

2/23/62
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מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

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ברוקלין, נ. י.

By the Grace of G-d
23rd of Adar I, 5722
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Mr. Chayim Yaakov Lipchitz
168 Warbarton Avenue
Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

Thank you for your letter of January 28th. I also received the book, Encounters, which I perused with great interest, although somewhat superficially, because of lack of time at this moment. I was particularly interested to note in it the photographs of your parents.

In keeping with the characterization of our Jewish people as a "stiff-necked" people, I will at once return to the theme of our recent correspondence, to which you reply in your letter. Having seen the book and the photographs, my views have been further reinforced, and I am more strongly convinced than ever that your participation in the museum in the Holy City of Jerusalem is not for you.

Now to refer to the contents of your letter.

You write that your participation will constitute only a minor part of the project. To this let me first of all say the following: You surely know that the whole project was started by one whose profession is associated with burlesque and night-show business, New York style. There are, unfortunately, elements in the Holy Land for whom such a person has a fascinating attraction. This is the element who not so very long ago began a battle to introduce into Jerusalem a swimming pool for mixed bathing. It is no coincidence that they should pick the Holy City for this venture, for there are many other large cities in the Eretz Yisroel where there are no mixed swimming pools. They chose Jerusalem with the calculated intention of making their attack as offensive and as provoking as possible. The project of the museum in Jerusalem is similarly used by these elements to strike a telling blow at all that is sacred to traditional Judaism. To our shame and disgrace this has unfortunately become a pattern of a calculated policy on the part of these elements to degrade the holiness of the Holy Land and to completely secularize Jewish life there. I ask you, therefore, is this the kind of company with which Chayim Yaakov Lipchitz, the grandson of Reb Chayim Yaakov Krinsky, should be associated?

As for your modesty in claiming that your participation is not significant, etc., etc., I can only say that so far the merits of the project were publicized not on the basis of the merits of the individuals clamoring for the implementation of the project, but it is safe to assume that the merits of the project will be proclaimed on the basis of your participation, which will be exploited to the full including the aid and comfort that it will add

to the anti-religious elements in their battle for total secularization, as above. In such a situation, even a very "minor" participation cannot be justified, regardless how insignificant may be one's share in such desecration, and even if one is convinced that the desecration will take place in any case.

You cite the well-known story related of the Baal Shem Tov in regard to a certain non-conventional manner of prayer which proved very effective. I have heard this story from my father-in-law of saintly memory in a version which has been published in the enclosed brochure. It is to the effect that a Jewish boy who grew up in the country without the benefit of Jewish education could not participate in the communal service on Yom Kippur, and being carried away by the fervor of prayer in the community, he exclaimed with ecstasy, "cock-a-doodle-do," and it carried all the prayers of the community right to the Heavenly Throne. The moral of this story is surely not to make that exclamation a permanent institution of communal service on the Holy Day of Yom Kippur, just because a certain individual could not express his feelings in any other way.

Besides, and this is more important for our case, the attempt to express one's feelings by the same sound as the rooster expresses his feelings, namely "cock-a-doodle-do," is in itself quite an innocent one and does not evoke an "obstacle" to the outpouring of the soul and to the sanctity of the blessings, etc., which are associated with the Holy Day of Yom Kippur; only the external form of this expression strikes us as absurd. Essentially, it is in no way in conflict with the inner spirit of either the person expressing himself in such a manner, or of those surrounding him.

It is quite different from the illustration which I used, namely, to bring a ballet troupe into the Synagogue on Yom Kippur on the assumption that it might make some esthetic or artistic contribution. In this case, even the external form would be in violent conflict with the whole spiritual set-up, and the reactions that such a display often calls forth in many individuals would be absolutely contrary to the spirit.

Incidentally, throughout your letter I do not find a reply to one point which I raised, and which is fundamental to this issue. As a matter of fact, I do not think that there can be a reply to this point. I refer to the fact that Jerusalem is the Holy City not for a group of individuals, and not even for a large group of individuals, but it is intimately connected with the inner individual spiritual life of millions of Jews in our own time as well as in past and future generations. Moreover, it is more intimately bound up with those Jews who pray every day, and who have no conception of burlesque. Therefore, no one has a moral right to do something which many of them would consider as a most obvious desecration of their Holy of Holies, even in a small way, and even with the best of intentions. As I said, this would be true even in regard to the Holy of Holies of a single individual or a group of individuals, all the more so when it directly affects millions of our people, who pray daily for the return of the Shechinah (Divine Presence) in the Holy City and its restoration to its former glory and holiness.

As I wrote to you previously, I feel I have no choice but to be quite candid in my correspondence with you on this subject, because of the far-reaching implications of the issue. I'm therefore also pleased to see that you have expressed your views in a similar candid manner. This gives me the hope that eventually our views will coincide since, I am sure, both of us have the sacred heritage of our people at heart.

With kindest personal regards and with blessing,

M. Schmerson

P.S. -- I noted in the book, Encounters, that you had occasion to deal with the question of the age of our universe and the Torah view on this, etc. I am, therefore, enclosing a copy of my correspondence on this and related questions, which I wrote in reply to an inquiry. I trust you will find it interesting.