

MINUTES OF JOINT OVERSEAS COMMISSION MEETING

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1962

HELD AT THE HOME OF MR. AND MRS. MAX STERN

Present: Mr. Max Stern, Presiding; Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, Rabbi Norman Lamm, Rabbi Simon Langer, Mr. Manfred Lehmann, Dr. Samson R. Weiss

Guest: Haham Dr. Solomon Gaon

Excused Absences: Dr. William W. Brickman, Mr. Moses I. Feuerstein, Mr. Ludwig Jesselson, Rabbi Leo Jung, Rabbi Joseph Karasick, Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, Rabbi Zev Segal, Rabbi Solomon J. Sharfman

Mr. Max Stern, Chairman of the Joint Overseas Commission, called the meeting to order at 8:10 P.M. He welcomed our distinguished guest, Haham Dr. Solomon Gaon and thanked him for attending this meeting. Mr. Stern stated that the agenda of the meeting lends specific significance to the presence of the Haham. Mr. Stern also welcomed Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits who had been in England on a lecture tour and had met there with the rabbinic and lay leaders of the orthodox Jewish community.

Dr. Weiss stated that many of the members of the Commission were unable to attend on account of Chanukah functions and other urgent matters, but that nevertheless it was decided to hold the meeting in view of the impending absence of the Chairman from the city and because of important decisions the Overseas Commission must reach.

Rabbi Norman Lamm gave a brief report on the Indian situation. The most important need of the community is to find a qualified rabbi to be in charge of Gittin and Kedushin. Chief Rabbi Nissim's endeavors to find a fitting man acceptable to him and to the Bene Israel community have so far been unsuccessful. Recently, Rabbi Lamm received confidential letters from Mr. Albert Menasseh, the President of the UOJCI, and Mr. Israel Kelman of the Bombay office of the Jewish Agency, both proposing Rabbi Silas, a native of Calcutta, presently Assistant to Haham Gaon. Rabbi Lamm discussed this matter with the Haham who gave his opinion on the qualifications of Rabbi Silas.

Haham Gaon stated that Rabbi Silas, though still young and therefore lacking experience, is highly qualified. He has studied in Israeli Yeshivoh and has Smichah from the late Rabbi Pesach Zvi Frank, of blessed memory, and from Chief Rabbi Nissim. This would make him acceptable to Chief Rabbi Nissim. The Haham feels that Rabbi Silas would be acceptable to the Bene Israel community, in spite of his being an Iraqi Jew, because of his association with the Haham's office which has always been most sympathetic and understanding in all matters concerning the Bene Israel. The Haham would be willing to assure Rabbi Silas that his London position would be kept open for him for two years, in order to make it easier for him to come to a positive decision. The Haham would be willing to make these arrangements in view of the great necessity to send a rabbi to India, although the leaving of Rabbi Silas from his present important and creative functions in the Haham's office would present the Haham with some difficulties.

REPORT OF JOINT OV. 2244 : REVISION
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20, 1960
P AT THE HOME OF MR. AND MRS. J.

Presiding: Mr. Emanuel J. ...
Langer, Mr. Nathaniel ...
Common Law

William W. ...
Ludwig ...
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experience, is highly qualified. He has studied in ...
Smilash from the late Rabbi ...
Chief Rabbi ...
... would be acceptable to ...
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Rabbi Lamm reported that Mr. Menasseh suggests that Rabbi Silas be engaged as the Chazan of the Fort Synagogue which would pay approximately Rs. 600 a month. It is obvious that this remuneration is too small and that at least another Rs. 1000 must be obtained for the rabbi. Rabbi Lamm also pointed out that it would be best that the rabbi do not appear as an employee or as a representative of the Orthodox Union, for the sake of placing him above all local conflicts.

All present agreed that every effort should be made to make the position as attractive as possible to Rabbi Silas. The Haham undertook to initiate discussions with Rabbi Silas even prior to his return to London.

As far as the necessary funds are concerned, the Haham believes that it might be possible to obtain them from the large trust funds of the Iraqi Jewish community which are frozen in India. He feels that it would be very helpful if a representative of our Commission were to take this matter up with Rabbi S. D. Sassoon and Mr. J. R. Jacob who have controlling influence over some of these funds.

There was unanimous agreement to accept the suggestion of the Haham who would keep us advised on the results of his discussions with the two above named gentlemen and inform us whether or not a representative of our group should contact them in this matter, of course all provided that Rabbi Silas is amenable to the suggestion to accept the position in Bombay. It was further the unanimous opinion of the Commission that we should make available the necessary supplementary funds if only part of the rabbi's additional salary or none of it can be obtained from Indian sources. In such case, our funds would be channeled through the Haham so that Rabbi Silas be established in Bombay as a representative of the Haham and of his Rabbinate.

The Chairman stated that he would pass through Calcutta in January and would be willing to meet with Rev. Silas, the father of Rabbi Silas, to discuss with him the urgent need for his son to accept the position in Bombay. Dr. Weiss undertook to write to Calcutta to arrange for such a meeting in advance of Mr. Stern's arrival, inasmuch as Mr. Stern will stay in Calcutta for only one day.

The Chairman then called on Dr. Weiss to give a brief resume of the discussions he held with Chief Rabbi Brodie and Haham Gaon in London in May and in September of this year, concerning the Leadership Conference out of which should emerge a call for a World Conference of Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities. Dr. Weiss reported that the Chief Rabbi had agreed in principle to convene such a Conference at Jews' College in London. Points in dispute are the following: The Chief Rabbi felt that the Conference should be limited to rabbis, scholars, scientists and men of letters, without the participation of communal lay leaders. Dr. Weiss felt that with the election of Sir Isaac Wolfson to the Presidency of the United Synagogue the situation has changed and that the Chief Rabbi may now be ready to include leading laymen in the Conference. Secondly, the Chief Rabbi felt that the Conference should be limited to Anglo-American leaders, at the exclusion of representatives from any other countries. We here felt that this would rob the Conference of a great deal of its potential impact.

Rabbi Jakobovits reported on his conversations with the Chief Rabbi who seems to have in mind a purely intellectual, non-organizational meeting, for the purpose of discussing the many challenges to orthodox Judaism in the realm of

ideology. It appeared to Rabbi Jakobovits that the Chief Rabbi's intention is to have emerge from this Conference a new impression of the vitality of Torah-true Judaism, both by the very caliber of men participating and by the statements which would emanate from the Conference.

Rabbi Simon Langer who had recently attended the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Chief Rabbis' Conference reported that he carried away a similar impression from his talks with the Chief Rabbi whose main interest in the planned Conference seems to be to dispel the unfortunate identification in the public mind of orthodoxy with outdated rigidity and obscurantism.

Haham Gaon indicated that he is inclined to feel that the presence of leading laymen would now be acceptable to the Chief Rabbi. He considers such participation of great importance. He also felt that carefully chosen participants from other countries would add great weight to the Conference.

The Chairman noted that obviously the Conference must accomplish a two-fold purpose. It must be a meeting of outstanding intellectual leaders who would formulate orthodox strategy in view of the present-day needs and challenges. It must further have a resounding public impact and become a manifestation of orthodox strength. The Chief Rabbi's thought that a public meeting be held at which the best qualified participant would address a large general audience clearly indicates his interest in the second purpose, too. Also, the plan to issue to the press statements on the conclusions reached by the Conference bespeaks this intent.

The consensus was reached that we recommend to the Chief Rabbi that he convene a Leadership Conference as soon as possible, with the inclusion of leading communal lay leaders and with the inclusion of participants from Israel and from other European countries.

The American contingent should be limited to a maximum of ten participants. The Conference should have as its main purpose ideological questions, as suggested by the Chief Rabbi. This does not obviate the possibility that the conferees may decide to propose a World Conference and to prepare an agenda for it. They also might call upon the Chief Rabbis of the various orthodox communities to convene such a Conference, placing themselves, so to speak, at their disposal, for the purposes of such a World Conference. It is also conceivable that the conferees may decide not to suggest such a World Conference but to rest on a Declaration which would, in fact, be a proposed Agenda for the world orthodox Jewish community.

Doubt was expressed whether such a Conference could still be convened for May, in view of the fact that important people have their schedules mapped out for months in advance. In any event, it was suggested that we inform the Chief Rabbi as soon as feasible of the consensus reached by the Commission, since the Chief Rabbi is scheduled to leave England for an extended trip in the middle of January. We also should propose to him the American participants.

Dr. Weiss then brought to the attention of the Commission the financial need of the proposed Leadership Conference. The Chairman felt that we here would find ways and means to take care of the American delegates. The costs of bringing the Israeli and European delegates would have to be covered by our friends in England. Haham Gaon agreed that this would be possible.

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the Russian statements on the occasion of the meeting in Moscow, which was held on the 15th of the month of June, 1941, in the presence of the representatives of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, and in which the Russian Government, in its statement, stated that it was the intention of the Russian Government to continue its efforts to bring about a general peace in Europe, and that it was the intention of the Russian Government to continue its efforts to bring about a general peace in Europe, and that it was the intention of the Russian Government to continue its efforts to bring about a general peace in Europe.

In view of the lateness of the hour the Chairman stated that the last item on the agenda, namely South America, would be discussed only briefly.

Dr. Weiss gave the background report stating that no progress had been made as yet to bring to realization our initial plans to send an emissary to South America who would confer with key personalities in the various communities for the purpose of laying the basis for a Hemisphere Conference.

Rabbi Jakobowitz reported on his meeting with Chief Rabbi Fink whom he met in Paris. Chief Rabbi Fink has left Buenos Aires and has accepted a position in the Haifa Rabbinate. Rabbi Fink felt that it would be a mistake to send emissaries from here without prior invitation from the South America communities. They would be ineffective because these communities are old established and rather well organized.* These communities should not only issue invitations to prominent American Jewish leaders to visit them but also stand the entire costs of such visitations. Rabbi Fink undertook to suggest this to his friends in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires.

Haham Gaon stated that he has great reservations concerning such visits. The impact the Conservative Movement made was not based on visits of individuals but on the large Conference they held and on their opening an office in, and sending a rabbi to, Buenos Aires. The community there is still under the impact of this Conference after a lapse of three years. He also felt that any visitor unable to address an audience in Spanish and, as far as Brazil is concerned, in Portuguese, would have little success.

Mr. Manfred Lehmann reported on the situation in Sao Paulo. There exists a very strong orthodox community of Hungarian character, but ineffective outside of its own clearly circumscribed circle. No similar communities have sprung up and its influence is not felt, for instance, in Rio de Janeiro or Porto Alegre. Mr. Lehmann felt that possibly local talent could be found to organize the co-operation and cohesion of the various Jewish communities. He also stated that he would see purpose in sending a Yiddish speaking emissary, if we cannot find a person capable of speaking Portuguese and Spanish.

No conclusions were reached and no motions offered.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 P.M.

NOTE: The members of the Joint Overseas Commission and the officers of the Orthodox Union and the RCA are requested to treat these minutes as internal and confidential communications.

(Minutes taken by Dr. Samson R. Weiss)

*The following sentence is to be inserted here:

They would regard an unsolicited visit as the evidence of a patronizing attitude and, therefore, not be very receptive to the visitor and to his suggestions.