

מדינת ישראל

Ministry of Religious Affairs
Dept. for Contacts with the Diaspora

Jerusalem, 3 Tevet, 5724
19 December, 1963.

Rabbi Norman Lamm
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations
84 Fifth Avenue
New York 11, N.Y.

Dear Rabbi Lamm,

We are at present facing difficulties which grew out of the problem called [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is now two and one half years in Jerusalem. You may recall that during your visit to Bombay three years ago you had lined up four candidates for rabbinical training in Israel. Of these only [REDACTED] came through. He feels that now he has a monopoly on your commitment to make him a rabbi in Bombay, and we see that the lack of competition makes him complacent. We have our reservations about the prospects of seeing this "sole candidate" as a promising factor in easing the problems of religious life and leadership in his home community. Actually, we ought to have a choice from the best qualified from among several competent students, which probably was your original idea. Perhaps we ought to consider the further training of graduate teachers from the Gold Institute, who have proven their reliable religious attitude since they have returned to India as teachers, Mohalim and Shohatim. I have worked there particularly with two of them and have been most favorably impressed by them.

During his first year at Kol Torah, [REDACTED] had to be introduced to many facets of Jewish life and learning, which had been entirely strange to him. Our periodic check-ups revealed that he made good progress, adjusted to yeshiva life, and met with a sympathetic and helpful attitude on the part of fellow students and families in Bayit Vagan.

At the end of his first year Kol Torah suggested to us that [REDACTED] be transferred to a Sefaradi yeshiva. We opposed this plan although [REDACTED] himself did consider such transfer seriously because he felt that the training he received at Kol Torah was too one-sided, too much concentrating on Talmud, whereas he had been promised a more comprehensive course of studies, including Bible, history, philosophy, etc. Some of his fellow students had taken turns during the year to teach him Humash and Rashi. However the progress has been very slow, and he himself showed little initiative to study on his own.

The end of his first year concurred with the precipitation of the B.I. problem in Israel. Since we could find no better place for him in another yeshiva, since he could not study at a yeshiva and at the same time enroll in certain courses at the Gold Institute for lack of schedule coordination, and since in yeshiva circles an apprehension developed towards B.I., we prevailed upon Kol Torah to have him continue there.

The political turmoil surrounding the tackling of the B.I. issue on the part of the Rabbinate, the decision, the discussion in Keneset and newspapers, the directives and their repercussions made apparently a profound adverse impression upon [redacted]. At the end of the winter last year, Rabbi S.Z. Auerbach, with whom I had been in contact, thought it advisable to have [redacted] continue at Porat Yosef, to concentrate on applied halakha rather than the study of Talmud for its own sake. In my negotiations with Porat Yosef I ran into stubborn resistance. They refused to admit a B.I.; at best would demand his immersion with all formality attached to a conversion.

After Pessah, Rabbi Suliman D. Sassoon was in Jerusalem. I discussed with him halakhic aspects prior to my trip to India and found him lenient towards the B.I. problem. Knowing of his connection with Porat Yosef, I presented to him the problem of [redacted] and asked for his mediation, which I repeated in the presence of Rabbi Abraham Shrem, Executive-Director of Porat Yosef. Rabbi Sassoon suggested a compromise: that [redacted] would take an immersion before Shavuot, and this would satisfy Porat Yosef. I broached the subject to [redacted] in the most diplomatic way; however, he refused to do so.

During my absence Rabbi S.R. Weiss wrote to Dr. Warhaftig (July 16, 1963) informing him that "Mr. [redacted] of Bombay has reached the conclusion of his studies" at the Kol Torah Yeshiva. The Minister charged Rabbi Dov Cohen with the responsibility for making suitable arrangements.

On my return from India I found that [redacted] was studying with a private teacher in a room of the Porat Yosef building, unconnected with the Yeshiva proper. His teacher complained that [redacted] was incompetent in his studies and showed no background for studying Hulin and Yoreh Deah with a view of working towards his ordination degree. On the other hand, [redacted] demanded that he wants a definite commitment for being an ordained Rabbi within a year or two as he claimed you had promised him. During the month of Ellul I volunteered to study every night for several hours with [redacted], including suggiyot in Rosh Hashana, halakha, mahzor, parashat Akkedah with commentaries, in order to study his abilities. I found that he could not apply himself, neither prepared his assignments nor went over the lessons studied, and kept himself mostly passive.

Unfortunately, I had no opportunity to discuss this problem with Dr. Weiss when he was in Jerusalem. He merely told me that [redacted] ought to study Milah, Shehita and Sofrut, and I told him that [redacted] wanted to be a Rabbi and Posek.

In a conversation with his father in Bombay I learned that [redacted] had been a very average student without much interest in Jewish studies, and a failure at the University. His father also told me that it would be advisable to have him checked by a psychologist because with all his paternal love he doubted whether his son would develop into a personality requisite for fulfilling the difficult position of a Rabbi in Bombay. For the sake of testing [redacted] along these lines, I made arrangements for him to lecture during Sukkot to several B.I. communities, and to function as a Hazzan. This plan could not be carried out because I was advised in the last moment that the congregants will involve [redacted] in political discussions ~~respect~~ive their halakhic status. Therefore it was cancelled. For the High Holidays I had arranged for him and his brother to stay at Porat Yosef.

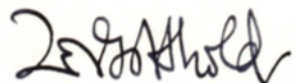
In consultation with Rabbi S.Z. Auerbach, it was decided that [redacted] continue to study Yoreh Deah. He studies at Porat Yosef daily four hours with Rabbi Daniel Addas, dorms and eats at Kol Torah. Communing between the two yeshivot, he claims to have little time for anything else. At best he studies eight hours a day. His private teacher has been paid by our Ministry for the past three months, but payment had to be stopped now for lack of funds. The Ministry is also reluctant about training him for the Rabbinate, creating a precedent and by this assuming responsibility for his qualification and ordination. Kol Torah claims that their financial obligation committed them only to his studies within the framework of their Yeshiva, excluding the kind of tutoring which he needs and receives now.

Hence we should like to know how you see the future of [redacted]'s studies. From the financial point-of-view you will have to assume the responsibility we have been carrying for the past three months to the tune of IL 96 weekly plus fare. From the practical point-of-view we are trying to have him study at the Seminary for Shohatim and Mohalim in Kiriyat Shemual near Haifa, which is to be opened in the next few weeks. This will put him into one class with other students, give him the theoretical and practical background, and ease the financial burden of private tutoring.

[redacted] promised me a few times to communicate with you about his problems as he sees them, and I hope that he has done so.

With best personal regards, I remain

Sincerely yours,



Rabbi Zev Gotthold