

January 30th 1972

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Dear Rabbi Lamm,
I am back in India - it is a case of true love: I can see all that is wrong with it (and I fear I don't even see all) and yet love it. I suppose the climate just suits me. This time I went to an Ashram (lehavdil: a rebbe with a court, but not quite): it is the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, a former French Colony on the Bay of Bengal, only far south. I came with the war, but still loved it. The Ashram has The Mother - French (and it is said of Jewish origin) now 94 and worshipped. I tried even to believe - truly. A number of brilliant people there (but most not) - though now I come to think of it which religion has not a number of brilliant people attached to it? Anyhow all I could see was a lady of 94 looking every moment of it but formerly she must have been extremely beautiful and certainly an organizational genius. I wish to compare it with my kibbutz material. We shall see.

My book came out here last week - having waited all this time (Oxford University Press bought the Indian rights) they brought it out last week, a week ~~later~~ ^{before} I got back to Bombay from Pondicherry. So far rave reviews - no doubt the rotten ones are still to come. As the community comes to see it - you know what they can be like.. If someone sees something in ^{it} ~~him~~ to damn it they will - not that it may not deserve it - but that won't be the point. When I was here last year a number of people asked whether they could write the Foreword (only I wanted someone for that who could write) and when they heard it was settled they turned rather nasty. But nothing compared with the last ^{can't} Consul's trouble... that was really something to write home about. I went to Sharr Rachamim the other day with some Swiss orthodox students - and looked at it like a stranger - funny: once it was like home to me. There are still about 7,000 or so Bene Israel here, but it has all the flavour of decay about it now. By the way, Penkar tried a comeback: but did not make it. Someone else brought me more data in case I wanted to do yet another book on them - it is funny: I lost all interest in it. I can't somehow convince them that I am now interested in other fields. On the other hand, I hear from a number of people in the States (for example, David Mandelbaum, prof at Berkeley who wrote that great chapter on the Jewish Way of Life in Cochín) that they have students all aching to 'do' the Bene Israel. Isn't it funny?

Nevertheless, I hope you are doing lots of things for my The Bene Israel of Bombay! Are you? I don't know why I worry: after all it is not my money involved. What does it matter to me then? But it does. When I did Exotic Jewish Communities I never did anything about it after I finished with the proofs - not a thing. But now that I am a regular review writer and I am overwhelmed with phone calls and letters from authors to ask me to get the papers to let me review it... I never knew one could do such a thing - but I know now. They don't seem to realize that if I do that too often Editors will get angry and that will be it and that I have to do what they send me. This might amuse you: I have quite a fan mail from my reviews. Among them came a letter from someone who says he long wanted to meet me and thought of inviting me but alas he keeps no kosher house and he heard I was addicted to kashruth. What a cheek: so I

wrote back I keep kosher but alas no house.
Don't be jealous about my being back in India - I have to return to
my particular hell (Melbourne) at the end of February. I feel sick
already. Let me know how my book is doing in your part of the world
- you should know. And with India in the news just now... doesn't
that help?
Meanwhile every good wish

Slfr

did you see the correspondence in the Jewish Chronicle following
upon Gourbey's beastly review on the latter's assertion that there
was nothing wrong in the Bene Israel-Baghdadi relationship? And
it was Gourbey of all people who first told me of the relationship
between the two communities.

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