects (see Ophir, 118-119). See also below fn. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Based on testimony of Dr. Yehudah Landes, heard at the time by word of mouth (Landes, 175).

<sup>9</sup> See *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 33, letter 12,345 (p. 121).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, letter 12,341 (p. 119-120). Cf. cover letter sent to Landes (dated 16 Adar I, 5738) published below.

Rabbi Dr. Avraham Yehosuah Heshel (Abraham J.) Twersky (14 Tishrei, 5691 — 18 Shevat, 5781) was an American-born Chassidic Rabbi and noted psychiatrist.

Twersky later explained that being that meditation was not his field he did not pursue this matter further (C. Dalfin *Conversations with the Rebbe* (1996), 179-180).

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Yehuda (Judah) Landes (April 18, 1930 — December 4, 2004) was a clinical psychologist who eventually piloted the Rebbe's Kosher Meditation plan.

Others who may have received this memo or were later involved in this process was Dr. Seymour W. Applebaum who the Rebbe mentioned in the letter to Landes



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to the replies of said recipients, we are aware only of a letter from Dr. Landes, suggesting his plan of action,<sup>12</sup> which is published below.

### Key points

#### *Kosher versus Jewish*

A point which becomes clear from the Rebbe's letters on this subject, is that the intent was not in providing a *Jewish* meditation per se, rather, the Rebbe was insisting on creating a *Kosher* meditation. Namely, to remove all the unwanted parts and ideas that are or can resemble idolatry, remaining with the core healing aspect of the meditation, but not necessarily with any ties to Judaism.

The Rebbe did allow for there to be Jewish aspects in this model, if it would help attract more attention<sup>13</sup>, but not, however, Jewish religious practices and rituals.

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dated 15 Av, 5738 (published below), that the Rebbe was corresponding with him. Additionally, the Rebbe conversed with Michael and Atara Hasofer from Australia regarding this. The Rebbe requested that Dr. Atara Hasofer should influence the Jews in Malaysia and Singapore who are involved in these cults. Additionally, the Rebbe had instructed her to persuade a certain Californian Professor to change his method to a kosher one (diary of Michael Seligson, entry of 23-24 Nissan, 5740).

In the end of 1978, Dr. Landes recruited Dr. Chaim B. Rosen to help him establish his pilot program, and later received guidance from the Rebbe about his meditation practices (letter dated 24 Teves, 5742, published below).

<sup>12</sup> In an [undated Hebrew letter](#) [perhaps from the summer of 5740] addressed to Dr. Atara Hasofer (d. 1990), that being that Dr. Landes started working and heading this project he should stay in the lead (Lahak weekly publication, Emor, 5776). It seems from this that the Rebbe felt that Dr. Landes was the one bringing the project the Rebbe intended in making to fruition.

From *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 31 (Simpson), p. 25, it seems that Rabbi Landa also communicated with the Rebbe regarding this.

<sup>13</sup> See also the summary and conclusion in *Landes*, 183-184.

See Farbrengen 13 Tammuz, 5739 (*Sichos Kodesh* op. cit., p. 317), and undated letter quoted above, where the Rebbe uses the recitation and use of Shema (and its meaning, which is sort of a contemplation of G-d's greatness) as something that can be included in the meditation.

Additionally, the Rebbe mentioned, this method should not be tied with “mysticism,” because this term might leave the door open to non-Jewish mystical cults.<sup>14</sup>

It seems that the Rebbe was not keen to start a new form of Jewish meditation.<sup>15</sup> The practices of prayer and contemplation within Judaism are already well established, and their methods as well as importance are spelled out by the Alter Rebbe in *Tanya* and in other fundamental Chassidic works.<sup>16</sup> They are foundations of the Chassidic lifestyle and need not be reestablished.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Letter dated 11 Sivan, 5738. See there for other reasons why this term should not be used.

<sup>15</sup> See letter dated 10 Tammuz, 5739 (below), and the Rebbe’s talk dated 13 Tammuz, 5739 (*Sichos Kodesh* op. cit., p. 319) where it seems that the Rebbe is not fond of this form of meditation even for “those few individuals that would be interested in a Kabalistic form of meditation.” See also Yechidus of 23-24 Nissan, 5740, to the Australian Hasofer couple (diary of Michael Seligson), where the Rebbe advised not to mix in any Chassidic elements in the meditations. The Rebbe said to them that there are those that think that Chassidic philosophy has to be mixed into this meditation, however, I do not think so.

The Rebbe also explained in the talk on 13 Tammuz, 5739, that this form of meditation by definition is contrary to the Jewish tradition and outlook and should only be used as treatment for (mental) health issues (see below note 46).

<sup>16</sup> Besides the meditation mandated daily in *Shulchan Aruch* (Orach Chayim, Siman 98). See also letter dated 4th of Elul, 5731 (published below).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. undated *Maana* (possibly from the year 5731) printed in *Kovetz He’aros Hatemimim Ve’Anash Morristown* 20 Cheshvan, 5773 (issue 796), p. 34. See also the Rebbe’s talk on 13 Tammuz, 5739, where the Rebbe mentioned that the importance of contemplation in, and dissemination of, deep Chassidic and Kabbalistic ideas needs no special explanation and encouragement. This is included in Rebbe’s perpetual call for spreading Judaism and Chassidus (*Sichos Kodesh* op. cit., p. 319).

The above being noted, there are some other aspects that can be pointed out. The Rebbe explained that Judaism, above all, is an action oriented religion (see undated letter in 5734 on the app), and that the deeper dimension and intent, though extremely vital, is secondary. Furthermore, the Rebbe often stressed that through, and only through, the actual performance of Torah and Mitzvos, can one attain a greater appreciation and understanding for them (see, for example, letters dated 23 Tammuz, 5712 and 18 Sivan, 5715). Another vital point is that Jewish mysticism and meditation are geared and directed to, and emphasize the advantage of, “comprehending” and grasping G-d through action (see at length letter dated 10 Nissan, 5741).

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However, a basic healing meditation is a necessary tool to attain peace of mind which is crucial for any subsequent form of Divine service. As the Rebbe spells out in the *Maaneh* that appears below, that this kind of meditation is necessary to ready those in need to properly attach themselves to G-d (*Dveykus*).

An additional reason for the need to create a meditation which is not expressly Jewish, was the all-important goal of alienating as many people as possible from the prevailing forms of meditation. This therefore demanded a model that would, while closely resembling the meditation methods that were widespread,<sup>18</sup> at the same time not demand any religious obligations, or any overtly Jewish themes, which might disinterest the unaffiliated Jews (as it might be seen as a gimmick to attract them to Judaism).<sup>19</sup>

### The need for urgency

The Rebbe viewed this as a pressing matter, one that needed to be dealt with in utmost haste,<sup>20</sup> and helped guide an approach that can be practiced swiftly. Though the benefits of systematically testing and perfecting the new method are undeniable,<sup>21</sup> the Rebbe still maintained

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<sup>18</sup> See undated Hebrew letter quoted above.

Based on the above, we can say that the Rebbe's call is perpetual, though it can take on many forms — depending on the *prevailing method* of meditation used. Being that most methods are a derivative of idolatrous worship, a prominent Rav, an expert in the field, must Pasken what constitutes זרה אביזרייהו דעבודה זרה and what does not (see letters dated 24 Shevat, 5742). If the method does in fact contain hints of Avodah Zarah, then measures should be taken to reproduce the method, stripped away from those aspects. These should not be replaced with new “Jewish” techniques, rather they should be made value free.

As for someone seeking a healing technique to relieve stresses and anxieties any value free method may be used (see above mentioned undated letter where the “relaxation method” is referenced [seemingly referring to the “Relaxation Response” developed by Herbert Benson]).

<sup>19</sup> See below letters dated 21 Adar II, 5738, 11 Sivan, 5738 (point three); Farbrengen of 13 Tammuz 5739 (*Sichos Kodesh* op. cit., p. 319).

<sup>20</sup> See below letter dated 16 Adar I, 5738 and sources mentioned in fn. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Letter dated 15 Av, 5738.

that the matter cannot afford the lengthy time which such tests usually take.<sup>22</sup>

And being that the change is not in the fundamentals, but rather in the form, the core benefits of the already existing methods can easily be extended to the new proposed form. Additionally, the Rebbe advised that though a properly established institute would be extremely beneficial in the long run, it is not worth waiting until such an institution can be created because there is a constant spiritual danger which cannot wait.<sup>23</sup>

### Publicity

Another point stressed in letters, is that in order to reach the desired goal, the Kosher Meditation needs to be a matter of widespread knowledge. The Rebbe therefore urged all doctors involved to advertise in a prominent way that they provide this service.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See point three in the memorandum and letter dated 15 Av, 5738. See also (*Sichos Kodesh* op. cit., pp. 319-320).

<sup>23</sup> See below letters dated 11 Sivan, 5738, and 15 Av, 5738.

<sup>24</sup> See point two in the memorandum and letter dated 15 Av, 5738.

The<sup>25</sup> following is the text of the original memorandum  
penned by the Rebbe:

**CONFIDENTIAL**<sup>26</sup>

By the Grace of G-d  
Teveth, 5738

**MEMORANDUM**

It is well known that certain oriental movements, such as Transcendental Meditation (T. M.),<sup>27</sup> Yoga, Guru, and the like, have attracted many Jewish followers, particularly among the young generation.<sup>28</sup>

Inasmuch as these movements involve certain rites and rituals, they have been rightly regarded by Rabbinic authorities as cults bordering on and in some respects actual, Avodah Zarah (idolatry). Accordingly, Rabbinic authorities everywhere, and particularly in Eretz Yisroel, ruled that these cults come under all the strictures associated with Avodah Zarah, so that also their appurtenances (אביזרייהו) come under strict prohibition.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A note in the letters: The member of the Rebbe's secretariat entrusted with transcribing the English letters often used the British spelling, for he spent time and studied in the U.K. before arriving in America. To stay as true as possible to the original we have not amended this spelling and they are scattered throughout (i.e. practised instead of practiced).

The letters published, unless otherwise noted, are sourced in photocopies of the original letters sent.

<sup>26</sup> See above footnote 7.

<sup>27</sup> Transcendental Meditation (TM) is a form of silent meditation (it was so named to separate it from Hinduism or any other religious practice (see further in this memorandum)). The TM technique involves the silent repetition of a mantra or sound, and is practiced for 15–20 minutes twice per day while sitting with the eyes closed.

The Rebbe noted that they gave it a "refined" name: Transcendental, meaning transcending intelligence and logic, above any limitations (*Sichos Kodesh* op. cit., p. 315).

<sup>28</sup> Though Jews in America account for a small fraction of the general population (two-three percent), the number of Jews involved was estimated at somewhere between twenty and fifty percent (see estimates and sources quoted in *Opihr*, 111).

<sup>29</sup> See sources quoted above fn. 5.

Moreover, the United States Federal Court also ruled recently that such movements, by virtue of embracing certain rites and rituals, must be classified as cultic and religious movements. (Cf. *Malnak v. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi*, U.S.D.C. of N.J. 76-341, esp. pp. 36-50, 78).<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, certain aspects of the said movements, which are entirely irrelevant to religious worship or practices, have a therapeutic value, particularly in the area of relieving mental stress.

It follows that if these therapeutic methods - insofar as they are utterly devoid of any ritual implications - would be adopted by doctors specializing in the field of mental illness, it would have a two-pronged salutary effect: Firstly, in view of the fact that these methods are therapeutically effective, while there are, regrettably, many who could benefit from such treatment, this is a matter of healing of the highest order, since it has to do with mental illness. It would, therefore, be very wrong to deny such treatment, to those who need it, when it could be given by a practising doctor.

Secondly, and this too is not less important, since there are many Jewish sufferers who continue to avail themselves of these methods through the said cults despite the Rabbinic prohibition, it can be assumed with certainty that many of them, if not all, who are drawn to these cults by the promise of mental relief, would prefer to receive the same treatment from the medical profession - if they had a choice of getting it the kosher way.<sup>31</sup> It would thus be possible to save many Jews from getting involved with the said cults.

It is also known, though not widely, that there are individual doctors who practise the same or similar methods as T.M. and the like.

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<sup>30</sup> The Rebbe included an excerpt of these court documents and sent them together with the memorandum. Page 78 reads as follows: Although defendants have submitted well over 1500 pages of briefs, affidavits, and deposition testimony in opposing plaintiffs' motion for summary judgment, defendants have failed to raise the slightest doubt as to the facts or as to the religious nature of the teachings of the Science of Creative Intelligence and the puja. The teaching of the SCI/TM course in New Jersey public high schools violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment, and its teaching must be enjoined.

<sup>31</sup> The Rebbe later noted that these days the concept of a deliberate renegade does not exist (see sources cited in *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 2, letter 267, part 3). Rather Jews, nowadays, turn away from Judaism out of convenience. It is thus certain that if there is an equally convenient and appealing kosher way Jews will turn to there first (*Sichos Kodesh* op. cit., p. 320).

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However, it seems that these methods occupy a secondary or subordinate role in their procedures. More importantly, there is almost a complete lack of publicity regarding the application of these methods by doctors, and since the main practice of these doctors is linked with the conventional neurological and psychiatric approach, it is generally assumed that whatever success they achieve is not connected with results obtained from methods relating to T. M. and the like; results which the cults acclaim with such fanfare.

In light of the above, it is suggested and strongly urged that:

- (1) Appropriate action be undertaken to enlist the cooperation of a group of doctors specializing in neurology and psychiatry who would research the said methods with a view to perfecting them and adopting them in their practice on a wider scale.
- (2) All due publicity be given about the ability of such methods from practising doctors.
- (3) This should be done most expeditiously, without waiting for this vital information to be disseminated through medical journals, where research and findings usually take a long time before they come to the attention of practising physicians. This would all the sooner counteract the untold harm done to so many Jews who are attracted daily to the said cults, as mentioned in the opening paragraph.

In conclusion: This Memo is intended for all Rabbis, doctors, and, laymen who are in a position to advance the cause espoused herein, the importance of which needs no further elaboration.

Needless to say, even if one feels doubtful whether he can advance this cause, or whether the expectation warrants the effort - the vital importance and urgency of saving so many souls from Avodah Zarah, not only warrants but dictates every possible effort, even if there be a doubt or double doubt about achieving success;<sup>32</sup> certainly when there is every reason to believe that much, indeed, can be achieved, with G-d's help and Zechus Harabbim.

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<sup>32</sup> See also *Sichos Kodesh* op. cit., p. 321.

A few weeks after this memorandum was prepared, the Rebbe sent it to Dr. Yehudah Landes, together with the following cover letter:

By the Grace of G-d<sup>33</sup>  
16th of Adar I, 5738  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Dr. Yehuda Landes  
881 Seale Avenue  
P.A., Calif. 94303

Greeting and Blessing:

It is some time since I heard from you,<sup>34</sup> and I trust that all is well. It is surely unnecessary to add that insofar as a Jew is concerned "all is well" includes, above all, advancement in Torah and Mitzvoth in the everyday life.

The purpose of this letter is to send you the enclosed memorandum which is self explanatory.

The reason it has been written as a separate piece, without signature, and to some extent confidentially, is that the subject matter is of a sensitive nature and the Memo could be used to encourage that which it seeks to discourage and preclude, namely, involvement in Eastern cults. For it may be argued by many who are already involved in the therapy discussed in the Memo, or are tempted to become involved, that until such time as the medical profession will openly adopt the same methods of treatment and provide an alternative, they are justified in seeking this therapy elsewhere, especially if they take care

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<sup>33</sup> This letter is mostly a loose translation of the cover letter sent to Rabbi Dr. Twersky published in *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 33, letter 12,341 (pp. 119-120).

This letter, as the memorandum, was marked as confidential for the reasons spelled out in this letter. The reasons why we nevertheless published this correspondence are outlined above (note 7).

<sup>34</sup> The previous correspondence that we have is a letter of the Rebbe to Dr. Landes is dated Rosh Chodesh Adar II, 5736.



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to avoid active participation in the idolatrous rites and ceremonies that go with it. In support of this contention they could cite this Memo which (1) confirms the therapeutic value of a part of the said methods, and (2) indicates also that the idolatrous elements in the said cults are not germane, indeed non-essential, to the therapy itself.

For this reason I am asking you - as all others whom I intend to approach in this matter - to use your discretion in connection with the enclosed Memo, as to its source and its utilization, etc.

I must however point out with all due emphasis that in my opinion the problem has reached such proportions that time is extremely important. Every minute that could be saved in speeding the implementation of the program suggested in the Memo could be a matter of spiritual Pikuach-nefesh for many actual and potential victims of the said cults.

You are one of a select few whom I am approaching in this matter, knowing of your position of influence and connections with this section of the medical profession, which could be used to great advantage and effect in promoting the cause espoused in the Memo - which, I feel certain, will meet with your approval. And the Zechus Horabim will help further.<sup>35</sup>

Needless to say, on my part I will do all I can to mobilize all possible cooperation in behalf of this cause which, I strongly believe, should be pursued with the utmost vigor, without fear of duplication, or overdoing it.

Your comments on all above will be most welcome.

With esteem and blessing,

**M. Schneerson**

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<sup>35</sup> The recipient's son reported that until receiving this letter, his father, a psychologist with a conservative outlook, gave little or any credence to alternative forms of therapy, including meditation (Landes, 174).

Shortly after receiving this letter, Dr. Landes replied:<sup>36</sup>

ב"ה

13 Adar II, 5738  
Palo Alto, California  
March 22, 1978

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson  
Lubavitch  
770 Eastern Parkway  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11213

Dear Rebbe Shlita:

I hope this letter finds you in improved health.<sup>37</sup>

In response to your special delivery letter dated 16 Adar I, 5738, which I received last Wednesday, I refer to your letter and attached memorandum discussing eastern cults such as transcendental [*sic*] meditation, Yoga, Guru, etc. These oriental groups while they are generally viewed by Halacha as Avoda Zora, they have within them, important scientific-medical techniques that are needed for treating mental illness and these techniques should be made available to the public without the religious or cultic aspects etc.

I am 100% in agreement with you regarding the power and value of their healing techniques which I will further discuss. In California, for example, I see many thousands of Jews and Non-Jews, including **medical professionals** involved with these oriental groups, (This is part of the so called "Human Consciousness Movement" and the so called "Holistic

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<sup>36</sup> The recipient's son recounts that he had asked his father why he had waited to respond (being that there is nearly a month between the two letters). His father replied, that being that the Rebbe's letters challenged some of his beliefs in psychology (see previous note), he had to go through an inner change and recognize that meditation was beneficial and not some form of quackery (Landes, 175, fn. 9). However, as can be seen from the letter, Dr. Landes replied merely a week after receiving the Rebbe's letter (March 22, 1978 was a Wednesday and he received the letter the previous "Wednesday"), and he also writes that he has used these techniques quite often.

<sup>37</sup> That year, on the holiday of Shemini Atzeres, the Rebbe endured a heart attack (see [chabad.org/994200](http://chabad.org/994200))

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medicine movement") and centers for these oriental groups are increasing both in California and also in many other parts of the world to spread this Avoda Zora. I believe that Transcendental [sic] Meditation operated by the Hindu monk, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, is the most prolific, highly organized and dangerous of the groups.

First, some comments regarding the assortment of mental health, psychologically based, treatment techniques that are common to these oriental movements, (A) These techniques are independent of the religious or cult aspects of these eastern groups, (B) The techniques are quite well known to modern psychology and psychiatry - They have been described since the beginning of modern clinical treatment for mental illness, (C) They are presently experiencing active research particularly at Stanford University, (Palo Alto) and the University of California, [(Berkeley) Harvard, etc., and hundreds of scientific articles are now available in the literature describing these techniques on a scientific basis. Further research is not necessary in order to use these techniques now with the Jewish public and to popularize this treatment information.

(D) Most recent trained psychiatrists and psychologists are familiar with this work, a few in California use these techniques exclusively but most psychotherapists use them occasionally as the need arises in the office, especially for patients with obsessive problems and problems of mental confusion and endogenous panic and fear. (I had used the techniques several times per week with my patients up until the time I received your letter). (E) These techniques are however, **particularly useful** and sought after by the **general** public who are in the normal range of behavior functioning **and** are disinterested in going to a psychiatrist or a psychologist (i.e. anybody in the medical profession dealing with mental illness) but prefer groups that consist of generally "normal" people who are motivated to attend those oriental groups because they offer to teach normal individuals and families how to relax, how to increase intra and inter personal sensitivity, how to feel less confused and more goal directed, etc. The majority of people, including Jews, who are attracted to the simplistic offerings of increased relaxation, assisted motivation and heightened sensitivity are in the "normal" category and in my opinion, would not be interested in going to mental health professionals involved in the "medical model" for the treatment of mental illness. Nevertheless, these groups attract a large number of Jews and non-Jews some of whom ultimately become interested primarily in the Avoda Zora components of

the groups religious content. This "Klipa"<sup>38</sup> has, in my opinion, a most powerful attraction and pull for Jews in particular, who unfortunately have often given themselves over to the religious aspects. I have this week interviewed Simcha Gottlieb<sup>39</sup> and Joel Rosenberg who are Chabad Baal Tshuvos who have been very active in T.M. prior to becoming Lubavitch, and they strongly agree that the religious components becomes a major factor in the power of these groups to attract Jews and non-Jews.

I have also this week consulted several Jewish and non-Jewish medical and psychological associates on the problem you described without directly revealing your letter as well as talking to Rabbi's Shlomo Cunin<sup>40</sup> and Chaim I. Drizen (Berkeley)<sup>41</sup> who are continuously exposed to Jews joining these groups, etc. There is general agreement that a non-medical model offering an alternative to the oriental groups but with these techniques would be attractive.

The techniques that I described earlier that can be extracted from what most eastern (Human Consciousness) groups have in common including T.M., Yoga, Trans Personal (Astral Planes), etc., have been known for hundreds of years and are all actively researched by scientists at present.

They are:

(1) Meditation

- a. free floating
- b. directed
- c. cue stimulated (i.e. with a sound or series of sounds)

(2) Dissociative processes

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<sup>38</sup> Lit. shell. Used to denote something impure and unholy.

<sup>39</sup> See [chabad.org/3563210](http://chabad.org/3563210) (minute 18:19) where he speaks about this experience.

<sup>40</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Cunin (b. 14 Elul, 5700) is the leading Lubavitch emissary to the state of California, a position he has held since moving there in 5725.

<sup>41</sup> Rabbi Chaim Itche Drizin was a Shliach in various places before becoming a marriage and family therapist in Florida, where he now resides. In 1972, he and his wife set out to Berkley to establish a Chabad House there.

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- a. This is where the person is encouraged to experience a separation of mind and body where the individual often learns to experience the mind leaving the body, etc.

### (3) Suggestion and hypnosis<sup>42</sup>

- a. This is primarily learning the capacity to become very highly motivated to focus one's attention on a single or singular event or through the exclusion of all other stimulation. This is either done with the help of another individual (the hypnotist) or by self suggestion (by your agency)

### (4) Directed fantasy<sup>43</sup>

- a. This is where certain stories are given over to an individual and they are taught to fool that they are "living" in the story and directly and actively participating in the experience. This mythical suggested life style fantasy will often carry over during normal, everyday living.

### (5) Group Process-isolation

- a. This is the heightened power and security that one feels when he is participating in activity with a group of fellow peers. All the oriental groups teach this group process as well as isolation process as a vehicle towards "higher consciousness" and sensitivity.

I would like to discuss with you several options that come to my mind that would in a practical sense carry out your suggestions in the earlier memorandum. I would appreciate your helping me **choose** the best ideas

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<sup>42</sup> The Rebbe replied in the following letter that he is not fond of hypnosis.

<sup>43</sup> Regarding the use of delusional methods see telegram dated 20 Iyar, 5740, published below.

to carry out among these options. Obviously, Rebbe, if you do not like any of these alternatives, I am totally open and prepared to carry out any suggestion you make in this matter that you prefer. Please understand I am ready and willing to work on any aspect of this project that you wish, immediately.

A. Develop a Jewish Institute with a Halachic and Chasidic (but non-Lubavitch) orientation for the dissemination and spreading of these techniques (mentioned earlier) to Jews and non-Jews, particularly utilizing an operational Jewish context. (These techniques, as you know, have been developed and used by Jewish scholars and mystics throughout Jewish history, particularly by the Me'Kubals and Chassidim). Staff and direction of the Institute should be by Jewish scholars, scientists, medical people, mental health professionals, Rabbis and laymen.

- (1) The Institute would principally give courses and lectures and seminars to Jews and non-Jews, professional and layman.
- (2) Spread publicity and use media to teach the world that these healing techniques do not require (Has Veshalom) Avoda Zora, i.e. they can be Kosher and they have essentially a neutral, non-religious capacity to help people.
- (3) Publish articles and pamphlets in this area for laymen and professionals and spread the information to Jews and non-Jews. The Institute would offer a psychotherapy treatment using human consciousness techniques as outlined above and this treatment would be made available to the general public on a sliding scale of fees depending on the economic situation of the patient.

Your letter did not specify a Jewish, Chassidic orientation in disseminating these healing techniques, but my own opinion is that it would be a powerful resource to connect Yiddishkeit & the kedusha of a "Jewish orientation" which might help overcome the growing attractiveness of the oriental movements and their Avoda Zora. I am very interested in working on this particular idea. It excites most of the people I talk to. I believe it can be developed, controlled and grow.

B. To create a secular medical or non-medical model Institute to spread these techniques, open to Jews and non-Jews, using primarily a medical,

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scientific, psychotherapy orientation, i.e. Those techniques that are suitable for the treatment of mental illness, etc. and use Institute facilities and programs to spread this information to both the general public and the "healing" professions. This concept is less appealing to me because such medical model secular groups **do** exist now and they either are so exclusive that no one pays attention to them or they are open and available to the general public and they not only propagate these scientific techniques but unfortunately, are openly involved at least in immodesty between men and women and perhaps, worse. The capacity to control the moral climate of public, secular Institutes involved in these human consciousness groups and human encounter movement groups is suspect and concerns me a great deal. The more exclusive "medical model" Institute would not be particularly popular and I think myself and staff would end up with little popular interest in its output. The effectiveness of a solely medical oriented group would be in my opinion, small.

C. As I mentioned earlier I am 100% prepared to carry out any suggestions and opinions you will make on either of these two Institute concepts or on any other suggestion you may have on these matters. I await your response to this letter and thank you for the opportunity to carry out your wishes in these matters.

With deepest respect and affection,

Your Hasid,

Judah Landes, Ph.D.

Shortly afterwards the Rebbe responded:

B. H.  
21 Adar II, 5738  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dr. Yehuda Landes, Ph.D.  
881 Seale Avenue  
Palo Alto, Cal.

Sholom uBrocho:

Thank you for your letter of 13 Adar II. I appreciate your comprehensive response to my letter and memorandum on the need to organize widespread use of T. M. and similar techniques in psychotherapy compatible with the Torah with the double objective of making such therapy available to Jewish patients in a kosher way and at the same time saving numerous Jews from getting involved with Avoda Zora as now commonly practised in the USA.

Needless to say, I noted your suggestions and observations in this connection with understandable interest.

In reply, let me first say that, as a general principle, so long as the two objectives can best be served, whatever project is determined to be effective is most desirable and, of course, acceptable to me.

There are, however, some points in your response which need careful assessment. For instance, the suggestion that an Institute employing the said healing techniques might be linked with a strictly orthodox, even Lubavitch,<sup>44</sup> orientation should be examined in light of it being a possible, or even likely, deterrent for many candidates who might hesitate to turn to such an Institute for fear that it may impose upon them religious demands and commitments which they are not yet prepared to accept.

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<sup>44</sup> In the copy of the letter to the Rebbe which we have it states: "but not Lubavitch".



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The above is not to say that the idea should be rejected out of hand, since there may be many individuals who would not be deterred by it. But I believe that if the project is to attract a wider circle of candidates for therapy it would have a wider acceptance if it is not *overtly* tied in with such an orientation, or discipline; at any rate, not in the initial stage.

Needless to say, the emphasis is on the *overt* orientation of the projected Institute, which should have no religious or other preconditions for anyone seeking its services. But the Institute itself should, of course be run in strict keeping with the Torah, with a kosher, indeed glat-kosher, kitchen, strict Shabbos observance, with Mezuzos on all doors - just as there are glat-kosher Hotels and institutions.

With regard to the basic point you make in your letter, namely, that most people for whom our plan is envisaged consider themselves "normal" and would not be interested in a program that offers professional (medical) services, but would prefer a more simplistic setup for relaxation, etc., this should certainly be taken into account, since the ultimate goals of our<sup>45</sup> plan would not be affected. And, if as you suggest, this would be the more practical setup for attracting more people and achieving our two objectives - healing and elimination of Avoda Zora - then, by all means, this method should be given due consideration.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note that already at the outset, after Landes' initial response, the Rebbe includes Landes in the creation of his program. See following letter to the Rebbe.

<sup>46</sup> Though here the Rebbe mentioned that having the treatment available to all individuals is worthy if it ultimately saves and attracts the people in need, the Rebbe, on a different occasion, explained at length that this form of meditation is not desirable for "normal" individuals. The form of meditation in discussion, the Rebbe explained, is contrary to the Jewish worldview and outlook.

Mankind is created to toil and to actively engage in the world. This meditation, on the other hand, focuses on disconnecting people from their environment, and removing themselves from active participation in the work needed to be accomplished. [On the other hand, Chassidic contemplation and meditation is part of active Divine service.] Neglecting, or acting against, this Divine design of creation will ultimately lead to complications. The Rebbe equated this to the Talmudic phenomena of the strong people of Mechuza. In Mechuza it was the norm

I would like to make a further point, though entirely not in my domain, namely, in reference to hypnosis as one of the techniques used in psychotherapy, as mentioned in your letter.

I have always been wary of any method that deprives a person of the free exercise of his will, and which puts him in the power of another person, even temporarily - except, of course, in a case of Pikuach- nefesh. Certainly I would not favor the use of such a method on a wider scale, least of all to encourage psychologists and psychiatrists enrolled in our program to use it.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, a point which for understandable reasons I did not want to mention in my letter accompanying the memorandum: If in the first stage of implementing the program there would be need for funding the initial outlay, my Secretariat would make such funds available.

Your further comments will be welcome, and many thanks again.

With blessing,

**M. Schneerson**

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and nature of the people to carry out strenuous labor tasks. Because of their nature, it was damaging to them when they were forced to be idle.

The usefulness of this meditation is for those that are burdened by the noises and stresses of life. It can help remove themselves from the bustling world and their inner confusion. In the newfound calm they can regulate themselves and ultimately lead a productive life. Meditation is a tool and preparation for normal life (see also Maana dated 19 Shevat, 5739, published below). The Rebbe also references Avraham our patriarch, in whom the meditative practices (isolation) were a necessary prerequisite for *his* unique Divine mission (*Sichos Kodesh*, op. cit., pp. 314ff.).

<sup>47</sup> The recipient's son noted that his father in fact did favor hypnosis from other forms of alternative therapies, however, upon receiving this letter, refrained from doing so save for the most extreme cases (Landes, 174).

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Dr. Landes quickly responded with a plan fitting the Rebbe's recent instructions:

B. H.  
3 Nisan, 5738  
Palo Alto, California  
April 9, 1978

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson  
Lubavitch  
770 Eastern Parkway  
Brooklyn, New York 11213

Dear Rebbe, Shlita

In response to your analytical letter of 21 Adar II regarding "our plan", I sense that I have the privilege of having acquired in your person, a senior partner (a senior partner may be defined as one who is willing to finance the initial stages of a project still struggling in "concept" form). Truly, I feel a great zchus in the opportunity to be your junior partner and I hope I do not disappoint you. I feel you should receive project reports as the project develops and this, with the appended queries, is the initial report.

I have gathered together a small temporary (ad hoc) committee of professionals who I know from the Chabad Palo Alto community and my professional contacts, who have agreed to keep this entire effort confidential. They will help to develop the mental healing without Avoda Zora in concept form so that it will be greatly attractive to Jews and non-Jews(?) and be able to compete with the rapidly growing T.M., B.S.T., Yoga and other transpersonal psychology systems that are currently sweeping California and attracting many of the best Jewish Neshomas.

The ad hoc committee at present consists of:

- (1) Judah Landes, Ph.D.      Clinical Psychologist
  
- (2) Zev Potterman,<sup>48</sup>      T.V., Media packaging specialist

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<sup>48</sup> William Zev Putterman (November 6, 1928, Bronx, New York — May 27, 1996) was an Award-winning television producer, and a supporter of Chabad activities on the West Coast. See letter addressed to him dated 25 Shevat, 5735, on the Rebbe Responsa app.

- (3) Chaim Rosen, Ph. D.<sup>49</sup> Cultural anthropologist, specialist in Erhard Seminar Training (E.S.T.), derivative Jewish groups, & T.M.
- (4) Shmuel Shapiro, Computer software engineer former member of several of the transpersonal groups in Northern California
- (5) David Starr-Glass, Accountant and business specialist

The committee will be enlarged to allow for specialists in mental health and transpersonal techniques later. For the moment, our major concern is developing a concept for an institute that will appeal to large numbers of young people who might otherwise be drawn into these other "Klipadik" groups.

**Always**, your three definitive concepts are the guiding principles for designing this concept i.e. (A) that mental, health healing techniques be made available from the "Human Consciousness" movement etc. (albeit, no hypnosis). (B) there be no Avoda Zora, has veshalom, in any way

associated with such an institute (c) it should be widely available to Jews (and non-Jews?) but maintain the highest Halachic standards of operation (you gave a glatt-kosher hotel as an example).

The ad hoc committee and I feel (the vote was 100%) that the only way to compete with the growing number of well financed, public relations oriented, Eastern cults (see, S.F. Sundays Newspaper enclosures) is to provide at top priority a Jewish Mystical context for the institute but with **no overt connection** to orthodoxy or Lubavitch. This institute would appeal to secular, non-religious, and religious Jews and perhaps non-Jews.

With regard to the fourth paragraph of your reply letter, (21 Adar II) stating that "the suggestion that an institute employing said healing techniques might be linked with a strictly orthodox, even Lubavitch orientation should be examined... (as an) even likely deterrent for many candidates".

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<sup>49</sup> Dr. Chaim B. (Charles) Rosen indeed partnered with Dr. Landes and started Jewish Meditation workshops around America. He later went on to establish a Jewish Meditation Center in Safed. See below letters dated 24 Teves, 5742.

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Our intention is to provide a Jewish Mystical "Front" that uses the healing methods in a Jewish context but without overt religious demands, i.e. demands for the performance of Torah and Mitzvos. The possibility of promoting the institute as "Jewish" makes it interesting and inviting as a healing "doorway" for Jews and non-Jews, a substantial and effective competitor for T.M., Gurus, etc., and offers a context which is **therapeutically necessary**, i.e. not just something different from the other groups but a context **which also may actually** work better. (Please understand that all these groups essentially offer similar techniques with minor variations but package them in differing attractive and promotable packages suitable for advertising media, etc.) The emphasis on promotion

and advertising, whether by word of mouth or T.V., is designed to get the person into the healing center, and it offers context with which to do essential healing itself.

The goals we look for can be achieved by Jewish "packaging" that **does not** impose religious demands on candidates might use:

- (a) Separation of men and women (different times)
- (b) Relaxing in hot mikvot.
- (c) Meditation to concepts such as "Ein Sof" (of) [or] the concept of "botul" to Ha'Shem.
- (d) Breathing and posture exercise.
- (e) Fasting and controlled eating (possible using Meir Abausers's<sup>50</sup> food concepts).
- (f) Nigunim
- (g) Peer discussion (similar to fabringens among contemporaries) to help people open their feelings.
- (h) Professional, individual diagnosis and interviews by a psychologist or other mental health professional to explore deeper conflicts and anxieties. Psychotherapy, as needed etc.

This concept would have to be developed and extended into one day orientations, weekend workshops (with Shabbos made part of the process of healing) and perhaps much longer periods. This effort will attempt to bring a sense of order into the confused and often chaotic life styles

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<sup>50</sup> Rabbi Meir Nissim (Michel) Abehsera (d. 2014 (aged 80)) was a Lubavitcher Chassid, an author, and a counselor on macrobiotics.

of individuals in psychological and ontological pain. The attempt is to reduce chaos, anger, fear and anxiety in a Jewish context, of healing which at a much later stage might be carried over to Torah and Mitzvos. The ad hoc committee who are mostly Baal Te'shuvos found this concept most appealing and potentially competitive in the growing arena of groups grabbing for Noshoma's.

Naturally this whole effort must be carefully **controlled** and **planned** so that it doesn't stray in direction as in the case of Zalman Schechter<sup>51</sup> type groups and others of its sort.

I would like to propose a name for this project, The Noam (נועם) Institute; I would appreciate your comments on the entire matter and your own thoughts about the name.

Prior to your original letter arriving, I won in Teves, 5738, a raffle ticket (a Chabad raffle) with a trip for two to Israel. My wife and I plan to leave on a three week trip 7, Iyar 5738. If you have the strength and time available on your schedule you might want to spend ten or fifteen minutes reviewing the matter with my wife and myself in order to save you correspondence. My wife has taken an active role helping to develop the concept of the Noam Institute since the arrival of your first memorandum. In any case, we would both deeply appreciate your Bracha on this coming three week trip to Eretz Yisroel.

To review, these are the questions that we need answered or confirmed by you relating to the concept:

- (1) Will you accept this institute being promoted as a Jewish mystical healing institute not connected with Lubavitch or orthodoxy but al pe Halacha and that this institute should be comfortable for both secular and religious Jews?
- (2) Are you concerned about having Jews and non-Jews meditating to concepts of Ein-Sof, Ha'shem, etc. and learning to be "botul" to these concepts? It is hoped that these concepts would assist in deepening the meditations.

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<sup>51</sup> Meshulam Zalman Schechter (28 August 1924 – 3 July 2014), originally a student of the Lubavticher Yeshiva at 770 and sent to various places to spread Judaism by the Rebbe Rayatz and the Rebbe, and later established his own path which veered off from traditional Judaism and deviated from Halacha.

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- (3) Are you willing to open this institute up to a self defined "normal population" that is not "medical model" type clients? (I am sure we will, in any case, have an abundance of mentally ill at our doors).
- (4) Would you like frequent progress reports at each stage? Would you prefer any additional consultations?

You should know that Rabbi Chaim I. Drizin (Berkeley, Cal.) is the project Chabad consultant during planning because of his experience with these groups and in terms of Halachik questions that come up.

Your willingness to finance the initial stage of this project, i.e the Noam Institute if it suits your ideas, is of course very welcome and indeed, vital. I feel the financial issue should be discussed when I can show you a coherent plan, projected budget, and staffing needs. I for[e]see the project as being self-sufficient once past the initial stage of funding and once things get going.

Please forgive the lengthiness of this report but I feel the senior partner is entitled to know what is happening.

May you have a Kosher, frelach<sup>52</sup> and healthy Pesach,

With deepest respect and affection,

Your Hasid,

Judah Landes, Ph.D.

P.S.

I must say that in light of your original letter I sometimes feel concerned that I am pushing you into a direction you may not prefer. If this institute concept is not what you want, please let me know clearly. If you wish me to follow an alternative healing model let me know and I am ready to do it.

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<sup>52</sup> = happy.

[Apparently, this letter remained unanswered until Dr. Landes sent a subsequent letter to the Rebbe dated 2 Sivan, 5738, which has not reached us]

B.H.  
11 Sivan, 5738  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dr. Yehuda Landes Ph. D.  
801 Seale Avenue  
Palo Alto, California 94303

Greeting and Blessing:

Thank you for your letter of 2nd Sivan upon your return from Eretz Yisroel and previous communication.

I am pleased to note that you and your wife enjoyed your visit in Eretz Yisroel and were impressed with the activities of Chabad there. As I have remarked on similar occasions, it is customary to bring back souvenirs from the lands one visits that are characteristic of native features and products, etc. I trust, therefore, that you, too, brought back with you the right souvenir from the Holy Land, namely, an extra measure of *holiness*, which will serve as a fitting memento of your visit. And, of course, there is always room for improvement in matters of holiness, Torah and Mitzvos, in the daily life. In your case this is even more important, not only for your own benefit, but also for the benefit of the many who look to you for inspiration; and one is inspired not by someone else's good thoughts and intentions, and not so much by word of mouth as by a living example, which needs no elaboration to a psychologist.

Now to the main subject of our correspondence, namely saving Jews from getting involved in Avoda Zora through T. M. and the like by offering them a kosher alternative.

With reference to your letter of April 9, I would like to make the following observations:

Although a well planned and systematic approach is generally required to ensure the success of any project, I do not think that we can afford to



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delay too long the implementation of our plan through time-consuming preparations, and for two reasons: Firstly, every day that the plan is not in operation means so many more Jews turning to those unholy cults, and there is no other sure way of preventing or discouraging this. Secondly, and this is also a weighty consideration, every new project is provisional by nature, for it is expected that as it progresses there would be need for changes and improvements, which is common experience in various fields, medicine, science, business, etc.

2. I note in your letter that your discussions with your colleagues have advanced to the point of forming an ad hoc committee. I therefore believe that the stage can **now** be set to start immediately a pilot clinic or similar facility, to start offering actual treatment, on the basis of your and your colleagues professional expertise and mutual consultations. The pilot project should be set up in a way that allows for ample flexibility for modification and change as may be necessary.

As indicated,<sup>53</sup> I will be able to provide the funding for the initial stage, within limitations. You will no doubt send me a tentative budget of the initial outlay, with an estimate of the period of time it may take until the setup becomes self-supporting. Indeed, I am confident that before long it will not only be self-supporting, but also profitable, considering the popularity of techniques involved. But it is important to start in a way that will not inhibit the effectiveness and development of the project even if it costs much more.

3. With regard to specifics, I do not think it advisable to use the term "mystic" for the planned healing center, since the goal is to attract the greatest number of Jews and save them from Avoda Zora, and the said term might discourage some. Moreover, generally mysticism connotes something that lies beyond the pale of human comprehension, while the therapeutic benefits of the techniques are quite understandable rationally. Besides, to emphasize the mystical aspect would leave the door open also, lehavdil, to non-Jewish mystical cults.

For the same reason it is advisable to be circumspect in regard to the description of the techniques to be used in the healing center. For example, you mention the use of "Mikvot." While it is not in my domain to assess the therapeutic effect of relaxation in a hot Mikve, I fear that

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<sup>53</sup> At the end of the previous letter (from 21 Adar II).

to include a **Mikve** "officially" in the regimen might be suspected - by some people, at least - that it is a gimmick to involve them in Mitzvoth. I think that veiling in it in some such term as "immersion" not **bath** and the like would entirely allay such suspicion.

As for calling the healing center by the name "Noam" - it is a name already in use by various organizations and journals.<sup>54</sup> Another suitable name would have to be found, but there is no need to make a final decision on this right away.

Finally, let me relieve you of any apprehension that you might be "pushing" me on this matter.<sup>55</sup> On the contrary, in connection with such a vital project "pushing" could only be all to the good, since time is of the essence, as I emphasized above.

In view of the fact that everything is by Hashgocho Protis, it is significant that your letter and my reply were written in proximity to the Yom Tov of Kabbolas haTorah, when we renew and redouble our commitment to the Torah on the basis of "naaseh" before "v'nishma,"<sup>56</sup> with emphasis on the **doing** and that "naaseh" is the key to "v'nishma."

With esteem and blessing

**M. Schneerson**

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Likkut Maanos Kodesh*, 5724-25, Maana 95, point 3; 5732-34, Maana 319, point 2.

<sup>55</sup> See the P.S. to the letter dated April 9.

<sup>56</sup> See *Shabbos* 88b.

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A few months later Dr. Landes responded:

15th of Menachem Av, 5738  
Palo Alto, California  
פ' ואתחנן

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson  
Lubavitch

770 Eastern Parkway Brooklyn, New York 11213

Dear Rebbe, Shlita:

I ask you to accept my apology for the delay in my response to you regarding the project of "saving Jews from getting involved in Avoda Zora through TM and the like by offering them a kosher alternative". I realize the urgency of the matter but I felt that this time could be profitably used by interviewing and learning more about Jews active in these Eastern religious cultic groups, discussing the matter with professional mental health specialists, and also getting some insight and advice on the project from various Chabad Hasidim whose opinion and thinking I respect.

The two versions of the proposal that I am submitting to you for your consideration are really the same in content but very different in financial expenditure and complexity of efforts. I am not exactly sure **if** what I am proposing to you is **what you wish** or if I have misunderstood the direction that you feel will best influence the Jews we wish to reach. **Among the points that I would appreciate your opinion on is:** a) do you feel that the integration of the Jewish tradition from "Chazal", i.e. the Rambam, Chabad Chassidus, etc. on issues of Jewish mental healing and current scientific mental healing, research and meditation but without any attempt or gimmick to promote Torah and Mitzvos, is an appropriate vehicle to reach alienated counter-culture Jews involved or sensitized to Eastern cultic groups? b) would you prefer simply, a medical model of mental healing techniques in meditation, alpha-feedback techniques to teach relaxation etc. to reach these groups? (if so, a modified Plan A that is a few thousand dollars more expensive could provide the equipment but I fear the medical treatment clinic would reach fewer Jews, especially in these target population groups). c) the Jews that I have met who are currently **doing** psychotherapy and **teaching** about meditation and other healing practices are themselves often deeply influenced by Eastern philosophies and alien religious ideas. Most are not committed, observant Jews. I wonder

whether these professionals (they are often the psychiatrists and psychologists studying and teaching in this area) are suitable for our institute or whether it is best to train new people who have not been under  
...<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> The rest of this letter has not reached us to date. We call on anyone that might be in possession of this letter, or any other letter relating to this topic, to send them to us so they may be published in subsequent editions.

By the grace of G-d<sup>58</sup>  
15th of Av, 5738  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Dr. Yehuda Landes, Ph. D.  
881 Seale Avenue  
Palo Alto, Cal. 94303

Greeting and Blessing:

I duly received your letter, and many thanks.

To reiterate in writing what was conveyed to you personally when you were here:

The main problem is the *immediate* danger in which many Jews find themselves - those *already now* involved and those about to be involved in T. M. and similar programs connected with Avodah Zarah. Hence it is clear that the first action should be directed toward saving them from this danger *without delay*, since every day is important in this situation.

Accordingly, among the ways and means to achieve this end, the first step should be that everyone who *already* has the professional authority to treat such patients, should make it his *special* interest to offer his services in the abovementioned techniques in a kosher manner; and should see to it, personally and through other channels, that his use of the said methods of treatment is *publicised* and made widely known. At the same time he should use his influence with other physicians in this field that they, too, should become, actively involved in these techniques for patients who want to avail themselves of this kind of treatment.

As a follow-up to the above, it would be highly desirable that these physicians maintain contact among themselves for the purpose of mutual consultation, cooperation, encouragement, etc.

As for an intensive research program in the said techniques, the creation of a central institute, and *similar* projects - these are certainly very desirable and necessary; but such undertakings usually require

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<sup>58</sup> The draft of this letter, in Hebrew, for the secretary to translate into English is printed in *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 33, letter 12,587.

preparation and long time-consuming efforts (such as the collection of material and case reports from those already practicing these methods, and from future practitioners; researching the published literature on the subject; consulting with renowned experts, with the proper approach to each one individually, etc.)

Clearly, all this cannot be done hastily (also not to antagonize some experts **etc.**); it can only be done slowly and painstakingly, step by step, requiring a great deal of work caution and time.

This is why I offered the abovementioned practical suggestion to cope with the immediate danger for it can be implemented immediately, since time is of the essence.

With blessing,

**M. Schneerson**

P. S. It would be well if you could take time out to discuss the matter with Dr. (Sholom Zeev - Seymour W.) Applebaum,<sup>59</sup> M. D., formerly of L.A. and presently in Kew Gardens, N.Y., who is also in this field. He has been corresponding with me.

It would also be well to get in touch and enlist the cooperation of the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists National Office: 116 E. 27th St., NYC 10016. (Their Annual Convention is scheduled for next week).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Dr. Sholom Ze'ev (Seymour W.) Applebaum a practicing psychiatrist who was later involved in Arye Kaplan's meditation research (A. Kaplan *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide* (N.Y., 1985), p. X (introduction); Ophir, p. 113, fn. 3). After this letter, Dr. Landes, Rosen and Applebaum worked on a meditation plan until Landes lost contact with him (Landes, 182).

<sup>60</sup> The Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists (founded in 1947) is an organization with a goal to promote the integration of scientific and Orthodox Jewish worldviews. A series of articles by Rabbi Nochum S. Zajac have been published on [anash.org](http://anash.org) outlining the Rebbe's relationship with the AOJS.

A meeting in fact was held with Dr. Landes, Dr. Rosen, and Dr. Seymour Applebaum with the AOJS. The AOJS, however, dismissed any involvement in this and they expressed a concern that the yeshiva world would not accept it due to the resemblance of idolatrous practices (Landes, 180).

The Rebbe later lamented about the fact that rabbis and other Jewish organizations did not support or become actively involved with this (Sichos Kodesh 5739

## 39 | Kosher Meditation

Also with Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov<sup>61</sup> of Philadelphia, Pa., with whom our Secretariat has discussed the problem.

Up until this point, immense plans were in the minds of the ad-hoc committee of creating a proper institute. However, after this letter was received, various workshops, according to the plans discussed, were quickly made. These were initially headed by Dr. Landes and Dr. Rosen, in various locations, mainly in California<sup>62</sup> and New York.<sup>63</sup>

On December 5, 1978, Landes reported to the Rebbe that he had developed a pilot program in Palo Alto. A month later, Landes wrote to the Rebbe asking which themes from Jewish meditative contemplation could be selected.<sup>64</sup>

The key aspects of the JM program created by Landes and Rosen are described by Yehoshua P. Landes as follows:

1. Instead of using the concept of “emptying the mind,” Jewish Meditation should focus on a specific idea, image, or issue. This was often a letter, such as alef, Shabbat candles, or the Shema.
2. Instead of the traditional Hindu mantras, JM used “Ha’Shem” (the respectful Hebrew term for G-d) during breathing exercises. (“Ha” — breathe in, “Shem” — breathe out.)

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<sup>61</sup> Rabbi Avrohom Yitzchak Shemtov (b. 22 Av 5697) is the Chabad emissary in Philadelphia (from 5721), and chairman of Agudas Chasidei Chabad.

<sup>62</sup> For example, in the *Peninsula Times Tribune* from Palo Alto, California, from Friday, October 27, 1978, pg. 28, the following article appeared: A new Jewish meditation and therapy group will meet Sunday evenings from 8 to 10 p.m. for six sessions beginning this week. Meetings will be held in room 9 of the South Peninsula Jewish Community Center: 830 Meadow Drive, Palo Alto. There is no charge. The exploratory meditation and therapy group will explore aspects of holistic healing, meditation and non-traditional healing methods in a manner consonant with Jewish practice. Group leaders are Dr. Judah Landes, a clinical psychologist long involved in adult and family therapy on the Peninsula, and Dr. Charles Rosen, an anthropologist engaged in comparative work in meditation, religion and healing.

See also clipping attached below.

<sup>63</sup> Landes, 179-180. About a year later Landes and Rosen parted ways and the latter established a JM Center in Safed (Landes, 182. See also letter to him dated 24 Teves, 5742).

<sup>64</sup> Ophir, 114.

3. Everyone sat on chairs. No one sat in a classic yoga position. Sometimes, however, participants were asked to remove their shoes.
4. Everyone would chant (or sing) Shema Yisrael<sup>65</sup> and often took candlelit walks outdoors.<sup>66</sup>

During that year, Dr. Rosen wrote an article in a Chabad Journal describing the program:

One prong points towards refining the core meditation. While derived from an important aspect of the Jewish tradition it can be readily practiced by anyone, regardless of his or her religious stance. This core meditation can be called parve, or basically neutral so far as any religious content goes. We have been involved in efforts to disseminate this parve meditation to psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental health professionals, so that they might use it in their practices. In this way meditation might be made more accessible generally, so that people who might otherwise turn to TM or other cults, could learn simple meditation in a value-free setting...

The second prong points toward expanding JM and making it more available as a specifically kosher alternative, an effort also supported by the Rebbe. JM is for those Jews who are not only open but also eager to learn meditations derived from our own tradition, who clearly prefer to meditate in a Jewish way and to be involved with the multiple dimensions of JM.<sup>67</sup>

Pictured is Dr. Landes having a Jewish Meditation session



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<sup>65</sup> See above footnote 13.

<sup>66</sup> Landes, 177-178.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Ophir, 115-116. Though Rosen mentioned a second prong — making a *Jewish* form of meditation — as being supported by the Rebbe, from the letters we have in our possession this does not seem to be the case (see below letter dated 10 Tammuz, 5739).



Dr. Landes kept the Rebbe notified of his activities and workshops. Below is an answer the Rebbe wrote to one of such letters.

SECRETARIAT of RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON  
the Lubavitcher Rabbi

ב"ה, י"ט שבט תשל"ט

לכבוד דר. יהודה שי' לנדיס

שלום וברכה!

מועתק בזה מה שהואיל כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א לציין על מכתבו ועל ההודעה<sup>68</sup> בקשר לפעולותיו:

"להמשיך (בטי.מ.) וההכרח בזה עוד נתגדל. ונתגדל גם זכותו ונתינת כח לו ולמסייעיו.

(לכתבו שעושה זה ב"כשר וויי"):

"וימשיך כן, כי נצרך זה לאנשים הנ"ל — בכדי להיות ראוי ומוכן לדבקות וכו'.

אזכיר עה"צ".

בכבוד

יהודה ליב גראנער<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> This may have been some sort of ad or newspaper clipping such as the one in the fn. 62.

<sup>69</sup> Free translation:

By the Grace of G-d, 19 Shevat 5739.

Dear Dr. Yehuda Sheyichyeh Landes

Greeting and Blessing!

The following is what the Rebbe Shlita noted on your letter and notice in regards to your activities:

"Continue (in T.M.) and the need for this only grew. [In turn], the merit and power given from above to you, and those helping you, likewise grew.

(in regards to what you wrote that you are doing this in a "Kosher way" [the Rebbe noted]):

מזכירות  
 כ"ק אדמו"ר מנחם מענדל שליט"א שניאורסאהן  
 ליו באוויטש  
 SECRETARIAT of RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON  
 the Lubavitcher Rabbi  
 770 EASTERN PARKWAY, BROOKLYN 13, N. Y.

ב"ה, י"ט שבט תשל"ט

לכבוד דר. יהודה שי' לנדיס

שלום וברכה!

מועק בזה מה שהאיל כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א  
 לציין על מכתבו ועל ההודעה בקשר לפעולותיו:

"להמשיך (בסי.מ.) וההכרח בזה עוד נחגדל.  
 ונחגדל גם זכותו ונתינת כח לו ולמסטייעיו.

ללכתבו שעושה זה ב"כשר וויי":

"וימשיך כן, כי נצרך זה לאנשים הנ"ל  
 בכדי להיות ראוי ומוכן לדבקות וכו'.

אזכיר עה"צ".

בכבוד  
 יהודה ליב גראנער

And Continue to do so, for this is necessary for these individuals — in order for them to be suitable and prepared for *Dveykus* (attachment to G-d) etc.

I will remember you in prayer when visiting the holy resting place [of my father-in-law of saintly memory]."

With esteem,

Yehuda Leib Groner [the Rebbe's secretary].

## 43 | Kosher Meditation

Attached is a newspaper clipping from The Jewish News of Northern California, Volume 129, Number 9, 2 March 1979, advertising Jewish Meditation

Dr. Judah Landes, psychologist, and Dr. Charles Rosen, comparative anthropologists, will present a workshop on "Jewish Meditation: The Answer to T.M." on Sundays, March 4 and 11.

The March 4 session will meet from 1:30-6:30 p.m. at Temple Emanu-El, 1010 University Ave., San Jose. The March 11 session will meet from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at the San Jose Jewish Community Center, 2300 Canoas Garden Rd., San Jose.

Drs. Landes and Rosen will explore and practice techniques of healing and personal growth by focusing on relaxation, improving awareness, reducing stress and learning good mental health practices.

Dr. Landes is a clinical psychologist. Dr. Rosen works in comparative religions, meditation and healing.

Pre-registration is required for the workshops. Cost is \$25 for

members and \$40 for non-members, including kosher snack. Discounts are available for more than one family member. For information, call 266-6317.

By the Grace of G-d<sup>70</sup>  
 10 Tammuz, 5739  
 Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dr. Judah Landes

Greeting and Blessing:

Herewith (in translation) is a copy of the Rebbe's שליט"א comment on your letter of 11 Sivan:

The methods of Rabbi Kaplan<sup>71</sup> and Rabbi Polit and **their aim** are **not at all** the aim and purpose I had in mind, of which I spoke with you.

The intent is not that you should teach Kabbalah or Chassidus or, Torah in general,<sup>72</sup> but only and exclusively that you should teach how through meditation and mental concentration and the like - such as are **kosher and permissible** according to the Shulchan Aruch - it is possible to attain peace of mind, etc.,

Especially to attain peace of mind by those in whom this is acutely lacking, due to anxiety in business, Sholom Bayis, health, and similar stresses.

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<sup>70</sup> The Rebbe had handwritten this response on a margin of Dr. Landes' letter (the handwritten response is published in *Teshura* Gershovitz-Groner 15 Elul, 5777). From the style, it seems like this letter was translated by the Rebbe's secretariat, though this letter, the way we received it, lacks the proper header. It seems from the attached document that this letter was also prepared to be sent in Hebrew. Wherever the words *they* or *their* appeared in this letter it was changed to *you* or *your* (in handwriting).

<sup>71</sup> Rabbi Aryeh Moshe Eliyahu Kaplan (14 Cheshvan, 5695 – 14 Shevat, 5743) was a rabbi, author, and translator of many Jewish books. In the last few years of life, he worked on developing a Jewish meditation program with the aim of renewing traditional contemplative methods. He developed his programs based on restoring and reconstructing the said methods from older kabbalistic texts and published multiple volumes on this (see Ophir, 119-120, and *Techumin*, vol. 18, pp. 408-418, part five). At one point Dr. Landes met up with Rabbi Kaplan, However, the meeting did not go well (Landes, 180, and fn. 33).

<sup>72</sup> The Rebbe also spoke about this in the Farbringen mentioned below (*Sichos Kodesh* op. cit., p. 319). See the introduction for a discussion regarding this.

Therefore you should **not** teach Kabbalah, mysteries of the Torah, Zohar and **similar** subjects in your sessions (or workshops).

In other words, your function is that of **physicians** (not *Torah teachers*) - and an essential purpose is preventive therapy.<sup>73</sup>

Tel: HYacinth 3-8250 Cables: LUBAVITCH NEWYORK

**מוכירות**  
**כ"ק אדמו"ר מנחם מענדל שליט"א שניאורסאהן**  
**ליובאוויטש**

SECRETARIAT of RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON  
the Lubavitcher Rabbi  
770 EASTERN PARKWAY, BROOKLYN 13, N. Y.

ב"ה, י' תמוז תשל"ט  
ברוקלין

הו"ח אי"א נו"נ עוסק בצ"צ כו'  
מו"ה יהודא שי"ח חמכונה דה. לנדיט

שלום וברכה!

מועתק בזה מה שהאיל כ"ק אדנו"ר שליט"א לציין על מכתבו מיום י"א  
סיון:

"שיטות הרב קאפלאן שי" ו הרב פליט שי" ומסרתם - לא זה מסרתם  
וכוונתם כלל, שאודותה דברתי אתו.

אין הכוונה שילמדו קבלה או חסידות או תורה בכלל, כ"א אך ורק  
שילמדו אין שי"י התבוננות ומח' חזקה וכיו"ב - הכשרים ומותרים  
ע"פ שו"ע - אפשר לבוא למנוחת הנפש וכיו"ב.

ובעיקר למנוחת הנפש דאלה שחסר זה אצלם באופן חריף, ע"י דאגות  
במסחר, בשלום בית, בבריאות וכיו"ב.

ולכן לא ילמדו קבלה וסודות התורה וזוהר וכיו"ב שטעאנסן שלהם,

ז.א. מסרתם כרופאים (ולא כמלמדי תורה) - והפקיד עקרי preventive

<sup>73</sup> In the Farbrengen referenced in the next letter the Rebbe spoke at length that this program in not for the average normal individual, for it could be harmful and separate the meditator from his surroundings, rather it should be a medical technique that is prescribed in doses by a physician. See also note 46.

Though we have provided throughout the footnotes some freely adapted excerpts of the Rebbe's talk delivered on 13 Tammuz, 5739, to provide the reader with the full picture, we are providing here the Rebbe's talk on this matter the way it was published in English, by Sichos in English, shortly after the talk was delivered:<sup>74</sup>

... There is an issue, which is connected with the physical and psychological health of many Jews, that demands attention. It is quite possible that these words will have no effect. Nevertheless, the health of a Jew is such an important matter, that efforts should be made even when there is not a sure chance of success.

This issue is the idea of meditation. Meditation has its roots in the very beginning of the Jewish heritage. The Torah commentaries explain that Avraham and the other patriarchs chose to be shepherds so that they could spend their time in solitude. Their lives were not simple, physical lives. On the contrary, they were totally given over to the service of G-d to the point where they are called "G-d's chariot." [That metaphor was chosen because just as a chariot has no will of its own and is totally controlled by its driver, similarly their lives were totally controlled by G-d.] They chose a profession that would allow them to live such a spiritual existence. Therefore, they become shepherds, spending their days in the fields, in solitude, rather than becoming involved in the hub-bub of life in the cities.

The same holds true today. There are certain aspects of psychological health and tranquility that can be attained by taking oneself out of contact with the hub-bub that surrounds oneself. By retreating into solitude, (not necessarily leaving the city,) and by withdrawing into solitude for a period of time, one may attain psychological health and peace of mind. This behavior will strengthen one and protect his mental health. This process involves taking oneself away from the hub-bub and tumult of the street, and meditating on an object that brings about peace of mind.

The Torah's statement "Behold I have set before you life and good, death and evil"<sup>75</sup> applies in all matters. Every facet of life can be used in a positive way or

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<sup>74</sup> This talk in its original Yiddish is printed in *Sichos Kodesh*, op. cit., p. 314-321. The talk in English can be accessed on <https://sie.org/2601787> (some of the following footnotes appeared there) and is printed (with some variations) in *Healthy in Mind, Body, and Spirit: Mental Health* (SIE, 2021), pp. 273-279. An audio version can be accessed at <https://ashreinu.app/player?parentEvent=3044&event=3049>.

<sup>75</sup> *Devarim* 30:15.

## 47 | Kosher Meditation

in an opposite direction. For example, the sun, the moon, and the stars are necessary for life of earth. They bring about manifold goodness. However, they also have been worshipped as false gods. One might ask (as the Talmud asks): "Since they have been worshipped as false gods, shouldn't they be destroyed? However, should G-d destroy the world because of the foolishness of the idol-worshippers?"<sup>76</sup> The same concept applies in regard to meditation. Though essentially good, meditation can also be destructive. There are those who have connected meditation to actually bowing down to an idol or a man and worshipping it or him, bringing incense before them etc. The cults have spread throughout the U.S. and throughout Erez Yisrael as well. They have called it by a refined name "transcendental meditation" i.e. something above limits, above our bounded intellects. However, they have also incorporated into the procedures the bringing of incense and other practices that are clearly "Avodah Zara," the worship of false gods.

Since we are living within the darkness of Golus, many Jewish youth have fallen into this snare. Before they became involved with this cult, they were troubled and disturbed. The cult was able to relate to them and bring them peace of mind. However, their meditation is connected with Avodah Zara, burning incense and bowing to a Guru, etc. Since the aspects of idol worship are not publicized, there are those who have not raised their voices in protest. They don't know if such a protest would be successful and since no one has asked them, why should they enter a questionable situation. However, while they remain silent, Jewish youth are becoming involved in "Avodah Zara," worship of idols. That sin is so severe that the Torah declares one should forego his life before accepting their worship. Furthermore, this plague is spreading, involving both youth and adults alike.<sup>77</sup>

A program must be organized to spread Kosher meditation. There are those who argue against such a step. They question its propriety maintaining that Kosher meditation might lead to non-Kosher meditation. Their argument can be refuted. It is opposite the spirit of Yiddishkeit, and particularly opposite the spirit of Chassidus, to withhold help from anyone. If someone is in need, one must help him. If someone does not realize that he requires help, the need to help him is even greater.

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<sup>76</sup> *Avodah Zarah* 54b.

<sup>77</sup> The pattern "one sin leads to another" [*Avos* 4:2] will bring those who have not been involved with the aspects of meditation that are Avodah Zara to this severe sin. Once they have begun meditation they will look for a greater Guru and a more well known Guru until they fall into that snare.

However, that is not the question at all. There are Jews who have already fallen into this snare. The simplest way to draw them away from it would be to provide them with a Kosher alternative. We are clearly obligated from the Torah to do so.<sup>78</sup> (If not as a Mitzvah in its own right as a part of the Mitzvah "love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>79</sup>)

Others will argue — such a practice will lead to "Bitul Torah, the neglect of Torah study." Since many of those who will seek meditation are not involved in a Torah lifestyle, the concepts that relax them and put them at ease when meditating are not necessarily connected with Torah. Though a Kosher topic of meditation will be chosen, it will not necessarily be connected with Torah. Hence, such a practice causes a neglect of Torah study.

This argument is also faulty. These people are sick and must be healed. They should be given a Kosher method of treatment instead of being forced to use means that are connected with Avodah Zara.

In instituting this program, some major factors must be taken into consideration: meditation should only be used by those who need it. A healthy person doesn't need meditation. On the contrary, if he begins to meditate he will hurt his psychological health.<sup>80</sup> The only meditation that all should carry out is one which is part of one's service to G-d, for the Shulchan Aruch states that before each prayer one must meditate on "the greatness of G-d and the humble state of man."<sup>81</sup> However, that meditation is done with a fixed time and a fixed intent. Its goal is not to calm one's nerves.

The meditation can however be based on a Kosher idea or a Torah concept e.g. Shema Yisroel, the meanings of the prayers. Thus, this will bring one to an awareness of the greatness of G-d and the humble nature of man.<sup>82</sup>

Also, since as in all treatments, the healer gains a certain amount of control over his patient, we must take care that the professional who is leading the meditation have a clear and well defined knowledge of what is permitted according to the Shulchan Aruch, what leads to Avodah Zara, etc.

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<sup>78</sup> Also, by doing so we will fulfill the Mitzvah of healing a fellow Jew.

<sup>79</sup> *Vayikra* 19:18.

<sup>80</sup> A parallel to this idea can be seen in the Talmud. Our sages declared that the workers of Mechuzah who were used to carrying heavy loads would become sick if they did not work. Likewise, those who don't need to take time off and relax will suffer by doing so.

<sup>81</sup> *Orach Chayim* 98:1.

<sup>82</sup> The Rebbe mentioned that for some meditation on the humble nature of man can be harmful.



## 49 | Kosher Meditation

In addition, the professional must be conscious that meditation shares a parallel with other medical remedies. Drugs and medicines are only valuable if given in a limited amount, and are detrimental to one's health if taken over-excessively. Someone, who is dangerously ill should take meditation in order to be cured. However, once he is cured, to persist in taking the remedy is harmful. Similarly, in regard to meditation, the measure in which a person is exposed to it must be regulated. This principle is expressed by the Rambam who writes, that if someone is overindulgent in a certain direction he will be healed by taking extreme steps in the opposite direction. However, after the influence of his initial behavior has been counteracted, he should return to a middle path.<sup>83</sup>

There are general guidelines for establishing a program of Kosher meditation. It is necessary that we do not close our eyes and return to our daily lives, thinking, what does meditation have to do with me? What contact do I share with the youth and adults that have fallen into this snare? We must realize that there are many in the United States, who have become involved. In Erez Yisrael, many centers for meditation have been opened. Even in Yerushalayim, the holy city, such a center has been established. I, myself, received a brochure from such an institution. It was professionally produced, containing pictures and a description of how in Yerushalayim, a center for meditation has been set up. They purchase American addresses, and send them this brochure. It makes a powerful impression and arouses curiosity. Thus, we can see how serious the situation is.

In view of this situation, psychologists, psychoanalysts, etc. have a holy duty to advance their knowledge of meditation, and work to develop a Kosher program. Furthermore, since we live in a country in which publicity plays a large role, efforts must be made to publicize the treatment in the broadest means possible.

Furthermore, this treatment should not be connected with any side issues. There are those who maintain that meditation must be connected with the secrets of Torah. Meditation on the secrets of Torah is very important, particularly in the present age when the Wellsprings of Chassidus must be spread outwards. However, the subject at hand is different. There are Jews who are involved in "Avodah Zara," worship of false gods, who must be saved. This is the first priority. If one begins by teaching the secrets of Torah, it is extremely likely that the majority of them will not respond. Even the few who might show an interest should be separated from "Avodah Zara" first.

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<sup>83</sup> See *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchos De'os chapters 1-3.

It is a necessity for everyone to be involved in this. However, if a novice would begin learning meditation immediately, it would take a long time before he could master the subject. Instead, one should turn to a psychologist and attempt to interest him in the matter. He should be told that thousands of Jews are being drawn into the worship of idols, bringing incense, believing in Gurus, etc., and how he has a holy duty (and since he also has a personal desire) to heal people, it is necessary that he extend himself into a field related to his own — meditation. In a short time, he will be able to master the techniques necessary for this treatment, since he already has had practical experience helping such people.

This aspect, if publicized correctly, will be immediately successful. It will be able to save those who stand at the crossroads. Their intent is not against Torah. If given the choice between a permitted treatment and a forbidden one, they will choose the permitted. Then, this success, will attract those who have already become involved with the forbidden practices.

We cannot sit and wait practically until someone asks to be helped. We have to approach those who are afflicted and speak their language, without mixing in any other Mitzvos. Our object should be merely the Mitzvah of healing their troubled psyches.

Each one of us knows such a doctor. We can interest a doctor in such activities, and he will find a way to attract those who have fallen into these snares.

These efforts are most important. Our sages declared: "One who saves a Jewish soul saves the entire world."<sup>84</sup> In this case, there are thousands of souls that must be saved. There will be critics. However, the very first chapter of Shulchan Aruch opens with the command "Don't be embarrassed before those who mock you." Rather than be affected by these doubts, we can proudly save many Jewish souls returning them to their source; sound in mind, and sound in body.

And then, through this effort of saving Jewish souls we will proceed to the future redemption. In all the other exiles, the redemption did not involve the entire Jewish people. However, the Messianic redemption will reach every Jew. The prophet Isaiah (27:12) declares: "You will be collected one by one" from Even the furthest extremes of Golus. These efforts to draw Jews away from the Golus of "Avodah Zara" will help hasten the fulfillment of the prophecy. The Talmud states that all the appointed times for Moshiach's coming have passed, and everything depends on Teshuvah. When the Jewish people do Teshuvah, they will immediately be redeemed.

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<sup>84</sup> *Sanhedrin* 37a.

By the Grace of G-d  
19th of Tammuz, 5739  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dr. Yehuda Landes, Ph. D.  
787 W. Fremont Avenue  
Sunnyvale, Calif. 94087

Greeting and Blessing:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your correspondence,<sup>85</sup> with the enclosure.

I trust that you heard a transcript of what has been said at the recent Farbrengen, wherein some of your questions in your letter have been answered.

With blessing,

**M. Schneerson**

P.S. In accordance with your suggestions, you will find enclosed one check in the amount of \$500 as a grant to Dr. Rosen in connection with the work on the handbook.

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<sup>85</sup> A letter to the Rebbe dated 3 Tammuz, 5739, which has not reached us.

On May 1, 1980 (15 Iyar 5740), Dr. Rosen, Dr. Landes, and Dr. Applebaum were meeting regarding meditation. One of the things that came up were a claim by a certain Lubavitcher that the Rebbe had told him in private that certain forms of meditation could allow people to fly, to practice mind control and telepath. Everyone at the meeting was concerned. That day Dr. Landes sent a telegram to the Rebbe asking for clarification. Shortly afterward the Rebbe responded with a telegram:<sup>86</sup>

Dr. [Landes]<sup>87</sup>

[6 May, 1980 (20 Iyar, 5740)]

In reply to your mailgram 5-1-80 [which was] just received, though self-evident from our personal discussions and correspondence, I must emphasize again, that my views and guidelines [in] reference [to] T.M. Meditation have not and could not have been changed, since they are based on [the] Shulchan Aruch.

As for the suggestion you mention in your telegram about "teaching people to fly," it is the first I hear about it, nor do I know details of it. But, needless to say, if it implies physical flying, and hence delusional, it is not only contrary to Torah — as [is] any deception — but also inadvisable as a therapeutic method. Since, eventually, the patient will realize the deception and it is bound to result in a severe reaction.

With blessing,

Menachem Schneerson

Ultimately, after Dr. Landes and Dr. Rosen conducted several JM workshops in the States, the people involved in Jewish Meditation parted ways. Dr. Rosen made a JM Center in Safed (see letter to him dated 24 Teves, 5742) and Dr. Landes continued in the states, mainly in California, until he retired due to his health in the 1990s.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Landes, 182.

<sup>87</sup> This telegram is published in *Letters From the Rebbe*, Vol. 6, p. 156, and partially in Landes, 183. We have added additional connecting word [in brackets] and punctuation for easier reading.

<sup>88</sup> Landes, 182.

After hearing some reports regarding the Jewish Meditation Center in Safed, which Dr. Rosen headed, the Rebbe sent Dr. Landes a letter he had penned to Dr. Rosen together with the following cover letter:

By the Grace of G-d  
24th of Teves, 5742  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dr. Yehuda Landes, Ph.D.  
881 Seale Avenue  
P.A., Ca. 94303

Greeting and Blessing:

I am directed by the Rebbe שליט"א to send you the enclosed copy of his letter, which is self-explanatory.

Since you have had occasion to discuss this subject personally with the Rebbe, and you know the Rebbe's views about the extreme precaution that is necessary in practicing Jewish Meditation, in order to avoid even the remotest suspicion of Avoda Zara, the enclosed copy is sent to you in the spirit of the Saying of Our Sages, "Encourage the energetic."<sup>89</sup> Indeed, such encouragement cannot be overstated, in view of the fact that it is a very touchy subject, including the possibility of inadvertently being the cause of someone inferring a Hetter which was not intended at all. For this reason, the Rebbe שליט"א believes that periodic consultations with a Rabbinic authority is highly desirable in order to avoid any possible inadvertency.<sup>90</sup>

With esteem and all good wishes,

Sincerely,

Nissan Mindel  
Secretary

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<sup>89</sup> See *Makos* 23a. *Sifri*, Nasso, 5:2; *Bamidbar Rabba* 7:6.

<sup>90</sup> Dr. Landes used the expert Halachic advice of Rabbi J.I. Schochet (August 27, 1935 – July 27, 2013) as he wrote in his letter of 15 Av, 5739 (that part of the letter has not reached us) and the Rebbe never made any objection on that choice (Landes, 179, and fn. 26 there).

By the Grace of G-d  
 24th of Teves, 5742  
 Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dr. Chaim Rosen, Ph.D.  
 1217 Normandy Dr. #3  
 Miami Beach, Fla. 33141

#### Greeting and Blessing:

After the long interval, I was especially pleased to receive your letter of Jan. 8th. May G-d, whose benevolent Providence extends to each and everyone, lead you in the way of the fullest utilization of your abilities to help others, and help yourself, **in strictest accord** with the Torah, **Toras Chaim**. This is also the way of Hatzlocho in the fulfillment of your heart's desires for good.

I have underscored the words "in strict accord," because in the field of Jewish Meditation one cannot overemphasize the great caution that is required to steer clear from even the slightest admixture of Avoda Zara, or even the suspicion of A. Z. I bring this up here because I have received complaints about some practitioners of Jewish Meditation, including also the Jewish Meditation Center of Safed, that, in the view of the complainant, some aspects of the practices are not in accord with the Shulchan Aruch. I do not know the writer personally, but since we are dealing with a highly sensitive and serious area, I cannot ignore such reports. Moreover, it appears that the complaints are basically connected with the fact that those who practice Jewish Meditation are persons who, inevitably, are not the experts on Halacha, particularly on the intricacies of Avoda Zara. Of course, however well meaning a Jew is, the fact that one is an M.D. or Ph. D. clearly indicates that he had devoted considerable time to obtain these degrees, and, to that extent, he has not been able to consecrate all his time and attention to Torah and Halacha. I use the term "consecrate" advisedly, for this is what proper Torah-study demands.

For this reason, it has been my advice to those Ph.D.'s and M.D.'s who wish to enter the field of Jewish Meditation, that even if they also have Rabbinical Ordination (**Smichah**), they should seek the advice and guidance of a competent and experienced Rav, who is an expert in

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those sections of the Shulchan Aruch which deal with these questions. To be sure, a Rav Moreh Hora'ah is expected to be proficient in all of the Shulchan Aruch, but there are Rabbanim who have specialized in this particular field, and they are competent to rule whether this or that practice has any suspicion of A. Z. And there is surely no need to emphasize how strictly one must regard any suspicion of A. Z., even the remotest.

In these days of confusion and misconception, additional precaution must be taken to avoid anything, however innocent in itself — if it can be misconstrued by a patient or by a colleague as a **Hetter** for similar treatment or methods which may not be just as innocent of A. Z.

I must emphasize again that the above is no reflection in any way on the Torah knowledge and commitment of any person. But because no person can be fully objective in a matter in which one is personally involved, especially if it is a dedicated involvement, it is important to seek the opinion of a completely objective and disinterested Rabbinic authority.

With blessing for Hatzlocho in all above,

P. S. In view of your writing that you plan to return to Eretz Yisroel soon, this letter has been written ahead of its time.

Enclosed is a copy of a letter which has a bearing on the subject.

## Appendix

Below is a compilation of letters related to meditation that were available to us

1

### Jewish Meditation and Zen

By the Grace of G-d<sup>91</sup>  
9th of Kislev, 5741  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Dr. . . . P.H.D.  
Great Neck, N.Y. 11021

Blessing and Greeting:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of . . . , in which you write about Jewish meditation and "Zen."

Needless to say, your enthusiasm for the latter astonishes me greatly, all the more in view of your introducing yourself as a Ph.D. humanistic psychologist, and having had discussions with knowledgeable Rabbis - which reveals a search for the truth, but regrettably misdirected.

To state some of the reasons for my astonishment, let me, first of all, point out that one of the basic scientific methods is to proceed from the simple to the complex, looking first for simple explanations, and failing to find such, to search for a more complex one. In psychology, too, the first approach should be to relate the problem to the subject's natural element and atmosphere in which he was born, since this has a very strong impact on the person's psyche, for a disturbance or disruption of one's natural element and environment is most likely to be the primary cause of the psychological problem of the patient.

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<sup>91</sup> *The Letter and the Spirit*, vol. 2, pp. 431ff.

Note: The following letters, which are printed in "*The Letters and the Spirit*" are from the archives of Rabbi Nissan Mindel A"H, the Rebbe's personal secretary entrusted with writing up the Rebbe's orally dictated responses. The "Nissan Mindel Archives" are comprised of secretarial copies, including first drafts, and may have subsequently been published with editorial changes. Therefore the letters as they appear in the book may not be the final signed version.



A second basic point is that the treatment should, of course, be fully consistent with the proper diagnosis, without being subjectively detracted by any method that may seem effective in other circumstances. By way of a simple example: When a drug is prescribed, it should be based entirely on its effectiveness, not by the attractiveness of the pill for its appearance or taste.

A little more deeply. One should not be carried away by immediate but short-lived effects that may be achieved from relieving symptoms, but look for a true and lasting cure, however important it is also to relieve symptoms.

After these prefatory remarks, which are no doubt superfluous in your case, it surprises me that in mentioning your personal background and qualifications, you did not indicate at all how many years you have devoted to in-depth study of the psychological approach expounded in Jewish sources, by Jewish authorities on the subject of guiding Jewish perplexed in every generation. (Some of such sources are available also in translation in various languages).

Moreover, these studies and conclusions have not remained in the realm of theory, but have been tested and proven over the years. For, as in the case of all science, it is actual testing and experimentation that are conclusive, and the more of these, the stronger is the evidence.

Now, although your letter does not indicate that you have had this preparation, either in theory or in practice, which is indispensable in treating Jewish patients with psychological problems, yet you come out with categorical conclusions as to how to treat Jewish patients and, more astonishingly, with the aid of Zen practice at that!

Apparently you are unaware that Zen, as commonly practiced now, is connected with Avoda Zara (idolatry). To be sure, some pagan practices, witchcraft and the like as had been practiced since ancient times, have had palliative effects, by using for example, incense, rhythmical bodily movements and the like, which in the way that tranquilizers nowadays are used as palliatives. Nevertheless, the Torah, **Toras Chaim** and Toras Emes being our true guide in life, strictly prohibits pagan methods and practices insofar as Jews are concerned. And this is because not only will such practices be of no benefit for the soul or body, but will rather be destructive to both - just as there are

many "pleasant" substances which also have palliative ingredients but, nonetheless, the total effect is poison. Indeed, it is precisely the external side effects and relief which such practices may bring that cover up the insidious harm and makes them all the more dangerous.

It is surely unnecessary to point out that the purpose of this letter is not polemical. But it is the duty of every human being, certainly of a Jew who follows the teachings of the Torah, to warn any person against pitfalls and help save him, or her, from harm. Since I am a firm believer in G-d's benevolent Providence, as well as in the teaching of our Sages that the heart of every Jew is always awake and responsive to the truth,<sup>92</sup> I trust you will accept what has been said here in the true spirit, and will diligently apply yourself to the study of Jewish sources on the subject of the Jewish soul and psychological make-up. And then, I am confident, you will "taste and see"<sup>93</sup> - to quote a familiar phrase from Tehillim. And by using the proper approach, you will indeed be able to utilize your qualifications and capacities in the fullest measure, to help many who are suffering from confusion and perplexity in these difficult times.

As a young, energetic scientist, who has shown a capacity for research and endurance in the quest for professional excellence, as is evident from your letter, I trust you will accept the new direction I am suggesting to you as a challenge, and I am confident that you will prove equal to it. All the more so as we have the assurance of our Sages, "Make the effort and you will succeed,"<sup>94</sup> coupled with the promise of Divine help.

Wishing you Hatzlocho,

With blessing,

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<sup>92</sup> See *Shir HaShirim* 5:2 and *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* on that verse.

<sup>93</sup> *Tehillim* 34:9.

<sup>94</sup> *Megillah* 6b.

## Seeking Yoga and Other Cults

By the Grace of G-d<sup>95</sup>  
Rosh Chodesh Sivan, 5739  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mr. . . .

Johannesburg 2000

Greeting and Blessing:

This is to confirm receipt of your letter and may G-d grant the fulfillment of your heart's desires for good.

Noting the beginning of your letter, it is surely unnecessary to reiterate that the everyday life and conduct in accordance with the Torah and mitzvot, although a must for its own sake, is also the channel to receive G-d's blessings in all needs. Consequently, every additional effort in matters of Yiddishkeit widens the channel, and there is always room for improvement in goodness and holiness, Torah and mitzvot.

Referring to the matter of a Jewish name, you are, of course, right that it has a special significance and is incomparable to a name in any other language. However, when it is transliterated - as when a letter is written in English and the name is transliterated in English letters - the original content of the name is preserved, and there can be no objection to it. Besides, there would be no point in signing an English letter in Hebrew, since the recipient may not be able to read Hebrew, which is why the letter is written in English in the first place, in reply to a letter in that language.

Since you brought up this subject, it gives me an opportunity to relate it to the timely topic of these days of sefirah, linking the Festival of Yetzias Mitzraim with the Festival of Mattan Torah. For, as you may know, our Sages declare that one of the things in the merit of which the Jewish people merited the Liberation from Mitzraim was the fact that they did not change their Hebrew names which was an important factor

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<sup>95</sup> *The Letter and the Spirit*, vol. 2, pp. 422ff.

in preserving their identity.<sup>96</sup> Which also reminds us that the ultimate purpose of the liberation from Egyptian bondage was to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai, which we will soon celebrate on Shovuos. With the giving of the Torah, every Jew was given also the capacity, and hence is also fully expected, to go from strength to strength in the study of the Torah and the observance of the mitzvot, bearing in mind that the actual practice is the essential thing.<sup>97</sup>

Inasmuch as the Torah and mitzvot were given to all the Jews, and to each one individually, for all times and in all places, and "these are our lives and the length of our days,"<sup>98</sup> it is clear that every moment of a Jew's life should be consecrated to Torah and mitzvot. Hence it is both surprising and painful to see a Jew spending precious time in search of "greener pastures" elsewhere, even if his intentions are good, for, as above, the important thing is the actual deed.

Needless to say, the above includes **Yoga and similar cults** even if it is not connected with anything pertaining to avodo zoro - if there is such cult that is completely free from avodo zoro, and in this only a competent Torah authority who is permeated with halocho is qualified to rule.

I am not seeking opportunities to admonish anyone, but since you mention certain oriental cults, it is my duty to call your attention to the fact that every spare moment that a Jew can use to deepen his knowledge of Torah he dissipates it on other things is deplorable enough, not to mention cults that in their overwhelming majority are certainly connected with avodo zoro in one way or another, and if there are exceptions, one must make doubly sure through an expert Torah authority, as mentioned above.

The present days are highly suitable for Jews to separate themselves from any alien influences in preparation for the Festival of Mattan Toraseinu, when G-d sanctified us as a nation apart from all other nations, a unique "Kingdom of G-d's servants and a Holy Nation,"<sup>99</sup> by giving us His holy Torah and mitzvot. And since G-d Himself has shown

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<sup>96</sup> See *Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5.

<sup>97</sup> See *Avos* 1:17.

<sup>98</sup> Nusach of the evening prayers.

<sup>99</sup> *Shemos* 19:6.

us the way, what sense is there in looking for better ways. This is really too plain and self-evident to need further elaboration.

Wishing you a joyous and inspiring Festival of Kabbolas haTorah and the traditional blessing to reaffirm the commitment to Torah and mitzvot with joy and inwardness.

With blessing,

3

### Saving Jews from Cults

. . . I would be remiss if I were not to make the following practical observation. No doubt you know the situation of Yiddishkeit and the problem of assimilation and intermarriage, etc. You must also know of the proliferation of various cults, many of which are definitely idolatrous, which have ensnared many young Jews, both men and women. Many of these cults are also very active in London itself, and their activities are open and public, etc. Sad to say, there has not been an adequate response on the part of Jewish askonim to counter this destructive influence. Even to save one Jewish boy or girl would have warranted the utmost reaction, how much more so when the problem has assumed tidal proportions. . .

Excerpt from a letter dated 9th of Tammuz, 5740<sup>100</sup>

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### Nothing is Being Done to Stop Cults Even After a Public Outcry

. . . In recent years a new plague has been ravaging and spreading among our young generation - the various idolatrous "cults." Sad to say, little, if anything has been done to counteract this terrible danger, even after the suicide and loud, but short-lived, outcry in the press. . .

Excerpt from a letter dated 11th of Tishrei, 5741<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *The Letter and the Spirit*, Vol 3, pp. 447ff.

<sup>101</sup> *The Letter and the Spirit*, vol. 5, pp. 445ff. It seems that this letter was addressed to Professor Cyril Domb.

Can I Find My Own Way In Life<sup>102</sup>

By the Grace of G-d  
28th of Av, 5740  
Brooklyn, NY

Miss . . .

Montreal, Que. H3Z 2P8  
Canada

Blessing and Greeting:

I am in receipt of your letter and may G-d grant the fulfillment of your heart's desires for the good.

With regard to the question of seeing the true way of life, etc., and your asking me if there is anything wrong for a man or a woman to find his or her own way - this is a surprising question, since the true way of life for a Jew has been set and shown and explained in the Torah, Toras Chaim, by which our people has lived ever since it was given us at Sinai. Seeing that you live in a city where there are many Rabbis and spiritual leaders who can explain to you what this Jewish way of life is, it would certainly be wrong to go searching in darkness.

Of course, there is a special satisfaction in finding things out for oneself, but this is a case similar to a situation where a person would say that he will stop eating and drinking until he finds out for himself how food and water sustains one's health; or the case of a person who, ignoring warnings that certain foods are harmful or poisonous, will nevertheless decide to indulge himself freely, until he finds out for himself. It would certainly be very wrong and illogical not to rely on authorities and experts in those areas, to which they had dedicated most of their life, study and research, claiming the right of man or woman, to find his or her own way. What is true of physical health is also true of spiritual health and with even more far-reaching consequences.

The above goes for all Jewish young men and women who go out searching for the truth in various cults, yoga and mystical philosophy where they are sure to find out sooner or later that they have been

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<sup>102</sup> *The Letter and the Spirit*, Vol 5, pp. 233ff.

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wasting their precious time and life in searching for the truth which has been right before their eyes all along in the Torah, Toras Emes. They are wrong also in thinking that since it is their own life, they can do what they like with it, for life has been given by the giver of Life to be lived in accordance with the way He set forth in His Torah and not to experiment with it recklessly, etc.

Much more could be said on the subject, but the above lines should suffice.

In summary, regardless of how you conducted yourself in the past, or what your approach has been, you ought to lose no time in ordering your life in strict accord with the Shulchan Aruch, and later on having the benefit of such an everyday life of mitzvos, the performance of which in itself deepens one's perception and insights, and having fortified your starving soul, if you will desire to learn more about the deeper meaning and aspects of the mitzvos, you could do so under the guidance of one who personifies this kind of life and is an authority on the subject. To argue about one's "right" in this situation, would be like a fish arguing that no one has a right to compel it to stay in the water if it wants to jump out of it on dry land and find out for itself what it would be like to live outside its natural element, and then it would decide what to do.<sup>103</sup>

With blessing,

6

### Questions on Meditation

By the Grace of G-d<sup>104</sup>  
4th of Elul, 5731  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mr. . . .

Bronx, N.Y. 10451

Greeting and Blessing:

Your letter reached me with considerable delay. In it you write about your practice of meditation, etc., and you ask elucidation on a number of religious questions.

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<sup>103</sup> See *Berachos* 61b.

<sup>104</sup> *The Letter and the Spirit*, Vol. 2, pp. 161ff.

It is, of course, difficult to explain such matters adequately in a letter. However, I might mention a general principle which, as many aspects of the Torah, are expressed in a few concise words. I am referring to the expression "Torah-Or." This means that one of the primary functions of the Torah is to illuminate everything in its true light. For such is the function of light in general, since in the absence of it there is darkness and in darkness a person can only grope and feel, and rely on the sense of touch, which is of course very unreliable. It is possible, for example, to mistake a very valuable gem for an ordinary piece of glass, or vice versa.

Similarly in the daily life, when a person seeks true meaning in life involving both the emotions and intellect it is possible for a Jew to find a meaningful life only in the Torah, and in its directives and guidance.

In light of the above, when you write about meditation, the important thing is what the meditation is on, and what the meditation leads to. Here again the Torah has its clear say on meditation, when it is to be practiced and what its content should be. The Torah tells us that meditation should be before prayer as a preparation to attune one's mind and heart to G-d, and that the meditation should be on the exaltedness and majesty of G-d and on the smallness and insignificance of man. In other words, to help a person realize that the material and physical aspects in life are not an end in themselves, but must be made subservient to the spiritual, holy and G-dly. And having thus elevated himself through meditation itself and through the prayer itself, the Jew can then go on to implement these truths in his actual daily life and conduct. As to the question how much time should be devoted to meditation and introspection, this, of course depends on the individual, his character and frame of mind in each particular day, etc. All this is clearly spelled out in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim, beg. 98 See it there.)

Needless to say, as in everything else, G-d's help is needed also in this, and one of the good practices in this connection is to set aside a small coin for tzedoko every weekday morning before prayer.

It is superfluous to emphasize that what you write about the nature of meditation does not at all correspond to what has been said above.

Another important point that I wish to make, is also at variance with what you write. I refer to the fact that according to our Torah, Torah Or,



the important thing is the deed. As a matter of fact, the deed, namely the actual fulfillment of the Torah and mitzvot in the daily life, is the primary objective, and it is through actual practice of the Torah and mitzvot that a Jew obtains a deeper insight into their meaning and significance.

The way to such meditation as mentioned above is through the study of those sections in Torah (Mussar and Chasidus), where the subject matter is discussed.

With regard to the question of **diet**, here too we have clear directives in the Torah as to what a Jew is permitted and not permitted to include in his diet. It is self evident that the nourishment which a person consumes is directly related also not only to his physical but also to his mental faculties. But we also have a clear directive in the Torah that a Jew is permitted to eat meat, and need not restrict his diet to vegetarian food.<sup>1</sup> The thing is that the meat has to be kosher in every respect. As a matter of fact, on Shabbos and Yom Tov, the eating of meat has a special significance.

A further point, which has been mentioned above in passing, should be emphasized. It is that the daily conduct in accordance with Torah, the actual fulfillment of the mitzvot in the daily life and the religious experience itself, have the effect of refining the general character of the individual, both his emotional as well as his thoughts, and make him more receptive to understand his life and his purpose in life, etc.. This too may be found in the ethical and Chasidic teachings, which are part of the Torah.

Finally, inasmuch as you are a college student, I will offer an analogy from the world of science. A person who wishes to make a study of any particular subject in the world of science, has before him two options: a) He may wish to start from scratch independently, or b) He may familiarize himself with what has already been discovered and attained by others who preceded him, and, instead of trying to verify all that for himself, utilizes his time and efforts to make further advancement. The first method has two obvious disadvantages 1) It is first of all a waste of time, inasmuch as others have already done all the exploration and investigation and have finally reached their conclusions. 2) No less important is also the consideration that it is very possible that his independent studies may altogether prove futile, or worse still, may

lead him to make false deductions. On the other hand, if he accepts the body of knowledge and experience of previous generations, and conclusions arrived at by specialists and authorities, he is certain to be on the right track.

The above is true also in regard to meditation and the whole approach to finding one's way in life. There is living proof that does not even require any faith, to the effect that the survival of the Jewish people since its inception more than 3,000 years ago, is due only to Jewish adherence to the Jewish way of life, in accordance with the Torah and mitzvot. Be it remembered that throughout this long period of history, the Jewish people have been put to various tests, and through various "experiments" such as all sorts of persecutions, wars and other crises, yet the Jewish people has outlived the mighty nations and empires of the world who had attempted to annihilate the small Jewish nation. The only single factor that helped the Jewish people survive and overcome its adversaries and to preserve its identity and uniqueness, has not been a language, or territory but the adherence to the Torah and mitzvot in its totality, with the observance of Shabbos, kashrus, the putting on of tefillin and the practice of other mitzvot, as commanded in the Written Torah and explained in detail in the Oral Torah.

I trust it is unnecessary to elaborate further on the above to you. May G-d grant that you should accept the directives of the Torah as a guide in life and way of life in the same spirit as when it was given at Sinai, when the Jewish people accepted the Torah on the principle of naaseh (we will do), and then v'nishma (we will understand). One must not expect to understand everything right away, since there is a body of knowledge which has accumulated over forty generations, and it still cannot be fully fathomed. But, as mentioned above, the proper approach is to begin with the practice of the mitzvot, since that in itself refines the mind and heart, and provides the insights into the deeper meaning. May you also be a living example in your environment as to how a Jew should live his daily life, in accordance with the Torah, called Toras Chaim and mitzvot by which Jews live. In the final analysis it is primarily a matter of one's own will and determination.

Wishing you hatzlocho and a Kasivo vaChasimo Tovo,

With blessing,



## לזכות

החתן הרה"ת שניאור זלמן הלוי שי'  
והכלה המהוללה מרת דבורה לאה תחי'  
פייפ



יה"ר שיבנו בית בישראל  
בנין עדי עד על יסודי התורה והמצוה  
כפי שהם מוארים במאור שבתורה  
זוהי תורת החסידות  
לנחת רוח כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו



ולזכות הוריהם וזקיניהם  
הרה"ח דוד שלום הלוי וזוגתו סוליקא שולמית שי' פייפ  
הרה"ח אברהם הלוי וזוגתו זישא שי' בערנשטיין  
הרה"ח הרב מנחם מאניס הכהן וזוגתו חנה פרידמאן