

RABBI NORMAN LAMM
THE JEWISH CENTER
131 WEST 86TH STREET
NEW YORK 24, N. Y.
SCHUYLER 4-3511

*This was mailed
today - 7/5/61*

Stew

July 4, 1961

Dear Rabbi Gotthold:

I have not yet received any direct reply from you to my previous communications, but I do want to add my own comments to the recent correspondence between yourself and Dr. Weiss.

Please forgive me if my expressions are sometimes harsh; they are not, however, inaccurate. I had all my life been led to expect a certain level of conduct from the halakhic authorities of our people, especially in the Holy Land. When such expectations are frustrated, the reaction cannot and should not be one of passive acceptance.

The fact remains that when I spoke to Rabbi Nissim on behalf of the Rabbinical Council of America and the U.O.J.C.A., and emphasized the critical nature of the problem, his response was one of cold, and even a bit callous, indifference. The Indian Jews did not concern him too much, since the Halakhah was the Halakhah. He did make these two points: that he would not prevent any local Beth Din from coming to a permissive decision, and that if Rabbi Rozovsky would publish his essay, and other leading Rabbis would, on the basis of this dissertation, then permit intermarriage with the Bene Israel, he would give his consent. Otherwise, he assured me, there was not a thing he was going to do.

Since then I have been in contact with Rabbi Rozovsky, with Rabbi Unterman, and with Rabbi Kahanaman. The first two have never bothered to answer my letters. The third has thus far not informed me whether or not he has succeeded in prevailing upon Rabbi Rozovsky to publish his essay.

In other words, if it was only an Orthodox rabbi requesting a ruling on a matter of major importance to some twenty thousand of our poor and uninfluential fellow Jews, not only was his request not honored, but his letters went unanswered. When, however, the secularists make one solitary move, the whole structure of the Israeli Rabbinate begins to tremble. Goldmann winks, a Mapam member of Knesset makes a speech, and the Rabbinate is all ears. Rabbi Nissim suddenly decides to reconsider his position; Rabbi Rozovsky's teshuvah, heretofore a military secret, is suddenly found in the hands of Rabbi Ittamar and others; and the absolute decision of the Halakhah becomes relatively flexible.

I, my dear Rabbi Gotthold, am totally unsympathetic to any of the apologia that may be offered in behalf of this disgraceful inactivity on the one hand, and the shameful "reconsiderations" on the other. My American naivete does not permit me to view with detachment this obvious and reprehensible politicization of halakhic decision-making.

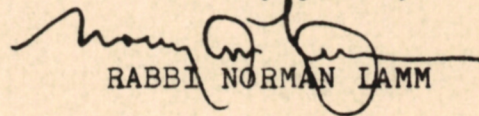
I should not, of course, be directing these remarks to you since, obviously, you are in these matters an innocent bystander. I am, however, irritated and disappointed by your references, in your cable, to "scoops" and "press releases." I had hoped that your understanding of my mission and the interest in this case by both U.O.J.C.A. and R.C.A. was such that you would not give such a crude interpretation to our moves. Our faults here are many, but we are not that fanatically addicted to the disease of public relationism. Our efforts for the Indian Jews were not half as publicized as they might have been. Our negotiations with the Rabbinate were pursued in the strictest secrecy. I suddenly feel as if all my efforts in this direction came to naught. I fervently hope that you will, in the future, attain a true picture of our concern, and perhaps relay it to some of the others who will find it hard to believe that we really mean what we say, and that our interest is le'shem shamayim.

I wish to add that in all other matters relating to Indian Jewry, I am totally in agreement with what Dr. Weiss has written you and the approach he is now taking.

Please do not take my words amiss. I am confident that on second thought you will appreciate my point of view as well as my indignation.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,



RABBI NORMAN LAMM