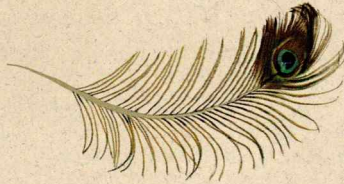


THE *Letter*
AND THE
Spirit

A COLLECTION OF
LETTERS ON THE TOPIC OF
MARRIAGE AND FAMILY
BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE,
RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL
SCHNEERSON



Presented to the celebrants at the wedding of

Yehuda and Chana Geisinsky

16 Cheshvan, 5774 / October 20, 2013

Brooklyn, New York

Dear Wedding Guests,

As we celebrate tonight with our *mechutonim*, R' Elchanan and Rivka Geisinky, the marriage of Chana and Yehuda, we are pleased to present to you this collection of letters written by the Rebbe on the topic of marriage and family.

In preparing a wedding, much effort goes into the beauty and physical aspects of just one evening, but the spiritual and deeper meaning of marriage lasts forever. With this in mind, we prepared this booklet as a token to you, the celebrants, to share in the everlasting and spiritual features which are the true foundation of a marriage, of family and of Klal Yisroel.

It is our fervent wish that the newlywed couple should emulate the lofty ideals found in this collection and continues to be a source of great *nachas* and pride to us all.

The teachings and writings that the Rebbe are a true treasure in these times and in all times, giving us much insight and inspiration. May we merit seeing the ultimate and final *geulah*, with the coming of *Moshiach*, speedily in our days.

Mazel Tov, Mazel Tov!

Rabbi Nosson and Shternie Blumes

Crown Heights, Brooklyn

16 Cheshvan, 5774 / October 20, 2013

SPECIAL THANKS

This booklet was made available for us from the archives of Rabbi Dr. Nissan Mindel , who was the Rebbe's and the Previous Rebbe's personal secretary for over fifty years. These precious archives were entrusted by Rabbi Mindel to his son-in-law Rabbi Sholom Ber Schapiro, whom he appointed to preserve, promote and spread *Chassidus* with the rich material.

This is being done through the Nissan Mindel Publications (www.nissanmindelpublications.com)

Rabbi and Mrs. Schapiro, close and dear friends of Rabbi Blumes for 30 years, have graciously shared with us this collection of letters in honor of tonight's *simcha*, for which we all are grateful.

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1.

Mr. _____,
Fort Carson, Colorado 80913

Greeting and Blessing:

In response to the information about your forthcoming marriage on Lag B'Omer, the 18th day of Iyar--

I am confident that both of you are firmly resolved to establish your home and family life on the foundations of the Torah and *mitzvot*, which insures that it will be a *binyan adei-ad*, an everlasting edifice, blessed by the Source of All Blessings, the Giver of the Torah and *mitzvot*.

We have the assurance of the Torah that when there is a real determination and commitment to live the everyday life in accordance with the Torah, the task is easier to carry out than imagined.

I extend to you prayerful wishes for the fulfillment of the traditional blessing:

Mazal tov, mazal tov, l'binyan adei-ad al y'sodei haTorah v'hamitzvot.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

2.

Miss _____
London, NW 11
England

Blessing and Greeting,

I duly received your letter, in which you write about your forthcoming wedding in a happy and auspicious hour. I send you my prayerful wishes for *mazal tov*, *mazal tov*.

Knowing your parents and your background, I trust that the following observations require no special elaboration.

I have in mind, first of all, that in the text of the blessings which are recited under the *chuppah*, a Jewish marriage is described as a *binyan adei ad* ("Everlasting Edifice"). Needless to say, this is not just a poetic phrase, but is an analogy containing many points of interest. Above all, when one is about to build a structure, the first thing that is necessary to ensure is that the foundation is solid. Whereas in regard to the structure which will rise on the foundation, there can be differences of opinion among persons about how much consideration to give to the outward appearance, how to reckon with the views of neighbors and friends, and whether to forgo certain other things for the sake of external appearances. There can be no difference of opinion that the primary and overriding consideration, insofar as the foundation is concerned, is that it should be solid and firm and durable, able to withstand

changes of climate, and firmly support the entire structure with all the people in it.

For this reason, the material which is chosen for the foundation must have been tested and proven to fulfill these vital requirements; tested and proven under various conditions, both favorable and unfavorable, even in the extreme.

All the above is true in regard to the "*binyan adei ad.*" Here, too, the Jewish home must be established on the very solid foundation of the Torah and *mitzvot*, which have been put to the test throughout the ages, both insofar as the Jewish individual is concerned, and the Jewish people as a whole, and under all sorts of situations. There can be no doubt that the Torah has lived up to its name--*Torat Chaim*--the "Torah of Life," meaning also a good and happy life in this world, and that the *mitzvot*, of which it is written, "The Jew shall live by them,"¹ have similarly been the source of life and happiness--not only in the world to come, but in this world.

May G-d grant that it should indeed be an "Everlasting Edifice" and the channel through which to receive G-d's blessings in all your needs, both materially and spiritually.

With the blessings of *mazal tov*, *mazal tov*,

[Sign.]

¹ Lev.18:5

3.

Miss _____
New York, NY 10027

Blessing and Greeting:

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

To begin with the conclusion of your letter, where you write about the idea of undertaking a course of fasting-- there is a well-known instruction by the Alter Rebbe¹, founder of Chabad, that in recent generations it has not been advisable to undertake extra fasts in addition to those we already have in accordance with the *Shulchan Aruch*. For in addition to the fact that fasting weakens physical health, it also weakens the vigor and vitality with which a Jew is expected to serve G-d in one's own personal life, as well as doing good and promoting *Yiddishkeit* in one's surroundings, all of which should be done with joy and in a happy frame of mind.

In light of the above, if you have not already made a vow about fasting, you should not do so; if you have made a vow, you should approach a *Rav* to release you from it. You may, however, if you wish, give to *tzedakah* the value of the meals which you would normally eat, had you fasted on that day.

With regard to the matter of a *shidduch*, I am sure you will not take amiss the following observation, which is no

doubt also known to you, namely that almost all *shidduchim* are nowadays carried out with the help of *shadchanim* and/or friends who act as *shadchanim*, because people are usually too busy and lack the opportunity to find a suitable *shidduch* themselves. Needless to say, the function of a *shadchan* is merely to make a suitable introduction, and then each of the parties can take it up from there freely and without pressure, etc. Therefore, if this procedure has not been followed in your case, it would be advisable for your parents to find an energetic *shadchan*, and may G-d grant that this effort, in the natural way, serves as a channel for G-d's blessing. Also, your daily life and conduct in accordance with G-d's will can hasten His blessing, as it is written, "And G-d will bless you in all that you do."

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ *Tanya, Iggeret HaTeshuva* Chapter 3

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4.

Mr. _____
New York, NY 10017

Greeting and Blessing:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter with reference to the proposed *shidduch*. On the basis of your description of the relationship and the character of the young lady, I believe that the way to clarify your position is also the simplest way, namely, to have a heart-to-heart talk about the standards of *Yiddishkeit* which you expect to be the basis of your family life and everyday life; including, particularly, the strict observance of the laws and regulations of *Taharat Hamishpachah*.

In view of the fundamental importance of clarifying this situation, and with the open-mindedness that is characteristic of a college environment, with which the young lady is familiar, it should not be a problem to discuss this important subject frankly and honestly.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

5.

Miss _____
New York, NY 10022

Blessing and Greeting:

I duly received your letter, and, as requested, I am acknowledging it ahead of its turn.

Several prefatory remarks are in order, though they are self-evident. But because of their importance, I will outline them briefly, at any rate.

It is clear that the matter of a *shidduch* and *marriage* is a lifetime decision. One must therefore consider not only the first period, when it is still new, etc., but take a long view of the many, many years that will follow. Here again, one must bear in mind not only the special and festive days, but the daily life as it becomes routine, day in, day out. For the relationship between two persons must be consistently good and stable, harmonious and sincere, and it also directly affects the general atmosphere in the home.

Secondly, it is also clear that in order to attain such a *relationship*, the fullest cooperation on the part of both partners is required, and each should be willing to give it freely; that is to say, each should give it because there is a desire to give it, rather than being compelled to do so.

Insofar as the Jewish religion is concerned, it should be remembered that our religion and way of life radically differs

from other religions. In the latter, religious experience is generally confined to certain events in one's life, or certain days and happenings. But the Jewish religion embraces the total life of the Jew, and requires that every aspect of the daily life be permeated with Torah and *mitzvot*, and, as the Wisest of All Men expressed it, "Know Him in all your ways."¹

After the above all-too-brief introduction, which I hope will nevertheless suffice, it should be evident that to enter into a *shidduch* and commit oneself to a lifetime partnership in which one partner has to transform the other in the realm of Jewish religious observance and experience, is surely unwise and it is very doubtful if it can succeed.

Moreover, even when the other party is prepared to make concessions, he will surely have the feeling that he is making a sacrifice. Consequently, however readily he may accept the sacrifice at the beginning, human nature is such that having to do this frequently, and having to do things to which he has not been accustomed, must create a feeling of resentment, and perhaps even stronger feelings as resentment accumulates and grows.

If such sacrifice further entails a severing of one's connections and relationship with persons who have been very close, especially parents, brothers and sisters, it is very likely to make one wonder if the whole thing was worthwhile. At the same time, it is bound to create guilt feelings in the other party, who will not be able to help wondering if she had a right to involve the other party in such a predicament.

It should also be borne in mind that when a person has to limit himself in various aspects of his way of life only out of consideration for another person, it is natural to expect that resentment will build up and accumulate to the extent that he will want to reassert his independence, and do so demonstratively. It might even call forth a sense of challenge not only in asserting one's independence, but also in an attempt to transform the other partner. The resulting clash, or at any rate, conflicts and resentments, are self-evident. At best, the only solution under the circumstances might be an agreement that each of the partners should go it alone and lead the personal life as he or she sees fit, in order to preserve a semblance of a mutual home life.

I must state at once, that I do not know of a single instance where such a *shidduch* succeeded. Even assuming that someone knows of such a case, it is surely not very wise to take such a chance. Even when one is prepared to take a chance, is it wise and ethical to involve another person in this predicament? Obviously, if one of the two life partners is not happy, the other one cannot be happy either.

From all that has been said above, you can clearly surmise what my opinion is in answer to your question.

I believe that you are influenced to some extent, or to a considerable extent, by seeing a personal challenge in the situation. If you are not conscious of it, it may be subconscious. But even if this is not the case, I do not think that this can work. Hence, if your feelings towards one another are truly proper and sincere, this is all the more reason not to wish to drag the other party into an unwholesome situation.

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

To add another point--which may not be very pertinent and could not easily be substantiated by a logical proof, and this is why I mention it last--one must ponder very seriously whether it is right and worthwhile to begin a new life when it involves a breach in the family, namely in the relationship between a child and parents, etc.

Insofar as I am concerned, I have no objections if you want to show this letter to the young man. Especially, since from your description of him and his character and integrity, he will most likely accept the thoughts expressed in this letter in the spirit that they have been given, and may also help him to make a more objective judgment.

May G-d, whose benevolent providence extends to each and every one, lead you in the way that is good for you, truly good and lastingly good.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ *Prov. 3:7*

6.

Professor _____
Jerusalem, Israel

Greeting and Blessing,

I was pleased to receive your letter, and many thanks for the good news of your daughter's engagement. To begin with a blessing, may G-d grant that it should truly be a *binyan adei ad*.

In keeping with the saying of our Sages that when *HaShem* shows kindness, He continues to show further kindnesses, may G-d grant that you are very soon able to report similar good news about her sister.

There is a custom in some circles which is also our custom, that in a case where a younger daughter becomes engaged to be married before an older sister, it is good that she should set aside some of her money towards the wedding expenses of her older sister, and that the parents should do likewise, for obvious reasons.

Hoping to hear further good news from you,

With esteem and blessing,
[Sign.]

7.

Miss _____
New York, NY 10024

Blessing and Greeting:

I just received your letter, in which you write about your acquaintance with a young man, and that you attempted to convince him of a basic matter of *Yiddishkeit*, etc.

It is not clear from your letter whether it is intended to be merely informative, or you also would like to know my opinion and/or advice. At any rate, even if this is in doubt I consider it my duty to express my opinion in this matter, considering the seriousness of it.

Knowing of your background, it is surely unnecessary to emphasize to you at length that in contemplating a *shidduch*, the first prerequisite is that the future partner in life is fully committed to the way of the Torah and *mitzvot* in the everyday life, with emphasis on the actual fulfillment of the *mitzvot*.

Of course, the Torah, as infinite divine wisdom, provides a wide field for intellectual study and profound concepts, and it is possible to find in it sources and references to the various *mitzvot*. Much can also be found in our sacred literature in the way of explanation of their deeper significance. However, the proper--as well as logical--Jewish approach is that one must not wait to perform a *mitzvah* until one fully understands its significance, and

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certainly one must never make such understanding a condition of its performance, especially considering the limitations of the human mind. For every day that passes without the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* is an irretrievable loss.

It is also understandable that when a person promises to commit himself fully to Torah and *mitzvot* in his daily life at some future date, this promise could be valid only if he knows from experience what such a promise entails. Since such a commitment would entail a radical change in his way of life, after years of a fixed pattern, he cannot--however well-meaning--have a real idea as to whether or not he would be able to carry it out. Only after he actually puts himself to the test for a substantial length of time would he be qualified to decide whether or not he can accept upon himself such a commitment for the rest of his life.

Clearly, when it comes to marriage, it should not be tied in with any expectation to educate, or re-educate, the would-be partner--especially where such education would be required at almost every step. Human nature is such that when a person is pressured to make concessions for the sake of another person--every day and many times a day--without as yet seeing any reason for doing it except to please the other partner, it is not a healthy situation, and it is bound to generate resentment and disharmony, etc.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

8.

Miss _____
Toledo, OH 43606

Blessing and Greeting:

I am in receipt of your letter.

I trust it is unnecessary to explain to you at length that for a Jew, every Jew, without distinction or exception--the only true and meaningful life is when it is based on the Torah, called *Torat Chaim* and *Torat Emet* because it is the Jew's true guide and teacher in life. The division of Jews into "orthodox, conservative and reform," etc., according to the degree of their commitment to the Torah is purely artificial, for all Jews have one and the same Torah, to which all Jews, without exception, have committed themselves since it was given at Sinai. And, when Moshe made the covenant with G-d, he included all Jews, regardless of their personal station in life--from "the heads of the tribes to the hewer of stone and drawer of water" (Deut. 29:9-11).

As mentioned above, the Torah is *Torat Emet*, a Torah of *truth*, and where *truth* is concerned, anything that is not *the whole truth and nothing but the truth* is not truth. Any individual, or congregation, that declares it will accept only part of the Torah and reject any part of it, simply violates the truth, and no artificial label to "justify" it can change the reality, for it would only be a delusion and deception of the self and others.

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In light of the above, the answer to your question about the marriage proposal is clear: If the man concerned underwent a proper conversion in full compliance with the *halachah* (Torah law)--for otherwise it is no real conversion at all; and if you are both resolved to establish your home and family life on the foundations of the Torah and *mitzvot* in the daily life; and--which is also important--the differences in age and background, as well as the fact that he has a teenage son, present no problem; and you can also get the advice of friends for an objective judgment (which is difficult for a person directly involved)--then it would be advisable to pursue the matter.

Needless to say, G-d's blessing is always needed, especially when one faces a serious decision in such an important matter requiring divine guidance. And the way to receive G-d's blessing is, obviously, through the daily life and conduct in accordance with His will.

With prayerful wishes and with blessing,
[Sign.]

9.

Mrs. _____,
Worcester, Mass. 01602

Blessing and Greeting:

I am in receipt of your letter and, although the time is not very convenient for lengthy correspondence, I trust that the following lines will adequately answer your letter.

You write about your present frame of mind and lack of fulfillment in having to devote all your time to domestic responsibilities, taking care of the children, etc.

It is a matter of common sense, as well as of considerable emphasis in our Torah, that a woman finds her fulfillment precisely as the *akeret habayit*, and this is the area where she can truly accomplish great and wonderful things, if she only desires it. It is written that "G-d created man straight, but he seeks many calculations."¹ Thus, in the present abnormal times, it has become a prevalent, though nonetheless erroneous, view that the wife must seek employment, and by all means outside the home. To be sure, if there was some employment that could be done at home to supplement the *parnassah*, that would be all right, as is mentioned in the well-known chapter of *Eishet Chayil*. However, some women insist upon outside employment, so that the matter has become quite customary and "second nature," to such an extent that it has resulted in a complete reversal of values, making the essential secondary, and the secondary essential, as if a woman can be regarded as a real person only if she goes against her nature and against the natural order in the world.

THE FAMILY

The above would be true even if the woman has only one or two children to take care of. How much more so when there are, thank G-d, more than the minimum number of children? This is especially true when they are at an age when they are entirely dependent upon the attention and loving care of the mother. And when one lives in a place where the ability to keep a Jewish home is in itself a challenge, not as it used to be in earlier days and under different circumstances, and when one has, in addition, the great responsibility and privilege to strengthen *Yiddishkeit* with the light and warmth of *Chasidut*. All this certainly requires the mobilization of all the woman's capacities, ingenuity, concentration and peace of mind, and there is no greater satisfaction than being able to accomplish all of the above. It would seem rather doubtful that, after all this, there would be an excess of energy and interest to divert to outside employment and the like.

Nevertheless, if you think it will have a beneficial effect upon your general state of mind, and if you feel that taking part-time employment, especially in the area of *chinuch* (which is of course related to the primary duties and responsibilities of the Jewish woman at home), would not interfere with your responsibilities as *akeret habayit*, it would be all right; provided that you keep in mind that such employment is only secondary and supplemental to the essential happiness of a Jewish woman as mentioned above. There is much more to be said on this subject, but I trust that the above lines will suffice.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ Eccl. 7:29

10.

Mr. _____
N. Hollywood, CA

Greeting and Blessing:

Your letter reached me with considerable delay. In it, you ask my opinion or advice as to the choice of a place where an orthodox Jew, a family man, should settle with his family.

This advice has already been given by our great teacher, the Rambam. A Jew must do everything possible to live in a community and in a neighborhood of *shomrei Torah* and *mitzvot*. The importance of this advice is emphasized by him when he continues, saying that if there is no possibility of avoiding an unsuitable place, it is better to live in a cave, or in the desert, rather than in unsuitable company (Hil. Deot, beg. of Ch 6). Note also that the Rambam speaks there of an adult Jew, and one who is not necessarily bound to maintain a close contact with a Jewish environment, etc. How much more so in our society, where willy-nilly it is necessary to maintain a close contact with a Jewish environment, especially where children are involved, in view of their vulnerability to unsuitable influences. It should also be remembered that the education and upbringing of children does not begin at the age of *Bar Mitzvah* or *Bat Mitzvah*, but at a very early age, and that the impressions and influences received at that age are lasting ones.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

11.

Mr. _____
Naperville, IL 60566

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter in which you write about your forthcoming marriage, and certain problems connected with it, in view of the fact that your fiancee is a convert. You further ask for a *brachah* and permission to make it public, but if I should instruct you not to publicize it (!) you will respect my wishes.

I am, of course, very much surprised at your whole approach--that you think I would give a *brachah* with the stipulation not to make it public. Obviously, this kind of conduct would have no place in *halachah*, nor in the elementary rules of honesty. Clearly, if a *brachah* is in order, why give it surreptitiously?

There is no need to elaborate on the theoretical aspect of this matter. You are surely more interested in the practical side.

Let me assure you that upon receiving word that Rabbi _____, after being fully informed of all the factors in the case, has agreed to be the *mesader kiddushin*, I will be quite satisfied that everything is in accordance with the *halachah*, and will be glad to send you a *brachah* without any stipulations; and you will be free to make it public or not, as you wish.

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

While on the subject of your letter, I must take exception to the concluding paragraph, in which you assert that according to the *halachah* Jewish women cannot make "public contributions" to the community and that a wedding is the only opportunity for a woman to stand before the congregation, etc.

This is an entirely erroneous view. Jewish women have historically had an important role in Jewish life and have made substantial public contributions to our people. Suffice it to mention that at the time of *Mattan Torah*, *Moshe Rabbeinu* was instructed by *HaShem* to speak to the women first and afterward to the men.¹ (See Rashi's Commentary). Similarly, for the construction of the *Mishkan*, women were the first and most eager contributors.² To cite something more directly relevant to our times, our sacred sources³ tell us that just as worthy women (*Nashim Tzidkaniot*) had a primary role in the first *Geulah* of our people (from Egypt), so the final *Geulah* from the present *Galut* will be hastened through the merits of Jewish women.

In view of the urgency of your letter, it is answered ahead of its turn and via Special Delivery.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ *Exod.* 19:3

² *Ibid.*, 35:22.26

³ *Mid.Zuta Ruth* 4:8

12.

Mrs. _____
Winnipeg 9, Manitoba
Canada

Blessing and Greeting:

I am in receipt of your latest letter. It surprises me somewhat that you ask my opinion on a question which I have already given to you long ago. However, inasmuch as you press the subject, I will again give you my unequivocal opinion. It is this:

The primary function of the Jewish woman is to be the *akeret habayit* (foundation of the Jewish home), namely to establish and conduct her home in accordance with the Torah, *Torat Chaim*, and the *mitzvot* whereby Jews live. And to the extent that it does not conflict with the Jewish sense of *tzniut* (modesty), the Jewish woman is also expected to participate in social and charitable activities in support of worthy institutions and the like. It is altogether not within her sphere, nor should it be her aspiration, to be (G-d forbid) a rabbi. This stand has been firmly established by various authoritative Jewish sources. As a matter of fact, the more familiar a Jewish woman is with the Torah outlook, and the more versed she is in her knowledge of the Torah in this area, the better she should realize that it is not her province to be a rabbi. The very aspiration to be one is in itself proof of the lack of adequate knowledge and feeling of the true Jewish outlook on life.

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

As mentioned above, I have already indicated to you my views on this subject, though perhaps in different words. I repeated it here only on your insistence. I want to add again that this stand is no reflection (G-d forbid) upon a woman's worthiness or intelligence, etc. It has to do only with the particular function which as been divinely allocated to particular things in the world, and the function of a woman, as noted above, is to be the *akeret habayit* and to contribute her share in the areas of philanthropy and social service, which are not less important than the functions of a rabbi.

I trust that the above will once and for all resolve your question, so that there will be no point in any further discussion of this matter.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

13.

Mr. _____
New York, NY 10027

Blessing and Greeting:

First, many thanks for your good wishes in connection with my birthday. I can best reciprocate in the words of our sages, "one who blesses others is himself, or herself, blessed by G-d, the Source of all blessings."¹ Accordingly, may G-d bestow His generous blessings on you in all your needs.

Now, with regard to your question about the woman's role from the viewpoint of our religion, or, as you refer to it, "orthodox" Judaism.

I must first point out that the division of Judaism into "orthodox, conservative, reform," etc., is a purely artificial one, for all Jews have one and the same Torah, given by the One and Same G-d, though there are more observant Jews and less observant Jews. To tag on a "label" does not, of course, change the reality of Jewish essence.

As for the attitude of Judaism to womanhood, it has also been frequently pointed out that those who think that the Torah places the woman in an inferior role to that of the man labor under a misconception, for it has no basis in truth. Man and woman are, by way of example, like the head and the heart in the physical body: both are equally vital, though each has entirely different functions, and only

the normal functioning of both together ensure a healthy body. The same is true of the role of the man and woman in Jewish life, and, indeed, in any healthy human society.

It follows that the heart need not feel inferior to the brain, although in certain aspects it depends on the brain, just as the brain need not feel inferior to the heart because in certain respects it depends on the latter. Similarly, in Jewish life, there are duties and functions which G-d has allotted to the woman and duties and functions allotted to the man.

Where a person, for some reason, is unable to perform a certain *mitzvah* or some of his or her functions, there is a ruling in the Torah that states, "the Merciful One excuses a person who is incapable of performing his, or her duty."² Indeed, G-d (Who knows what is in the heart of everyone), knowing that were the person able to do so, he or she would have performed it, considers the thought in place of the deed.

Incidentally, it is noteworthy that of the various divine names, it is the name *rachamim* (Merciful One) that is used in the above ruling. This pointedly emphasizes that all G-d's precepts derive from His attribute of mercy and lovingkindness, which, like all divine attributes, is infinite. It follows that where a person is precluded from performing a *mitzvah* by circumstances beyond his or her control, that person is completely excused and exonerated.

Needless to say, one need not apologize for asking questions. On the contrary, since Jews are described in the Torah as "wise and understanding people,"³ it is desirable

that questions which come within the realm of human understanding should also be understood and not left to faith alone, wherever this is possible. There is only one prerequisite, which goes back to the time when the Torah and *mitzvot* were given at Mount Sinai; namely, that the Torah must be accepted on the basis of *na'aseh* (we will do) first, and only then *v'nishma* (we will understand)⁴--meaning that the performance of *mitzvot* must not be made conditional upon our understanding of their deeper significance, etc., nor must the vitality and enthusiasm of our performance be diminished.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ *Sotah* 38b

² *Ned.* 27a

³ *Deut.* 4:6

⁴ *Shabb.* 88a

14.

Mrs. _____
Northridge, CA 91324

Blessing and Greeting:

I received your letter; and may G-d grant the fulfillment of your heart's desires for good, that you may have good news to report in all the matters about which you wrote.

The *zechut* of your observance of our sacred traditions--which I was gratified to note in your letter--will surely stand you and yours in good stead in all of the above, including your continued advancement in all matters of Torah and *mitzvot*. For although this is a "must" for its own sake, in compliance with G-d's will, this is also the "channel and vessel" through which to receive additional divine blessings in all needs, materially and spiritually.

The above is a particularly timely message now that we are about to celebrate *Purim*, the highlight of which is the reading of the *megillah* evening and morning. It is noteworthy and significant that although--as the *megillah* tells us--both Mordechai and Esther were instrumental in bringing about the miracle of *Purim* and saving our people, the *megillah* is not named after both of them jointly, nor after Esther and Mordechai in that order, but solely after Esther ("Megillat Esther"). Here is a pointedly emphatic message for every Jewish woman about her unique role in Jewish life. To be sure, no one can compare to the stature of Queen Esther, but it does emphasize the extraordinary

potential of every loyal Jewish daughter to shape the future of her family, with far-reaching consequences for the environment and even for the entire Jewish people.

If this seems farfetched and mystical, the following episode will illustrate what even a comparatively small effort can accomplish.

You may have heard that many of our senior Lubavitch students volunteer their summer vacation to travel to distant places in order to reach out to fellow Jews in need of encouragement to strengthen their identity with and commitment to our people and the Torah way. In the course of this program it so happened that one of the students visited a small, Jewishly-isolated town where he found only a few Jewish families, and, as he later reported, he was disappointed to have accomplished nothing there. But several months later, our own *Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch* which sponsors this program received a letter from one of the families in that town. The writer, a woman, related that one summer day she happened to stand by her front window when she saw a bearded young man, wearing a dark hat, his *tzitzit* showing, approaching her door. She confessed that when she admitted the young man and learned of the purpose of his visit, she was not responsive, for she and her family were not prepared at that moment to change their lifestyle. Yet for a long time after that encounter, the appearance of the young man haunted her. He reminded her of her grandfather and had refreshed her memories of the beautiful Jewish life she had seen in her grandparents' home, though the material circumstances were incomparably more modest than she had come to know in her married life. Finally--the letter went on--she decided to make the change. She made her home kosher, and the family began

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

to observe *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*, and she is raising the children in the Torah way. Since then, her home is filled with such contentment and serenity that she decided to write to the *Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch* and express her profound gratitude.

Now, if all that was the result of a brief encounter with that young man, though unbeknownst to him of its lasting impact, how much more can be achieved by an American Jewish family, whose influence is not limited to a few minutes' conversation, but serves as a shining example of the kind of daily life and conduct that should be the privilege and blessing of every Jewish family?

Needless to say, if, in maintaining the proper Jewish standards, there may be some difficulties to overcome (many of which may even be more imaginary than real), surely such difficulties should be of no significance in comparison to the infinite benefits. Moreover, the effort required is a personal one, while the benefit is also for the many.

With prayerful wishes for a joyous and inspiring Purim
and With blessing,

[Sign.]

15.

Mr. _____
Brookline, MA 02146

Greeting and Blessing:

This is to confirm receipt of your latest correspondence, which is acknowledged ahead of its turn, inasmuch as you requested an urgent reply.

It is rather curious and surprising to see some people taking emergency measures in quite a normal situation, and vice versa.

The above remark is *apropos* of what you write about your daughter. As you surely know, the highest goal of a Jewish woman is to be a good *akeret habayit*, and in such a way that "all the glory of the king's daughter is within the home."¹ In other words, the true *akeret habayit* takes the greatest pride in her home and family. Hence, it is self-evident what kind of an education and training a Jewish daughter should receive, and in what area she should excel.

It also follows from the above that a Jewish girl cannot find true fulfillment in a career or profession, any more than a husband can find true fulfillment by being a good cook, although in exceptional cases, there are men who make a career of being a chef.

In light of the above, it would certainly be no reflection on the husband to say that he is not clever or smart at

preparing tasty dishes; but it would reflect on his achievement to say that he is not a good *Rosh Yeshiva* or not a good engineer, for it is in the natural order of things that the husband should develop his fullest capacities and qualities in his field.

You should, therefore, not belittle the fact that your daughter would be attending a school where emphasis is placed on preparing the girls for a good *shidduch* and to be a good *akeret habayit*, for it is here where a Jewish daughter finds true fulfillment and real pride in her Jewish home, as mentioned above.

As for the academic question of what is to be done in the case of a boy who shows particular interest and enthusiasm in becoming a cook, and what to do with a girl who has special qualities that would make her a good engineer--considering the general principle that all G-d-given capacities have to be utilized fully--a letter is not the medium to discuss such a problem, especially as it is not relevant to your letter.

I hope and pray that you will find the right way to encourage your daughter along the lines mentioned above, to prepare herself to be a true *akeret habayit* and find real fulfillment in it. If it is true, as you write, that she lacks special qualities to become a good engineer or the like, you surely know that there is a body of scientific opinion that declares that when a person excels in one area, he is likely to be mediocre or even less in other areas. As a matter of fact, this is perhaps all to the good because if a person excelled in more than one area, he or she would find himself or herself torn in different directions.

THE FAMILY

With reference to your assessment of your achievements in spreading *Yiddishkeit*, I believe I have mentioned to you before what we have often heard from my father-in-law of saintly memory, that just as a person should not speak *loshon hara* about others, so one should not speak *loshon hara* about himself. As a matter of fact, it is often one of the methods of the *Yetzer Hara* to discourage a person from the full measure of achievement by giving him the idea that he is inadequate and it is no use trying harder.

As a matter of fact, I can now offer you ten jobs to promote *Yiddishkeit* as enumerated in the enclosed general message, in which you can achieve a great deal, without infringing upon your duties connected with your job, engineering, and only utilizing your spare time.

As indicated at the beginning of the letter, this letter is sent to you by special delivery.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹Ps. 45:14

16.

Miss _____
Rochester, NY

Blessing and Greeting:

This is in reply to your letter in which you inquire about the significance of the dollar bill you received in connection with the Candle Lighting Campaign.

Actually there are many aspects involved, but I must limit myself here to one or two. But first a few words leading up to the subject.

As you know, Jews are commanded to remember and do all the *mitzvot* of our Torah. But there are certain *mitzvot* which the Torah specifically emphasizes with the command: "Remember!" This, to mention a familiar example, is one of the Ten Commandments: "Remember the *Shabbat* day to keep it holy."¹ So also the commandment to remember *Yetziat Mitzraim* every day of the year, and various other commandments. The most central of all such remembrances is to remember the day of our receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, which we celebrate on *Shavuot*: "Remember the day when you stood before G-d, your G-d, at Horev (Sinai), lest you forget the things which your eyes saw."²

It is self-evident why the Torah commands us to *remember* those very important events, for a Jew lives in a world which hustles and bustles with all sorts of material things that distract his attention from the truly important and eternal things. We are speaking, of course, even of "kosher" things such as eating and drinking, doing business, etc., which all must be done in accordance with the *Shulchan Aruch*. Yet, inasmuch as a person is inevitably involved with such things for the most part of the day, day after day, in a routine manner, he may become so much absorbed in them as to forget the very important and essential things which the Torah wants us to remember particularly.

It is also a matter of common experience that when people want to make sure they will not forget certain matters, they do all sorts of things to help them remember.

In light of the above, the Torah has given us certain *mitzvot* which, in addition to all other meanings, are notable "reminders." Again, to mention a familiar example, the *mezuzah* (among other things) reminds the Jew upon leaving and returning home that G-d, Who is our very life and strength, is One, etc., as in the portion of *Shema* which the *mezuzah* contains. Similarly, upon arising from sleep in the morning, we recite a prayer in which we declare that our soul, which G-d returns to us every morning, is pure, etc. And so there are many *mitzvot* which constantly help us to remember our real purpose in life--to serve G-d in all our ways. There are *mitzvot* which serve as reminders to *all* Jews, since all Jews are equal in regard to the observance of those

mitzvot. But there are also *mitzvot* which apply to certain groups only, such as *Kohanim*. In each case, there are specific reminders for those concerned.

This brings us to the subject matter of your letter. One of the most important and most beautiful *mitzvot* is the lighting of the candles before *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*, and it was given as a special privilege to Jewish women, mothers and daughters, to do it not only for themselves, but also for the whole family and household. Obviously, everyone in the home enjoys the advantages of the light of the candles, illuminating the home as well as the table at which the members of the family sit down for the *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* meal.

The importance of this *mitzvah* goes deeper than the mere illumination of the home in the plain sense, for it also makes it a bright home *spiritually*, in accordance with the text of the blessing recited before lighting the candles--". . . Who sanctified us with His commandments." Hence, it is highly desirable that such an important *mitzvah* should have a special "reminder," that would further emphasize the deeper significance of this *mitzvah*. There could be various things which could serve as reminders of the *mitzvah*. The most suitable one would be a reminder that is not too cumbersome, yet at the same time expresses the significance of the great *mitzvah* of lighting the candles. Thus, the most suitable way is to connect the *mitzvah* with money, since money is the medium with which one fulfills the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, which is an especially great *mitzvah*, since the giver

could use the money for his own needs, yet gives it selflessly to a needy person, and thereby saves a life, as our Sages have emphasized.

The special relevance of *tzedakah* to the lighting of candles before *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* is in the fact that, as our Sages relate, lighting the candles is an act of rectification of a wrongdoing committed by the first woman and mother of all mankind, namely Chava (Eve), who caused "the candle of G-d, which is the soul of man"³--of Adam--to be extinguished through the sin of eating the forbidden fruit. By lighting the candles, the Jewish mother and daughter rectifies the act of putting out the "candle" It is, therefore, particularly relevant to associate candle lighting with *tzedakah*, for *tzedakah* too is an act of life-saving, as mentioned above.

This, then, is in brief one of the meanings for the dime or dollar bill which accompanied the Candle Lighting Campaign, and which is intended for *tzedakah*; or, if one wants to keep that particular dime or dollar bill as a memento, one may substitute an equal amount for *tzedakah*. All this is intended to call attention to and emphasize the importance of the lighting of the candles, for the person lighting them and for the whole Jewish home.

May G-d grant that you fulfill this great *mitzvah* with joy and inspiration. And inasmuch as the great principle of our Torah is *v'ahavtah l'reachah kamoachah*⁴, you will surely use

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

your good influence with friends and neighbors to ensure that they, too, observe this great *mitzvah* in a similar way.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

P.S. In connection with the above, I want to emphasize a very important point, namely that however important that dime or dollar bill is, it is still *muktzah* and not to be touched on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*, like any other money.

¹ Exod.20:8

² Deut.4:9-10

³ Ibid., 24:9

⁴ Lev.19:18

17.

Mrs. _____
Skokie, IL 60076

Blessing and Greeting;

I am in receipt of your letter in which you ask whether this is the right time for you to become *pregnant* again.

In general, it is surely unnecessary to emphasize to you at length that children are a special blessing from G-d, and, indeed, one of the essential blessings. It is also self-evident that this is not a matter in which a human being can choose the right time and set up his own calendar. Clearly, a Jew must trust in G-d, the Creator and Master of the world, and although a person must do his part in the natural order of things, this matter in particular should be left to G-d, and one should not attempt to interfere in G-d's affairs. In other words, a Jew is expected to live a normal life, in accordance with the will of G-d, as revealed in the Torah and codified in the *Shulchan Aruch*, and leave the matter of pregnancy to G-d, Who will find the right and proper time for it.

To be more explicit, my mentioning the *Shulchan Aruch* is to emphasize the great importance of observing the laws and regulations of *Taharat Hamishpachah* in particular, within the general framework of observing all the *mitzvot*.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

18.

Rabbi _____
Brooklyn, NY 11236

Greeting and Blessing:

Your letter reached me with considerable delay. In it you write about problems arising in connection with Jewish Family Services, specifically how to combine the two aspects--on the one hand, the advice and guidance given should be consistent with *Da'at Torah*, and at the same time should accord with the family problems, which may entail conflicts in such cases as respect for parents, *sholom bayit*, etc. Also, you ask if, from the Torah viewpoint, it would be permitted, or required, to reveal certain confidential information given by a patient to other members of the family.

In general, as you also indicate in your letter, these are very complicated problems, hence it would be difficult to lay down hard-and-fast rules, or "guidelines," as you mention. For each case has to be judged individually and requires the directive of a competent Rav *moreh hara'ah*.

On the other hand, since the Torah is a *Torat Chaim*, meaning that it is the true guide to daily life, it is certain that it provides guidelines in every case, however complicated it may be. But the decision in each case, as to the particular section of *halachah* under which the case should be dealt with, or whether it should be referred to a physician or psychiatrist, etc.--is in itself a decision which

should be made by a competent Rav in accordance with the *Shulchan Aruch*.

In light of the above, it is my opinion (as I already had occasion to state before) that every Jewish Family Services should have a competent Rav either as a permanent member of the staff, or as a regular consultant, whose opinion should be obtained before making a referral.

At first glance, the responsibility of handling such matters may seem frightening, and one may be very reluctant to get involved in the first place. But it is well to remember the answer that a certain Rebbe once gave to someone who came to him about a very responsible task that was thrown into his lap that he wished to avoid. The Rebbe's reply was: "Who, do you think, should handle such a task if not one who recognizes the great responsibility involved?"

I may add, however, a word that should ease one's anxiety, and this, too, is *Da'at Torah*. I refer to the saying of our Sages that G-d does not require anyone to do anything beyond his powers, and the task at hand is not one beyond one's capacity. It is only necessary to be certain that the matter does belong to his department. And, as mentioned, the final decision is up to a competent Rav *moreh hora'ah*.

May G-d grant that your efforts to carry out G-d's will be with *hatzlachah*, so that the Jewish Family Services are not only a service to Jewish families who are Jewish by birth, but help make these families truly *Jewish*, in their actual daily life and conduct.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

19.

Mr. _____
Buffalo, NY 14222

Greeting and Blessing:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter; and may *HaShem* grant the fulfillment of your heart's desires for good in regard to yourself and all your family, including the matter which is of immediate concern.

More specifically, there is surely no need to emphasize to you the importance of preserving the family unity and harmony, especially the praiseworthy act of remarrying one's divorced wife (as long as she had not been involved in a second marriage). Moreover, the act of remarrying is connected with special divine blessings for healthy offspring, and all other blessings connected with reestablishing the mutual life on the basis of the Torah and *mitzvot*, as set forth in the *Shulchan Aruch*. There is also the assurance that when one is determined to do a good thing, one receives special help from On High.

With blessing.
[Sign.]

20.

Mr. _____
Valley Stream, NY 11580

Greeting and Blessing:

Your letter reached me with some delay. In it you write about your problem in regard to the relationship with your wife, after being married to her for 14 years and having been blessed with children. You also indicate that the problem is connected with the observance of the Jewish way of life.

In the latter aspect lies the answer to your questions. It is the Jewish way of life, in accordance with the Torah, that having been married for a number of years, and having been blessed with children who are to be brought up to a life of Torah, *chuppah* and good deeds, it is imperative to do everything possible to preserve the peace and unity of the family to the fullest measure.

At the same time, it is also clear that inasmuch as the Torah is the Jew's very life, there can be no sacrificing of it even in the hope of preserving the family; for a peaceful and harmonious Jewish family life is possible only if it is based on the observance of the Torah and *mitzvot*, as it is also written in reference to the Torah, "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace"¹.

Needless to say, while it is necessary to insist upon the Jewish way of life, this should be explained to your wife in a

pleasant way, taking into account her feelings, and not giving the impression that there is any desire to "boss" her around and to show her who is the master of the house; but explaining that this is really for the benefit of both the parents and the children and, no less important, for the benefit of the whole Jewish people, since the family unit is the very basis of our Jewish people as a whole.

It is a matter of common experience, due to human nature, that when two persons are personally involved in a disagreement, it is hard for them to discuss their differences dispassionately, and one or the other or both may get involved in a heated debate, when things are said which would otherwise not have been said. Therefore, it is customary in such a situation that the matter is brought before an orthodox rabbi, who has experience, as well as being bound to treat such matters in confidence. Thus, the matter can be discussed fully in the presence of the rabbi, and straightened out in accordance with his guidance.

I would like to add one important point, that a Jew who accepts the Jewish way of life in his daily life, even though it was not spontaneous, but came about through the influence or even persuasion of another--sooner or later this Jew will come to realize the truth, namely that it was for his real benefit, and whatever his original reaction might have been, even if he was reluctant or resentful, in the end he will certainly be most grateful for the influence which has set him on the path of truth and real happiness.

You do not mention anything about the Jewish education of your children, but I trust that in light of the above, and in accordance with the traditional blessing, you

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are bringing them up to a life of Torah, *chuppah* and good deeds.

Hoping to hear good news from you in all above,

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ Prov. 3:17

21.

Mrs. _____
Washington, DC 20008

Blessing and Greeting:

Your letter reached me with some delay.

Although it is difficult to reply to it in detail by means of a letter, I will, at any rate, answer briefly:

- 1) Concerning the establishment of a close relationship between two persons, especially a husband-wife relationship, which clearly is one of the most important aspects of human life, especially in the view of our Torah--the Creator, in His infinite kindness, has revealed and given to us certain directives and precepts. The purpose of these directives and precepts is, on the one hand, to ensure the conditions under which the couple will be blessed with many blessings, and on the other hand, to guide and protect them from undesirable acts and consequences.

In light of the above, it makes no sense to postpone the things which have to be carried out, while guarding against things which should not be done, on the assumption that the right way will come gradually. For, obviously, the divine blessings are needed immediately in daily life, as is the prevention of undesirable consequences.

- 2) The above would be valid even in a case where the said factors are presumed but not proven, inasmuch as there is so much at stake, while the effort would involve only a certain inconvenience on the part of those who do not yet appreciate the importance of these matters. Actually, there can be no question about the validity of this approach in the present case, where the Jewish way of life has been tested and proved over the course of thousands of years. Jewish history has shown that those who adhered to the Jewish way of life, in accordance with the will of G-d, have been able to surmount all difficulties, and to survive in the face of great odds, whereas those who chose to deviate from this way of life, even temporarily, have suffered serious consequences which may not have been immediately apparent, but which eventually led to complete severance from the Jewish fold, G-d forbid.
- 3) Where there is a real desire, and a real feeling for one another, and a real quest for a harmonious life, one clearly does not allow any inconvenience to jeopardize these great goals in life. Such an inconvenience would not be considered a sacrifice; on the contrary, the good attained through effort is all the more appreciated, and brings people more closely together. On the other hand, it is too much to expect of a person who believes honestly and sincerely in these things to compromise in matters of such basic principles.

I trust the above will suffice, without entering more deeply into all the aspects of the situation, for they have a clear bearing on the matter about which you write.

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

May G-d grant that you may have the strength to disregard any difficulties and order your daily life in accordance with the directives and imperatives of our Torah. And if there are really any problems or any inconvenience involved--of what significance can they be in relation to the inner peace and inner harmony which the Jew attains when he follows in the way of his ancestors, and identifies himself with his great spiritual heritage?

With blessing,
[Sign.]

22.

Mr. & Mrs. _____
K'far Chabad, Israel

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter, following our personal conversation when you were here. Although it is not my custom to repeat in writing things already discussed orally, I will nevertheless put down in writing several points at any rate, since you urgently requested it.

- 1) With regard to most of the problems about which you write, there is the promise of our Sages of blessed memory, "try hard and you will succeed"¹. In other words, if you are truly and wholeheartedly determined to resolve the problems, you will find the proper way to do it.

- 2) On the question of how to achieve a more easy adjustment in the family life of husband and wife, it should be remembered, first of all, that it happens very often that such an adjustment is required, inasmuch as there are two people involved, who come from two different families, etc. It should also be remembered that there is no human perfection, and that one person must make allowances for the other, just as much as one expects the other to make similar allowances.

- 3) With regard to the question of temper, and especially in the matter of anger, this weakness can be controlled by reflecting on the verse, "I visualize G-d before me always"², which is also the introduction to the first part of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and thus an introduction to the whole code of Jewish behavior in the daily life. By reflecting on the fact that one is *always--*every minute--in the presence of G-d, how can a person display any kind of temper?

- 4) So that intimate mutual life may be wholesome to the utmost, it is necessary to observe strictly the laws and regulations of *Taharat Hamishpachah*. For, although these laws require separation for a certain period of time, this distance has the effect of bringing them closer together in the period that follows, while closeness during the time that requires separateness results in separateness when there should be closeness. Thus, in the majority of cases, true harmony and peace in married life are directly related to the observance of the laws and regulations of *Taharat Hamishpachah*.

- 5) With regard to influence on relatives and friends with a view to bringing them closer to Torah and *mitzvot*, needless to say, it depends on the psychological makeup of the persons to be so influenced, as well as their knowledge, intellectual level, etc., which must be taken into consideration in each case. However, there is one general point that should be applied in all cases, and that is that the approach must be a friendly one, although also a firm one. Do not be discouraged if first efforts do not immediately bring the desired response; we have the assurance that

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words coming from the heart penetrate the heart and are eventually effective, especially when coupled with a living example. If, for some reason, the efforts seem to be unsuccessful, the fault probably lies with the person making the effort, whose approach apparently is not the right one, though well intentioned.

In connection with the happy expectation, may G-d grant a normal and complete pregnancy, and normal delivery of a healthy offspring in a happy and auspicious hour.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ Meg.6b

² Ps. 16:8

23.

Mrs. _____
Montreal, PQ 252
Canada

Blessing and Greeting:

I received your letter with considerable delay.

I trust it is unnecessary to emphasize to you at length that the Jewish way of life and customs, etc., are not only very significant in general, but also in every detail and in the very order of things. In light of this, it becomes obvious how important is the matter of peace and harmony between a husband and wife, since the *mitzvah* of making peace between a husband and wife is mentioned among the *mitzvot* whose fruits a Jew enjoys in this world, while the "capital" remains for the world to come¹. These are stated right at the beginning of the *Siddur*, together with the morning blessings, which are said even before starting the actual morning prayers.

With this approach in mind, it will be easier to see that even if one party is completely in the right (or almost completely in the right), while the other party is completely in the wrong (or almost completely in the wrong), it would still be incumbent upon both parties to do everything in their power to restore peace and harmony. Certainly this imperative duty is even stronger in the case of a husband and wife who hold a prominent position in the community, so that other Jews look up to them for an example and guidance. Clearly, an outsider cannot know, nor can he be

told, what compelling reasons there are for such a situation. The outsider can only observe and draw his own conclusions, since he will not inquire about, nor is it possible to inform him of, all the factors and extenuating circumstances, if there are any. Add to this also the fact that it concerns a couple, both of whom are active in the sphere of Jewish education.

Moreover, and this is also very essential, of course, since G-d has blessed you with children, good children, who require the attention, love and upbringing of both parents, and the children are surely entitled to receive what is due to them from their parents--there can be no shadow of a doubt that each of you should do everything possible not to strain the relationship, but on the contrary, both of you must try to strengthen it and restore it to full accord.

As to the situation itself, namely, who is right and who is wrong, I cannot, of course, go into this, nor is it necessary in light of what has been said above. For the important thing is, as already stated, to strengthen the family ties, for this is the overriding consideration. However, it would be well if you could find a mutual friend before whom both of you could unburden yourselves in a frank exchange of grievances. It is possible that an outsider, but a friend, could see more objectively the best way to straighten things out, and in the soonest possible time, so that once again peace and harmony can reign in the home.

Hoping to hear good news from you,
[Sign.]

¹ Mish. Peah 1:1

24.

Mrs. _____
Baltimore, MD

Blessing and Greeting:

I am in receipt of your letter, in which you write about your background, and also about the change in your way of life, having been raised in an environment which was not one hundred percent orthodox; however, in due course you experienced a change, and became more observant of the Jewish way of life, which has created certain frictions between you and your husband.

I can well understand that your husband, who has not gone with you along this path, or at any rate, has lagged behind you, may sometimes be somewhat dissatisfied that his partner in life has made greater progress, while he has not yet found the strength to follow suit. On the other hand, in such a case it is clear who has to make the concession in order to avoid friction. For the non-religious person it is easier to make a concession, inasmuch as it does not involve any transgression or sin or even any strong conviction or matter of conscience; at most it might involve certain inconveniences. On the other hand, for the religious person, a concession means a breach of strong religious feelings and convictions that go to the very core of the soul.

From the above it follows that the partner--if he sees that there is no attempt by the other party to be domineering, but that the other party is motivated only by

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strong feelings and convictions of having found the truth, and consequently wants to see a near and dear person share in this new-found truth--will eventually change his attitude, especially if you follow the ways of the Torah, which are ways of pleasantness and peace.

May G-d grant that all the difficulties and frictions will soon be no more, and that you and your husband should go hand in hand together along the path of truth, the way of the Torah and *mitzvot*, with joy and gladness of heart, and together bring up your children to a life of Torah, *chuppah* and good deeds, in good health and ample sustenance.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

25.

Mrs. _____
Miami Beach, FL

Blessing and Greeting:

I am in receipt of your letter.

You surely know the great importance of peace and harmony among Jews, as is so often emphasized in our Torah.

The Torah is even more emphatic about *shalom bayit*, the peace and harmony in the relationship between husband and wife. So much so, that despite the sanctity of every word in the Torah, especially the sanctity of G-d's Name inscribed in the Torah, there is one occasion when G-d Himself orders His written Name to be erased by water, and that is--in order to preserve the peaceful relationship between husband and wife.¹

In light of the above you will find my answer to your question. It is that you ought try your utmost not only to preserve a peaceful and harmonious relationship with your husband, but also to strengthen it, and, as in every area of the good and desirable, to such an extent as to serve as an inspiring example to all around.

Needless to say, I am not attempting to make a judgment as to who is right and who is wrong, who is at fault, and to what extent, etc. But even assuming, for the

sake of argument, that one of you is entirely in the right, it is still very worthwhile, for the sake of *shalom bayit*, to do everything possible to preserve it. Moreover, the wisest of all men said, "as water reflects the face, so does one heart reflect another"². It is certain that a consistently conciliatory and friendly attitude on your part is bound to evoke a corresponding attitude on the part of your husband.

As requested, I will remember you and the others mentioned in your letter in prayer, and may G-d grant that you will have good news to report.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

P.S. In accordance with your request, this letter is sent to you on a priority basis, Special Delivery.

¹ *Shabb. 116a*

² *Prov. 27:20*

Mrs. _____
Worcester, MA

Blessing and Greeting:

Following up your previous correspondence, I am writing these lines to express the hope that the relationship between you and your husband has improved considerably, making it a home fit for the Divine Presence; as our Sages say, "Where a husband and wife are meritorious, the *Shechinah* is with them."¹

This is all the more so since both of you have the *zechut* of *hatzlachah* in the *chinuch* of Jewish children, of whom G-d said, "You are children unto G-d, your G-d"². It is therefore easy to imagine the great *zechut* which both you and your husband have, in that G-d has entrusted to you the *chinuch* of His children, and has blessed with *hatzlachah* your efforts to implant *Ahavat HaShem* and *Yirat HaShem* into their hearts. In light of this, each of you should regard it as a special blessing to have found a mate worthy of G-d's blessing for *hatzlachah*. Even if it may appear that there is some deficiency in the perfection of the other party, and even if such deficiency is not wholly imaginary, it should be remembered that true perfection belongs only to G-d. Indeed, the very fact that we have all been commanded to go from strength to greater strength in all matters of goodness and holiness shows that there is no perfection in human beings, for obviously the previous level is imperfect by comparison with the higher level. Moreover, perfection

itself, insofar as humans are concerned, is relative, in that it is to be found in different areas in different people.

Thus, our Sages speak of one category of Jews as Torah learners, and another category as *mitzvah* doers. Clearly, they speak of excellence in each case, for every Jew is expected to be both a Torah learner and a *mitzvah* doer. Hence, the difference between the two categories is a difference of excellence in each area; that is to say, in the first category there is excellence in their Torah scholarship, while in the other category the excellence is in the fulfillment of the *mitzvot*.

It is surely unnecessary to elaborate to you on the above at greater length. I only want to emphasize that the greater the harmony, mutual respect and devotion of a husband and wife--especially where both are *shomrei* Torah and *mitzvot*--the greater is the measure of G-d's blessings for both of them in all their needs. This includes reward in kind--to be blessed with healthy offspring of your own, to bring them up to a life of Torah, *chuppah* and good deeds--in fulfillment of your hearts' desires for good.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ Sotah 17b

² Deut. 14:1

27.

Ms. _____
Sherman Oaks, CA 91403

Blessing and Greeting:

I received your letter in which you write about your communal activities, especially your involvement with a shelter for Jewish battered women and their children, and the difficulties connected with it.

I am confident that your awareness of the importance of the cause, and seeing the help that it brings to these tragically affected women and children, makes it easier to overcome whatever difficulties you may encounter. At the same time, it is well to bear in mind that the work that you are doing demands a special sensitivity, a sensitivity also from the viewpoint of *Yiddishkeit*, which, under the tragic circumstances, often is a factor to be reckoned with.

In light of the above, I trust that you will accept my suggestion that you should consult with at least one competent rabbi, who is familiar with the detailed and intricate factors that are involved in this activity, particularly insofar as *Yiddishkeit* is concerned. In this connection, one must especially bear in mind that the requirements of the *Shulchan Aruch* must be fully adhered to, so that everyone can benefit from the services even if one is not a very strict Torah-observer otherwise. For example, when a *glatt* kosher meal is served, everyone can enjoy it, whereas if it is not *glatt* kosher, it would present a problem

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to those who observe *glatt* kosher. It should also be remembered that when we speaking of *Yiddishkeit*, we speak of something which deeply affects both the spiritual and physical aspects of Jewish life.

The *zechut* of helping many Jews in need of help will surely stand you in good stead, both in your personal affairs and certainly in the very worthy cause in which you are involved.

Wishing you *hatzlachah* in all above,

With blessing,
[Sign.]

28.

Mrs. _____
Everett, WA 98204

Blessing and Greeting:

I duly received your letter. Many thanks for the good news it contained about your satisfactory relationship and home life with your husband. And, inasmuch as there is no limit to the good, may it steadily go from good to better. Of course, steady advancement in matters of *Yiddishkeit*, though a "must" for its own sake, widens the channels through which to receive G-d's blessings in a growing measure in all needs.

If you will let me know the full Hebrew names, together with the mother's Hebrew name in each case, as is customary, I will remember you in prayer at the holy resting place of my father-in-law of saintly memory, whose *Yahrzeit-Hilula* we have just observed on the 10th of *Shevat*.

With regard to the matter of your husband's daughter from a previous marriage, and your feelings of jealousy of your husband's love for his daughter, I would call your attention to the following, though it is also self evident.

In view of your good relationship with your husband, which, as mentioned before, will surely be strengthened

even further, an important factor in this strengthening will be your husband's notice of your good relationship with and sincere affection towards his daughter. Thus, because he naturally loves his daughter, and would also like you to love her, his affection for his daughter--far from detracting from his affection for you--will make him all the more appreciative of your attitude towards his daughter and strengthen your mutual relationship still further.

There is surely no need to remind you of the great principle of our Torah, which makes it the duty and privilege of a Jew to love a fellow Jew, even a stranger; and love him to the degree of "like yourself"¹. How much more so should one love a Jewish child, since all children are particularly sensitive and want to be loved, and they instinctively feel whether such love is genuine. Even more so should one love a child whose parents have been separated, and whose father has married another wife. All this, as mentioned, is really self evident. I am confident that you will not find it difficult to love that child, once you make up your mind that she is in no way in competition with you, but, on the contrary, could further strengthen the mutual relationship all around.

One should also remember the Torah rule that *HaShem* does not expect anything from anyone beyond one's capacity.² Thus, it is clear that all that the Torah expects of a Jew is well within the ability of a Jew to fulfill. *HaShem* has surely also given you all the necessary capacities to

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overcome any feelings of jealousy or resentment, and to convert them into feelings of love and affection, in full accord with *HaShem's* will.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ Lev. 19:18

² Mid. Rabbah Bamidbar 12:3

29.

Mr. _____
Youngstown, OH 44505

Blessing and Greeting;

This is in reply to your letter which has just reached me, concerning your son.

I am somewhat surprised that you write to me of the reasons and advantages of your plan for your son, which is something you should discuss with him.

However, since you have written to me, it is my duty to bring to your attention a point which you have apparently not taken into account. It is that in dealing with the younger generation, especially in the present day and age, one should be very cautious about pressuring a grownup son (or daughter) to make a decision against their own will; particularly the kind of decision which would have to be sustained over a long period--as in the present case, years of study at college. For one thing, it may build up considerable resentment, which would not be good for your son's inner peace or for the relationship, and is also likely to affect his studies, especially medical studies that require concentration and peace of mind.

All the more so in the present case, when, as I understand it, your son is reassessing the option of resuming his medical studies, but has not yet made up his mind. I wonder whether it is advisable that his parents should

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persist in their efforts to make him change his mind in favor of their plan for him, especially as the change involved would not be one of short duration, but would have to be confronted over a long period, as mentioned above.

As requested, I will remember you and your family in prayer.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

30.

Mrs. _____
Long Branch, NJ 07740

Blessing and Greeting:

I duly received your letter in which you write about a situation where the children are more strictly observant than the parents, and the problems that this creates at home.

Since you invite me to comment on this situation, I would like to say the following: It is surely unnecessary to explain at length that parents always desire their children to have a firm and proper outlook on life. This is especially true in our day and age of so much confusion in regard to the real values in life, and where so many young people are at a loss to find their true bearings, etc. Hence, it is obvious how happy parents should feel when their children do have a strong commitment to a meaningful way of life, which, additionally, is in harmony with the tradition of both sides of the family, as you write. It is well known that this way of life also includes a very strong relationship on the part of the children towards their parents, especially since the honoring of one's father and mother is one of the Ten Commandments.¹ All of this should make the parents feel rather fortunate, and should give them a great measure of peace of mind, and certainly should be no cause for the parents to make the situation more complicated and more difficult for the children.

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Moreover, it has been a very welcome trend in the larger cities in recent years to see a greater percentage of children who are more strictly committed to the observance of the Torah and *mitzvot* in the daily life than their parents, and that these parents have *nachas* from the children and take great pride in them.

I trust that the above lines, though all too brief in relation to the subject matter, will suffice, for a person of your background, to provide some food for thought; and to see to it that not only is the peace and harmony at home fully preserved, but consider it an achievement in having brought up such fine children, whose ambition is to go from strength to greater strength in the Jewish way of life, and certainly not make it difficult for them in any way, G-d forbid.

May you and your husband truly have lots of Yiddish *nachas* from each and all of your children in good health and a happy frame of mind.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ Exod.20:12

31.

Professor _____
Cambridge, MA 02138

Greeting and Blessing:

This is in reply to your recent letter.

To begin with the concluding paragraph of your letter, about the advisability of making a change--it is my opinion that (on the basis of your description of the situation) it would be advisable for you to continue in your present position at Cambridge, which would also be beneficial for your parents. I do not see how your moving to Eretz Yisroel would strengthen your influence on your son, especially in view of the fact that the young generation there tends to feel and act more independently of parental influence. At any rate, since you recently spent a year there, you are surely familiar with the situation in Eretz Yisroel in this regard.

As to what you can do to guide your son in the direction of Torah--you are no doubt aware that nowadays it is often easier to influence adolescent children through friends than by the parents themselves. Children who begin to feel that they are old enough are inclined to shun parental advice because they think that their parents still consider them immature, and the like, but they would be more receptive to the same advice coming from "objective" sources. Therefore, it would be well if you could find friends in Boston who will try to influence your son in the right direction. This would be most effective if done in a way that would not make it obvious that they are intervening at your request.

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There might then also be a chance to persuade him to attend a *Yeshiva*--such as Yeshiva University, for example--with a dormitory where he would come under the influence of suitable peers.

To turn to another topic, which I trust you will not take amiss. I am somewhat surprised that you did not mention, in your letter, your contacts with our brethren behind the Iron Curtain; nor of any activity to help many of them who have come out of there. You are undoubtedly aware that a considerable percentage of them require a great deal of encouragement in matters of Torah and *mitzvot* in their everyday life and conduct. Influence in this direction from one who is himself an escapee from there, and knows the problems at first hand, is likely to be vastly effective, especially when accompanied by a living example.

Of course, some persons may feel that they are not very good at such communal activities. But if this, or another reason, may have been excusable in normal times, it cannot be valid in times of emergency, especially when it concerns *Pikuach Nefesh*, which suspends everything else.

Needless to say, it is not my intention to sermonize. But seeing what is happening to many of our brethren who have come from behind the Iron Curtain because no one attempted to reach out to them, I have no choice but to relay their SOS.

May G-d grant that you have good news to relay in all that has been mentioned above.

With esteem and blessing,
[Sign.]

32.

Mr. _____
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Greeting and Blessing:

I was pleasantly surprised to note in your letter excerpts of letters from your son, as well as the spirit of your comments in this connection. Inasmuch as there is no end to the good, I trust that there will be a continuity in this direction and that, moreover, the good influence of your son will create a chain reaction affecting all the members of your family.

I wish to take issue with you, however, in the matter of your youngest daughter who, as you write, is eleven years old, and resisted starting Hebrew school, but you "did not force the issue". You can well imagine my reaction to this. For surely, if your eleven year old daughter would have resisted going to school altogether, you would have found it necessary to "force" the issue--if the term "force" can be applied here. Certainly, insofar as a Jewish child is concerned, her Hebrew education is at least as important to her as a general education. This has been generally recognized throughout the ages, but it should be particularly recognized in our own day and age, for we have seen many of the greatest and saintliest of our people exterminated by a vicious enemy. Consequently, all of us who have been fortunate enough to survive must make up for this tremendous loss. On the other hand, the forces of total

assimilation have grown much stronger in the free and democratic countries.

You may consider my reference to your daughter's attitude, and to your attitude in this connection, no longer relevant, since you write that she has agreed to begin Hebrew school, though you immediately point out (with apparent satisfaction) that the method of instruction is "*Habet u'shema*" (see and hear), a system which apparently does not aim to lead to *va'aseh* (do). Surely there is no need to emphasize to you the fact that when the Torah was given to our people, "*Na'aseh*" was not only a condition of acceptance of the Torah, but a prior condition--"*Na'aseh*" before "*v'Nishma*." Our Sages¹ of blessed memory pointed out that Jewish identity and the very basis of Jewish existence, for the individual as well as for the people as a whole, lies in this great principle of "*Na'aseh*" before "*v'Nishma*." Certainly this is the way to train and educate a Jewish child.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

¹ *Shabb. 88a*

33.

Mr. & Mrs. _____
Silver Spring, MD 20901

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter.

First of all, please accept my prayerful wishes of *mazel tov* on the engagement of your daughter in a happy and auspicious hour, and may you have much *nachas* from her in every respect, materially and spiritually, which go hand in hand, especially insofar as Jews are concerned.

You ask what has to be done to convince your daughter and her fiance about matters relating to financial security, etc. Insofar as I know both of them, and can gather from the letters which I have received both from your daughter and from her fiance, I believe they are both mature enough, and undoubtedly receptive to the question which you raise in your letter. Moreover, as I can see, your daughter and her fiance are aware of the reasoning which you put forth in your letter in regard to a livelihood, though I do not know whether they have come to this awareness through you, or independently. At any rate, they are aware of this matter.

With regard to your writing about the question of "glatt" kosher, noting that there are many observant Jews who are not particular about "glatt," yet your daughter and her fiance wish to restrict themselves to "glatt" only, I do not quite see what the problem really is. It is surely unnecessary to point

out to you that even in regard to material standards, outlooks change. When there is a possibility of improving the living standards, even insofar as external things are concerned, people readily do so, although they were quite content previously with their furniture and apartment, etc. Surely in matters of the spirit, when people have reached a stage where they feel they can improve their standard, why shouldn't they do so? Were this change to entail merely a higher degree of excellence, this would surely be very commendable; how much more so when the question of "glatt" is not considered so lightly by many, and in fact is considered most basic?

Needless to say, what has been said above is not intended as a reflection upon all those who, for various reasons, are not particular about "glatt."

May I add also a further observation? It has always been considered a special heavenly blessing for parents to see their children firmly rooted in life. There can be nothing more firm and lasting than religious convictions and way of life. In the present day and age, and in this country, where the young generation seems to be lacking a firm anchorage, and is in a state of vacillation and instability, it is certainly an extraordinary divine blessing to see one's child firmly rooted in a way of life which is in the best traditions of our people. Indeed, it is truly gratifying to see one so firmly rooted in his outlook, as to be prepared to make sacrifices and accept privations, and on the contrary, taking satisfaction in his religious and moral convictions. This may, at times, create some uneasiness among those who are closely related to him, but do not quite share those convictions. But there is no reason, nor justification, to attempt to weaken those convictions, especially where

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young people are concerned. Rather, they should be encouraged.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

34.

Mrs. _____
Brooklyn, NY

Blessing and Greeting:

I received your letter in which you enclosed a copy of my letter to your son.

I am pleased to read in your letter that you are concerned about his religious education and behavior. This gives me the hope that you are doing everything possible to encourage him in his religious studies and observances, for it is very important for him to receive his parents' encouragement, all the more so in view of the outside influence. It takes a great deal of moral stamina and strength of character to be able to ignore the negative influences of the street and the general environment, and to conduct oneself in a manner which is so different and independent.

This brings me to the point which you mention in your letter, namely that you do not think it right that your son should not shave, being able to use an electric razor. Without entering into the *halachah* aspect of the matter, I would like to point out something you are undoubtedly aware of, and that is your son's age. He is in transition from youth to maturity, which entails a considerable strain. During the sensitive age of adolescence, it is particularly important not to do anything which might aggravate the strain. This is particularly true in a country such as this,

where the boundaries between the Jews and non-Jews--and among Jews themselves, between observant and non-observant--are unfortunately almost nonexistent. Moreover, not only are Jews a minority among non-Jews, but observant Jews are as yet also still a minority among Jews themselves. This is why it requires a great deal of courage and conviction to be a strictly observant Jew, and under the circumstances, it also entails a considerable strain, as already mentioned above, for even mature adults are subject to influence, and it requires much willpower to resist it; how much more so where a teenager is concerned?

In light of the above, it is obviously the sacred duty of every near and dear one, and especially of parents, to do everything that may be conducive to the teenager's peace of mind and make his struggle easier, and certainly not do anything which might weaken his willpower to resist the influences of the street, etc.

A further point. In matters which relate to faith, religion and feeling, every individual is a world by himself. This is not the case in matters of reason, where one can argue and convince and change one's mind. Young people, especially, become attached to an ideal, particularly one that is expressed in actual behavior. It would be extremely difficult to get such a person to change his feelings and conduct, and any effort to change this true nature, when applied to a young person at this sensitive period of adolescence, is fraught with serious implications.

All the above leads to this conclusion: Inasmuch as your son has adopted a particular approach to the question of shaving, and has done so despite the fact that this makes him different from many young people his age, even

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including some of his own friends--yet he desires to adhere to this way--this is clear proof of the importance which he attaches to it as part of his outlook and religious conduct. Any attempt, therefore, to try to discourage him from this would be like trying to dislodge a brick in the structure which your son has built up for himself, which might shake the entire structure. As already mentioned, this would be inadvisable under any circumstances, and in any environment, and especially here in the United States of this day and age. For this is not a question of a difference between an extreme attitude or a moderate one, but is directly related to the inner peace of mind of the individual.

In view of all that has been said above, I take the liberty of strongly urging you not to attempt to interfere with your son at this stage, and giving him the opportunity to conduct himself in this area of religion and feeling without inhibitions. On the contrary, you should manifest an attitude of understanding and encouragement, being quite certain that, as in all matters of Torah and *mitzvot* carried out with faith and sincerity, this can only bring him G-d's blessings in all his needs, materially and spiritually.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

35.

Mr. _____
Skokie, IL 60076

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter in which you seek advice in connection with the family business in which you are employed, which is owned partly by your father, who, in your estimation, is not getting the full share of his income, etc. It has therefore occurred to you to look for another job or start your own business.

It is surely unnecessary to point out to you that when one wishes to correct a wrong in any situation, including a business, it is easier to accomplish it from within than from outside. This is all the more true in the present case, where, as you write, you have an important and responsible position.

On the other hand, taking a new job, or starting a new business, would surely require a great deal of your attention, and one cannot foresee how much time and peace of mind would be left to deal with the present problem.

The above is a general observation and guideline. For actual and practical purposes, the decision would depend also on various details and factors, including your options, as

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well as the relationship within the family. Therefore, it would be advisable to consult with friends who are also knowledgeable business-wise.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

36.

Mr. _____
Morristown, NJ 07960

Greeting and Blessing:

Your letter reached me with considerable delay, and the pressure of duties regrettably delayed my reply further.

With regard to the question of *adoption*, about which you write, I am generally not in favor of it in view of the many complications which it involves from the viewpoint of the *halachah*. Indeed, my advice is to apply the efforts and costs that an adoption entails to matters that will bring G-d's blessing for additional natural and healthy offspring.

If, however, you think that in your situation there are weighty factors that warrant consideration of an adoption, I would suggest that you consult an orthodox, practicing rabbi. He would then explain to you in detail what complications are involved from the viewpoint of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and the additional complications when the adopted child grows up, besides the emotional aspects. Whereupon you will carefully weigh the matter and decide whether or not to go on with it.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

37.

Dr. _____
Cambridge, MA 02140

Greeting and Blessing:

Your letter, in which you write in reference to your daughter, reached me with some delay.

I trust I need not emphasize to you that I do not, G-d forbid, give any orders. I can only give advice when I am asked for it, and, of course, I can only give advice to the best of my understanding and assessment as to what constitutes the best interests of the person asking my advice. Clearly, I must consider not only the immediate future of the person and his material benefits, but what will ensure a lasting benefit to that person, particularly his, or her, peace of mind. If human happiness has always been predicated on inner peace and harmony, it is especially so in the present age of confusion.

For a Jew, true inner harmony and peace can be attained only if his lifestyle is not contrary to his essence, which is something he cannot change or alter, and which is his heritage from countless generations. In other words, a Jew can be in harmony with himself if his life is authentically Jewish. No material riches can substitute for it.

I surely need not elaborate to you on the state of the present-day young generation. There is no greater blessing than feeling secure and steadfast, and not being subject to

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convulsions from one extreme to the other every day, from basic standards of modesty and morality to the basic concepts of *Yiddishkeit*.

These are my motivations when young people ask for my advice; the rest is up to them. It certainly makes it easier for them, if they are also encouraged by others.

May G-d, whose benevolent providence extends to each and every one individually, grant you much true *nachas* from your daughter and the ability to enjoy it in happy circumstances.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

Yehuda and Chana Geisinsky

dedicate this book

in memory of

Habochur Hatomim

Nosson Nota Deitsch, ע"ה

ben R' Zalman Yuda Deitsch, ע"ה

A dear chaver of Yehuda

Nosson's memory serves

as a source of inspiration to be a true chossid,

and an example of Ahavas Yisroel.

He is sorely missed

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.