

# Turning Judaism Outward: A Biography of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson by Rabbi Chaim Miller Quotes

To explain the importance of the task at hand, Rayatz offered the following insight. The main purpose of a Jew is to “make” another Jew, even if it is just one more Jew. That is why the first commandment in the Torah is to ‘*be fruitful and multiply.*’ Why should such a thing be written first? Isn’t the Torah all about holiness? Isn’t it the sublime wisdom and will of G-d? Because this needs to be the fundamental orientation of a Jew! A Jew needs to “make” another Jew.<sup>1</sup>

“In general, my custom,” the Seventh Rebbe once explained, “following a directive of my father-in-law the Rebbe, is to answer every query.” While the volume of mail no doubt changed with time, one internal estimate placed the volume of correspondence at 250-300 letters per day. There was a priority system for important mail, and many letters were forced to begin with an apology for the lengthy delay in response. Interestingly, the Rebbe would usually give precedence to a letter from a non-Lubavitcher over a devoted follower, and to a gentile over a Jew. “My Chasidim

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<sup>1</sup> 32

will understand the delay; others might feel slighted,” he explained.<sup>2</sup>

Despite barely leaving the two blocks that separated his home from 770, the Rebbe’s most radical message in these early years, which ultimately proved to be his most celebrated achievement, was that of Jewish outreach. Judaism can no longer afford to remain insular and must turn outwards, he argued. It is time to “go to the youth instead of waiting for them to arrive,” he told Forward journalist Asher Penn. “In the shtetl [village], when Judaism was passed on from generation to generation, the Rabbis could relax and sit at home with the knowledge that Jews of all ages would approach them whenever necessary. But America is very different. Here we must find the youth, awaken them and strengthen them. We need to speak in their language.”<sup>3</sup>

The Rebbe disagreed with the ideal held in most Yeshivah circles of a secluded life devoted exclusively to Torah study. His response to the “kollel philosophy” in a 1957 letter is typical: “Regarding what you wrote about an overall arrangement for Yeshivah study, continuing to sit and study [indefinitely] even after marrying... the ruling of our sacred law is wellknown: that fulfilling a commandment which cannot be performed by others takes

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<sup>2</sup> 193

<sup>3</sup> 229

precedence over all else (BT Moed Katan 9b). In recent generations working in the field of the Rabbinate and education in sacred matters, etc., has actually become a matter of saving lives.” In a 1964 letter to a resident of New York city, he articulated the argument more forcefully: “The House of Israel is on fire, and the younger generation, as things now stand, are largely trapped. You are surely not unaware of the “dry” statistics of intermarriage and assimilation in this country, and of the fact that the situation is similar in other countries.... The existing emergency demands immediate action—to save Jewish souls, of the old, the middle-aged and the young. This is the primary obligation of each and every one of us who desires to counteract the Hitlerian objective.”<sup>4</sup>

In any case, the Rebbe argued, Christianity was surely preferable to the atheism prevalent in public schools. “It is easier to ‘fix’ an idol-worshipper than a non-believer,” the Ba’al Shem Tov had once said.<sup>5</sup>

[Rebbe:] Our generation lives in the wake of the Holocaust which witnessed the murder of six million innocent Jews, may G-d avenge their blood! May G-d save us from those who pass judgment on the few of us that remain, and say that the present conduct of such Jews will cause another Holocaust, G-d forbid, may it never occur. Such

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<sup>4</sup> 237

<sup>5</sup> 248

words are a blatant insult to those who gave up their lives. According to Jewish theology, there are certain negative occurrences which do not come as a punishment for sin but simply because G-d decrees so, without any rationale that it is fathomable according to the logic of Torah. In reference to Rabbi Akiva, who was murdered by scraping his flesh with iron combs, our Sages coined the phrase, "Silence! That is what arose in His will." Furthermore, in the Bible itself, it is documented (at the Covenant of the Parts) that the Exile in Egypt was not because of sins, but was simply a decree of the Almighty. The massacre of six million Jews with such horrific brutality, such an awesome Holocaust that has no comparison throughout history (and never should have, may G-d protect us!), could not conceivably be a punishment for sins. Even Satan himself could not concoct an account of sins from the last generation that could justify (G-d forbid) such a heinous punishment! We have absolutely no explanation whatsoever in Jewish theology for the Holocaust, except, "that it is what arose in His will." Certainly it was not commensurate with the inner will of G-d, but rather, in the spirit of Isaiah's comment, "for a brief moment I abandoned you." Without any doubt, it was certainly not a punishment for sins. On the contrary, all the victims of the Holocaust are holy, since they were killed on the basis that they

were Jews, may G-d avenge their blood! Certainly, this event was in total discordance with G-d's innermost desire...<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 393-394