

7"2

13 Massapoag Lane
Sharon, Mass. 02067
June 18, 1972

Dear Rabbi Lamm,

I was very pleased with the warmth and promptness of your reply. Rabbi Finkelstein replied that he has long maintained a policy of not commenting for the press on current matters, and that to make an exception now would set a precedent that might plague him in the future. He also points out, probably correctly, that to quote him might have an adverse effect -- presumably by creating an ecumenical appearance which might please editors but did in fact trouble me.

In any case I have consulted with the editor of the Advocate and have enclosed herein a draft of an article which I would like to send him at the end of this week, for publication in his issue of June 29. The article is based on your remarks alone. I have taken the liberty of quoting from your second letter, the one of June 8, also.

The minyan continues to go well. It gives me nachas to make certain by telephone on Wednesday evening that we can count on eleven men the following Shabos, and then have 16 appear. We have had to double our supply of siddurim.

Meanwhile, I wonder if I may trouble you with a sh'elah regarding our mechitza. The mechitza is portable, specially constructed for us, and we store it during the week in the temple's furnace room. There is no question regarding its height, its degree of opaqueness, and the manner in which it divides the room, all of which were carefully worked out beforehand, nor is there any question regarding carrying it on Shabbat, since it remains within the building, nor any question regarding fastening (on Shabbat) a separate piece with hooks and eyes, since these are fastenings not of a permanent nature. There is, however, a question of whether by putting the mechitza in place on Shabbat, we would be putting in order for davening a room which is regularly used for davening, and whether making such a room acceptable for davening is work not permitted on Shabbat.

Mr. Arnold has put this question to Rabbi Labovitz, who told him he was not certain and that we would have to go to a higher authority. Therefore, in the absence of an answer, we have put the mechitza in place before Shabbat and removed it only after Shabbat. However, it would be a convenience, both in terms of our own extra trips and in terms of avoiding any unnecessary offense to those elements in the temple who are not friendly to us, if we could put the mechitza in place a short time before the service and remove it directly after the service -- provided there is no violation of Shabbat in so doing.

(Regarding Rabbi Labovitz's uncertainty, I should explain that he is a businessman who has Semicha, but has never been a "pulpit" rabbi or

↓

a professional teacher.)

The problem arises because our minyan thus far is Shabbat mornings only. The rule, as I understand it from Mr. Arnold's recollection of his studies, is that to make a room acceptable for conducting a service, if that room is used for services regularly, is work in the Shabbat sense. (This particular room is used by the Conservative congregation during the week for daily services, but on Shabbat morning is used by the Orthodox minyan on a regular basis.)

The argument for permitting the mechitza to be put in place before services on Shabbat morning, as I see it, is as follows:

. The mechitza does not, at the time it would be put in place, make the room acceptable for davening. At that time there are no women present, so the room is acceptable for davening with or without the mechitza. (We begin the preliminary service about 9:30 a.m., and would put the mechitza in place about 9:15 a.m. Women rarely come in before 10:15 or so.) What the mechitza does is not make possible the service that begins at that time, but rather it makes it possible for women to join us. It would also be possible, for instance, to exclude women from the service. Bringing in the mechitza from a neighboring room is thus like bringing in siddurim or chumoshim that may have been taken to another room, or bringing in chairs.)

The argument for requiring the mechitza to be put in place before Shabbat, I hope for convenience's sake will not prevail, but I will set it forth honestly:

Though we could exclude women, we do not wish to do so. We also know from experience that on a typical Shabbat, sometime before the end of Shachris, at least one girl is likely to arrive and maybe two or three. Moreover, the whole idea of the mechitza is very central to our purpose and was one of the issues that caused us to start this minyan. It is a point we never cease to make, and it is an essential part of our whole concept of what a shul should be.

That is the question. Mr. Arnold has raised it without leaning one way or the other, and we all are committed to whatever is halachically correct.

There is a supplementary question: If it is ruled that it is not permissible to put the mechitza in place during Shabbat because we would be rendering the room fit for davening, might it still be permissible to remove it during Shabbat after the services, as the removal (unlike rendering the room fit) does not involve a task forbidden on Shabbat?

To repeat, there is no problem here of carrying or of the fastenings; the question is only the one of putting the room in order for davening during Shabbat.

If you can find the time to clarify this for us, we will be grateful for your response and will follow it.

Meanwhile, if there is anything in the enclosed newspaper draft you would want changed, please let me know that, if possible, even before the answer to



3
our sh'elah.

I appreciate also the good wishes you have expressed for my work as a writer. I am, as usual, in the midst of a novel. As in my previous efforts, my hopes are that it will entertain, that it will leave my readers more favorably disposed toward Yiddishkeit, and that it will keep me solvent. It would go faster if I were less prone to give in to family and other distractions during working hours. This is a fault I must try harder to correct.

My very best wishes to you and to Mrs. Lamm, whom I had the honor of meeting some years ago, and for success in all that you do.

Sincerely,

Myron K.

Myron S. Kaufmann

enclosure

(DRAFT)

Rabbi Norman Lamm, professor of philosophy at Yeshiva University, has praised the recent formation of an Orthodox minyan in Sharon with Conservative help as "marvelous."

"Despite all the difficulties," Rabbi Lamm wrote in a letter to a member of the group, "I think it is marvelous that this new Orthodox group should have been born out of friendship instead of in controversy."

His remarks referred to a plan whereby several members of Sharon's Temple Israel volunteer for a ~~strictly~~ ^{strictly} Orthodox service to help a small number of Orthodox Jews complete their minyan.

The plan is a temporary measure to tide over the first few Orthodox families until another half dozen or so move to Sharon and join the group. At that time it is expected that an Orthodox congregation will be formed under a Young Israel charter.

Rabbi Lamm said in his letter: "I took special delight in learning the unusual way in which you have managed to establish an Orthodox minyan in a Conservative environment. From a mere 'presence' to a 'minyan' to a full 'shul'... May the next step be a fully functioning and vital Orthodox community." *The word "community" was underlined.*

A spokesman said the Orthodox services began the first day of Passover and have been held every Sabbath and holiday since. He said some movement of Orthodox families into Sharon has already begun as a result.

One of the most widely published and highly respected Orthodox leaders in the United States, Rabbi Lamm occupies the pulpit of the Jewish Center on Manhattan's West Side in addition to his professorship. In a subsequent letter to the Sharon group he added that their "cause is one of which

↓

I heartily approve," and that permission to quote him about the project was granted "enthusiastically."

The decision to help an Orthodox congregation get started in Sharon, through the loaning of facilities and the ^{temporary} volunteering of participants, was voted unanimously by the Conservative temple's ritual committee last March. The temple's position was summed up by its rabbi, Shamai Kanter, as follows: "If there are Jews in Sharon who have particular needs, it is a mitzvah to help them meet their needs."

#