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ברוקלין, נ. י.

By the Grace of G-d
25th of Shevat, 5746
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Greeting and Blessing:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of Jan. 26th, in which you write about a serious problem.

As requested, I will remember you in prayer for the fulfillment of your heart's desires for good.

While all blessings come from HaShem, a Jew is expected to do what is necessary in the natural order. In the matter of the said problem, you surely know that there are doctors and psychiatrists who treat it, and have been successful in many cases. I know of a number of cases of people who had this problem but eventually overcame it, married and raised a family.

While on this topic, I would like to clear up a misconception that has led some individuals into confusion and wrong conclusions. The misconception stems from the argument that since some individuals are born with this problem, it must be a "natural" thing; hence it cannot be designated as a wrong, or a sin, and there is therefore no need to do anything to change it, or at any rate, it is not a serious problem at all.

That this approach is entirely without foundation can be seen from the fact that the Torah (called Toras Chaim and Toras Emes because it is our true guide in the everyday life) declares that to indulge in it, or even to dwell on it mentally, is a grave transgression of HaShem's commandment. Hence, it is also clear that the problem is controllable, for if it were beyond human control, HaShem would not have made it a sin.

The fact that the problem may largely be congenital does not alter the situation. Every day children are born with particular natures and innate tendencies or drives, some of them good and some of them bad. This is why human beings have to be trained and educated, so as to develop and strengthen the positive characteristics and eliminate the bad ones. The Creator endowed human beings with the capacity to improve, indeed even to change, their "natural" (i.e. innate) traits. A case in point is kleptomania. It is generally recognized that kleptomania is a very compulsive drive. But no one will suggest that because it is probably inborn and extremely difficult to resist, the kleptomaniac should be told that it is okay for him to steal, or that there is nothing he can, or should, do about it, and so on. Similarly in the case of one who is born with a drive to destroy things, or with a quarrelsome or aggressive nature, or with a propensity to cheat or lie, or any other innate trait that is considered reprehensible. No normal society would declare that since one was born that way, one should be allowed to go through life according to his natural desires and tendencies. Such an

Mr. David Gross

attitude will help neither the individual, nor the society. On the contrary, everything should be, and is, done to help individuals to overcome their neurological problems, whatever they may be.

Needless to say, the person who is afflicted with this or other neurological problems, may well ask, "Why has HaShem created such a compulsive drive, which is in direct contradiction to His moral Code? Why has He afflicted me, who desires to comply fully with His commandments?"

No human being can answer such questions, which only HaShem, the Creator, can answer. One observation that can be suggested in relation to the question, "Why me?" If an individual experiences a particularly difficult, or trying, situation, it may be assumed that HaShem has given him extraordinary powers to overcome the extraordinary difficulty. The individual concerned is probably unaware of his real inner strength; the trial may therefore be designed for the sole purpose of bringing out in the individual his hidden strength, which, after overcoming his problem, can be added henceforth to the arsenal of his revealed capacities, in order to utilize both for infinitely greater achievements for the benefit of himself, and others.

Maimonides, the "Guide of the Perplexed" of his generation and of all subsequent generations, who was also acclaimed as the greatest physician of his time, declares in a well known passage in his famous Code, Mishneh Torah (Yad Hachazaka): "Every person has the option (power), if he so desires, to direct himself to do only good and be a Tzaddik, or, if he chooses, to follow the bad road and be a Rasha. Do not ever think that a person is predestined from birth to be a Tzaddik or Rasha. Nor is there any inner compulsion to make a choice, but one has the capacity to choose the right behavior, and it is entirely a matter of one's own will and determination" (Free translation from Hil. Teshuva, ch. 5. See it there at length).

A final remark from the scientific viewpoint.

To say that the human mind and neural system are unimaginably intricate, is to say the obvious. Only the Creator knows His handiwork. But the Creator has endowed the human mind with wonderful qualities to probe the mysteries of nature, to research and experiment and steadily gain more knowledge about himself and his physical and mental capacities. Considerable progress has been made by scientists in their studies of the brain cells and hormones. It is now clear that a wide range of human emotions and sensations can be stimulated artificially with the aid of electronic and biochemical techniques. It is now generally agreed that most, if not all, neurological disorders, including deviant sexual behavior, probably proceed from chemical (hormone) deficiencies or irregularities during the period of youth. Some neurological disorders are already being treated successfully in certain areas involving the neural system, and it is to be hoped that the range will expand and eventually include the whole spectrum of neurological disorders, both of individuals and of nations.

Mr. David Gross

In the meantime, we can only put our trust in HaShem, and strengthen our adherence to the Torah and Mitzvoth, of which it is written, "They are our life and the length of our days."

With blessing,