

מסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל
THE JEWISH AGENCY

INDIA • FAR EAST OFFICE • BOMBAY

TELEPHONE - 252055
TELEGRAMS - 'ALIYAH' BOMBAY

137, MAHATMA GANDHI ROAD.
BOMBAY-1, P. O. B. 1979

Ref. No. : 2057/63.

23rd December 1963.

Rabbi Norman Lamm,
131 West 86th Street,
NEW YORK 24, N.Y.
U. S. A.

Dear Rabbi Lamm,

Much time has elapsed and much has occurred since I last wrote to you. However, silence should not be understood as lack of activity in those matters in which we were, in the past, in more regular contact.

In a week's time, I shall be leaving India and will be returning to Jerusalem. My successor, Mr. Moshe Felber, has already arrived and is acquainted with all aspects of the work and, particularly, the matter appertaining to the Union of Orthodox Synagogues.

Allow me to give you a brief report of Rabbi Gotthold's visit and subsequent developments. Prior to his arrival, I was in Israel and had discussions with Dr. Warhaftig, Chief Rabbi Nissim and Rabbi Dov Katz, Director of the Rabbinical Courts to discuss the proposed 'mishlachah' of Rabbinim. I later proceeded to London and took the matter up with the Beth Din, hoping to obtain through them, or with the help of the Hacham Gaon, whom I also met, the third person for the above 'mishlachah'. However, to no avail. Finally, on my return to Israel, a meeting took place with Rabbi Dov Katz, Rabbi Gotthold, Rabbi Kusherlevsky, Av Beth Din of Beersheba, Mr. Shlomo Shamit of the Aliyah Department, Jerusalem, and myself.

It was agreed that I would return to Bombay and, only when the 'green light' was given, then Rabbi Gotthold would arrive and prepare the ground for the other two members of the Beth Din. On my return, I found that the Opposition had strengthened considerably but, eventually, we were able to form a non-official reception committee comprising of Mr. Albert Manasseh and Mr. Shalom Abraham, President of the United Synagogues of India. Whilst we were still

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- 2 -

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negotiating with other groups, Rabbi Gotthold arrived. He was faced with a number of incompatible requests:

1. That since he was receiving support from the Union of Orthodox Synagogues in America, he must "represent them here".
2. That it would be a grave mistake to appear in any way to favour or to ally himself with any particular group since, by doing so, he becomes himself "personae non grata" with other Organisations.
3. Mr. Penkar and Mr. Jhirad wanted to form a Beth Din with him.

Rabbi Gotthold's refusal was not appreciated.

It was our prayer that a rabbi would come - preferably from England; failing that, from America and, only as a last resort, from Israel - who would see himself and be regarded as the rabbi for the whole Jewish community irrespective of their affiliation abroad or any other associations here; that he would devote himself solely to the question of 'halachic' problems.

Rabbi Gotthold was here for a couple of months and dealt with some 30 cases of conversion and divorce - both here in Bombay as well as in Poona and Ahmedabad. Whilst we tried to assist him in every way possible, he met with a certain negative attitude with the Israeli Consulate here ~~who~~ tended to exaggerate the minor reactions of a very small group among the Bene-Israel community. Due to these and other reasons, Rabbi Gotthold concluded the cases himself and returned to Israel.

Some six months have now elapsed but we still have yet to see a formal certificates for those cases dealt with by him and the Beth Din he formed comprising of two of the teachers who have returned from the Machon Gold in Jerusalem.

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In addition, we have had very disquieting reports casting doubt on the validity of the conversion and divorce ceremonies conducted by Rabbi Gotthold here. If this should be true, it would be a catastrophe.

Messrs. Penkar and Jhirad who presumed to have acquired sole "proprietaryship" of Rabbi Gotthold and demanded that all requests for interviews with him should be channelled through their offices, were obviously angry when this was refused. They held me responsible though, unknown to them, I was, myself, completely in the dark of many aspects of Rabbi Gotthold's work here who regarded himself as completely independent.

It may well be that the Union of Orthodox Synagogues in India is active though I must admit that no echo has reached our office. To put it more bluntly, for the last six months, there has been absolutely no activity whatsoever. The Organisation is taking its place among the scores of others which exist on paper only.

If I leave India with any feeling of disappointment and even frustration it is, in particular, the work of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues. You had enthused me with a certain amount of hope and yet, after 3 years, I cannot point to any progress within the Organisation or in the community due to its efforts.

Allow me to reiterate that, if the Union of Orthodox Synagogues of America wishes to spread its teachings to this country, then it must do so by sending a rabbi here. Even if he came for a short period, he would at least justify the use of the name of the Organisation in this country.

You will have to forgive me for being direct and undiplomatic but, as you know, it is only "El' shem Shamiim". Please accept my personal regards and, perhaps we will meet in Israel. My address: 7 Rechov Hachidah, Bayit ViGan, Jerusalem.

Yours sincerely,

Israel Kelman.

cc. Dr. S. Weiss.