

February 17, 1963

Mr. Abraham Jhirad
UOJCI
c/o Magen Hasidim Synagogue
8, Moreland Road
Bombay 11, India

Dear Abraham:

The recent exchange of letters between us as well as between myself and Mr. Kelman have caused me a great deal of distress. In particular am I unhappy over the fact that misunderstanding has developed between the U.O.J.C.I. and us in New York.

However, I am confident that with a bit of good will and intelligent exercise of restraint, plus some insight, the very warm and cordial relations that have existed heretofore will not only be preserved but even enhanced in the future.

I cannot deny my very deep impression that our people in Bombay have committed some indiscretions. The last issue of Mabasser particularly aggravated an already tender situation in a manner that was utterly unnecessary and even cavalier. But I have a great deal of confidence in our Bombay Branch, and especially in you personally, Abraham, and therefore know that, with the help of G-d, we shall manage to re-establish the harmony that has prevailed heretofore and without which our sacred work cannot succeed.

As human beings, with all the limitations that mortality places upon us, we sometimes find that we cannot see the forest for the trees. We find ourselves progressively more involved in details which may seem momentous and yet are, in truth, trivial and ephemeral. It is all too difficult to retain a true perspective when you are deeply involved in a situation which has many complications. Feelings tend to become ruffled, decisions are arrived at impetuously, and fundamentals are somehow overlooked. It is therefore understandable that because of all the complexities of the situation in which you find yourself, plus certain interpersonal irritations, that unwise things should be said and indiscreet remarks published.

I beg you, however, to remember that the ultimate goals for which we strive are not to prove our independence or superiority vis-a-vis a Jewish Agency Director or an Israeli Rabbi or an Iraqi fellow-Jew or a Bene Israel community politician. Our goal is, quite simply, the preservation, survival, and further development of a beloved but long-ignored branch of Kelal Israel - namely, our brothers, the Bene Israel of India. In order to achieve this goal, we must sometimes learn to exercise the kind of restraint that makes heavy

demands upon us, and the kind of patience which cannot ordinarily be expected of normal human beings. The main reason I was so anxious for you, personally, to accept the position of Executive Director was my confidence in your equanimity, your ability to remain temperate in a highly excitable atmosphere, and the calming effect you demonstrated in otherwise tense situations. I urge you to reexamine the whole situation from the proper perspective, and to make a conscious effort to reassert these precious qualities which G-d has given you. I have told you more than once that, considering the multitude of pressures placed upon the leadership of the Bene Israel community in India, I can understand how people can submit to a feeling of mass hysteria. But these are particularly the kind of situations which call for cool and wise leadership, which will rise above the crowd and redirect it to its ultimate goals. Allow me to call upon you, Abraham, to exercise every ounce of leadership and influence that you have in order to bring to an end this rapidly degenerating situation. Dr. Weiss has already written to you about the forthcoming visits of the two Israeli Rabbis - both of them Ashkanazi and with American experience. I cannot urge you strongly enough to go out of your way to welcome these gentlemen, to create the kind of mood which will make it possible for them to succeed in their sacred mission, and to offer them personal guidance so that they steer clear of any unnecessary involvements or exacerbations. Dr. Weiss has already mentioned, in his letter, what is evidently a serious misunderstanding of the nature of Gittin. I wish to affirm that the writing of the document, in every single detail, is of extreme Halakhic importance, against which the permission for the couple to seek a divorce is only of secondary significance.

I hope and pray - and I am confident - that you will not fail me in the critical months that lie ahead. World Orthodox Jewry stands at one of the great crises of its history. Its Western Branch has a great responsibility-- but our brothers of the East have an equal responsibility to be forgiving and understanding. In the historic drama of reunification and redemption, you must feel that you, personally, have a great role to play in all this, and that the Penkars and the others have an equal stake and responsibility, for which we shall all ultimately have to account before the Almighty, the G-d of Israel.

Do go back to your work with great vigor and largeness of soul, and may G-d grant that your tasks be crowned with success.

Sincerely,

RABBI NORMAN LAHN

NL:ff

CC: Dr. S. R. Weiss
Mr. M. Feurestein
Mr. Max Stern