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June 4, 1965

Mr. Shimshon Heller
Executive Director
Poale Agudath Israel of America
147 West 42nd Street
New York, N.Y. 10036

Dear Mr. Heller:

I read the manuscript you sent me very very carefully.

Before I begin to give you some of my reactions, I hope you will emphasize to Rabbi [REDACTED] that my criticisms in no way detract from my fervent admiration for him and my enthusiasm for the same volume as it appeared in Hebrew.

I am sorry to say that the manuscript I have before me is totally -- unquestionably unfit for publication. The English is not only ungrammatical, cast in a foreign idiom, and beset by hundreds of different errors, but the expression is banal and most unappealing.

As I mentioned to you when we talked last, there are certain things that may be said, and that should be said in a Hebrew publication for an Israeli audience that should never be reproduced in English for an American reader. This implies, as well, a slight revision of some halakhic material. Thus, for instance, a detailed analysis of when a husband may or may not eat from the leftovers of his wife's dish is pretty much meaningless to a young American couple. In general, I would also counsel against the translation of tumah as "uncleanliness" or "unclean." There are other things that Rabbi [REDACTED] included, and for which he no doubt has good Jewish sources, which will only be rejected offhand by any modern reader, such as his remarks in Chapter XVIII, No. 3. I think one should be extremely careful about making scientific pronouncements without being doubly sure of their validity -- even if, as in this case, they have the authority of Maimonides behind them.

Mr. Shimshon Heller

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I need not continue in this vein, although I can go on and on. Let me plead with you not to allow the good reputation of Rabbi [REDACTED] to be sullied by having his name associated with a manuscript as is. I have learned through bitter experience that Rabbi Saadia Gaon was right when he maintained that one of the eight principle reasons for skepticism and the rejection of Judaism is the inadequate presentation of our point of view.

I do think that the strictly halakhic sections can, with a little work, be recast into a good guide book on the problem, but it would require a much more relevant and attractive introduction and conclusion. I should be glad to discuss it with you in greater detail either personally or over the phone. However, I want to plead with you not to inform the translator, whoever he is, of the extent and intensity of my criticism. I do not want to hurt anyone's feelings.

I hope you do not mind my frankness. It is the only way I know of dealing with such matters.

My best wishes for a happy Yom Tov.

Cordially yours,

RABBI NORMAN LAMM

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