



Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations
of America

84 FIFTH AVENUE • NEW YORK 11, N. Y. • ALgonquin 5-4100

MEMORANDUM

ב"ה

DATE: 1 Av 5723
July 22, 1963

TO: Mr. Max Stern, Chairman, Overseas Commission

FROM: Dr. Samson R. Weiss

SUBJECT: Enclosed Report of Rabbi Gotthold

Enclosed please find a copy of Rabbi Gotthold's report, received this morning, together with the copies of pertaining press statements and correspondence which he enclosed.

Rabbi Gotthold's reference to our failing him in London is unfortunate. Here, for your information, are the facts:

The first we heard of Rabbi Gotthold's presence in London was through a wire we received on Wednesday, May 22nd in which he informed us that he is departing on Sunday, May 26th for Bombay and in which he requested \$1,000. After consultation with your good self and Rabbi Lamm, I replied by wire that he should call Rabbi Lamm collect on Thursday morning, May 23rd, in view of information received that public protests were planned for his arrival.

Rabbi Gotthold did not phone as requested. Thereupon, I sent a second wire on Thursday recommending that he proceed only after phone consultation with Dr. Wahrhaftig whom we also informed by wire of the situation. The wire concluded as follows:

"PLEASE WIRE IMMEDIATELY DECISION REACHED WILL THEN CABLE FUNDS."

On Friday, May 24th, Rabbi Gotthold phoned Rabbi Lamm and informed him that he had decided to proceed to Bombay. Accordingly, we immediately cabled \$1,000 to Rabbi Gotthold.

I can see no failure in this procedure.

It appears to me from Rabbi Gotthold's report that it was known to him while still in London that Rabbi Kushelevsky would not come to India. In any event, he did not inform us until now about his efforts to obtain in Europe non-Israeli rabbi to join him in India.

Ambassador Hotel,
Churchgate Reclamation,
Bombay-1,
India.

July 16, 1963.

Rabbi Samson R. Weiss, Executive Secretary
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America,
84 Fifth Avenue,
New York 11, N.Y.

Dear Rabbi Weiss,

Herewith I confirm our telephone conversation of last night at the receipt of your cable of July 11, signed by Max Stern. At present, I have no time to enter into argumentation and I rely on your commitment that I shall not be left stranded again without funds as was the case when you failed me in London.

As I told you on the phone, I assumed that you are receiving reports about my activities here from your local Executive Secretary, Mr. Jhirad. I shall submit a full report on my return to Israel. At your request, this shall serve to enlighten you about the situation here.

You will recall that there were severe doubts at the last moment whether I ought to proceed to Bombay from London. I took it upon myself to venture there because I saw a steady deterioration aggravated by our procrastinations and indecision. My spot decision was later on confirmed by Dr. Warhaftig. In Europe, I had made efforts to secure the participation of at least one non-Israeli rabbi. For this purpose I contacted the Rabbinical Conference at Basle, talked to Rabbi Suleiman Sassoon Hakham Gaon, the Chief Rabbi's office, and arranged for a talk between Rabbi Grosnas and Dr. Warhaftig. I went to Amsterdam to negotiate directly with the younger Pereira. There was no tangible result. I mention this particularly with reference to an argument which is constantly thrown into my face here: "You want to tell us that the UOJCA representing three million Jews, an all-European Jewry can find none but Israeli rabbis to serve us?"

As has been pointed out in several publications, I sneaked in here on May 27. A few days earlier, a black-flag demonstration caused by false reports from the Actions Committee in Israel had collided with the police. I met a tense community rife with suspicion and rumours. Even the so-called host organisation, the UOCI showed a hesitant and reluctant welcome. The first to respond co-operatively were of the circles of the United Synagogue. Active demonstrations and pamphleteering continued for about a month, spearheaded by the Bene Israel Purity Justification Committee. However, much graver danger and

damage is being done by the local representative of the Zionist Association and World Jewish Congress, Mr. Hershel Cynovobicz. This man had sought me out in Jerusalem, greatly perturbed by the news that a Rabbinical Delegation will be coming to Bombay and he had not been informed about it until his visit to Israel this April. He demanded that all preparations and plans be concentrated in his hands. He pointed out that this is purely a Synagogue affair and he had nothing to do with the organisation which he purported to represent. We also took the trouble to check on him at the Jewish Agency and the World Jewish Congress, receiving strong advice to keep away from him. At our meeting in Jerusalem, he put it bluntly: "If you are not with me, I am against you." This pledge he has made good. Some of the visible manifestations are the completely fabricated rumour reports appearing in the Jewish Chronicle by their Bombay correspondent who is also the editor of Mr. Cynovobicz's "The Indo-Israel Review" and in his pay.

I have succeeded in piercing the opposition here and obtained the co-operation of all synagogues; even with the Bene Israel Purity Justification Committee, a truce agreement has been reached. However, since some of the enclosed publicity caused by my presence here has allegedly done irreparable damage to Indo-Israeli relations, I am under strong pressure by and through the Israeli Consul General here to leave India at the Consul's earliest convenience.

I have been dealing so far with twenty-seven cases of divorce applications and similar matrimonial disputes. Last week, one divorce has been transacted in the co-operation of the Iraqi Scribe and two Bene Israel, Jerusalem-trained teachers as witnesses. Four more divorces are due to be transacted this week. Of twelve applications for conversion, three have been transacted last week and seven more are due this week. The latter are mostly applicants not of the Bi Community, whereas family disputes are about two-thirds in their community. Besides these, I have been kept busy on consultations of important communal and personal problems in this area as well as in Cochin. There is at present no Miqweh anywhere in India and has not been for quite some time. You draw your own inference. I am going to qualify one this week by using artificial ice. I am also establishing procedure for Kitvu-Uttenu with regard to future divorce transactions to be carried out in Israel through agents. There is no possible way of relying on qualified personnel here. I spent many hours in briefing the abovementioned three colleagues in the fundamentals of Dinai Geurushin Meguerim, but at best, left at their own, they can see to it that proper authorisation for a deputation is carried out.

So far, I have given over forty addresses and lectures, participated in many meetings and conferences, interviews and counselling sessions. The work has been very frustrating, the progress is slow and I feel that I have achieved more

than could be expected from the outset. Expenses are also higher than expected. It is a sad joke that Rabbi Lamm had a car at his disposal by courtesy of the Israeli Consulate when visiting the Konkan villages. I have not even been shown the most fundamental civility by the hostile personnel of the Consulate and have to make these and similar visits on my expense account. The abovementioned team of witnesses and scribe have to accompany me also to Poona and Ahmedabad so that for all practical purposes we have expenses tantamount to the presence of Rabbis Kushelevsky and Zioni. I also have to stay at a hotel more expensive than others (not as expensive as the Taj Mahal) after I consulted the Commissioner of Police with regard to threats and denunciations.

You ought to have briefed me better on the affairs of the UOCI. It was known only at a later stage that I had access to some correspondence which clarified somehow the development since Rabbi Weinberg's visit here. Except for the publication "Mebasser", no activity on their part is manifest. I am pinning some hope on the disbanded youth group of the Union with whom I met and worked out several projects. I shall not at present comment on the tripartite division of the synagogue in addition to the unaffiliated of the Iraqi, Cochin and village communities. The liberal Religious Union has maintained a rabbi for many years and is making every effort to engage one again. The conservative organisation, frustrated by internal fights amongst three strongmen, can at present claim only one synagogue in Bombay. I am working on the establishment of a council for synagogue affairs which will improve representatives of all factions or denominations; the prospects are none to bright.

In conclusion of this interim report, I should like to state that I have originally come to prepare the ground for the work of a full-fledged Bethdin. For various technical reasons, these plans will not materialise. Therefore, I have decided to deal with all matters as competently as I can for want of a better solution. I know that this may not be satisfactory to all quarters. However, judgment ought to be reserved until the situation here is fully understood. I have been placed into an unhappy position which always has to count with the lesser evil, but I could not with a good conscience turn my back towards the problems and leave as I was bidden to do by the local Jewish community and the Israeli representative here.

Sincerely yours,

Leah Hold