

מדינת ישראל
STATE OF ISRAEL
Ministry for Religious Affairs

Jerusalem, Sivan 20, 5721

June 4, 1961

36/1

מס'

Rabbi Norman Lamm,
THE JEWISH CENTER,
131, West 86th St.,
New York City 24,
U.S.A.

Dear Rabbi Lamm:

Last Thursday [redacted] arrived in Israel. On Friday morning I went to see him at the "Kol Torah Yeshivah", and to confer with him and the leaders of the Yeshivah. I do not have to tell you that he makes a very fine impression. However, his background and knowledge are so far below the standard of the Yeshivah that we can hope until the holidays he will merely benefit from the atmosphere of the institution and make friends with his fellow-students. His Hebrew is not developed enough to permit him profitably to participate in any class. He will need private tutoring from Siddur and Chumash to intensive Hebrew language training to prepare him to enter the Mekhinah for the Winter-term.

The administration of the Yeshivah is ready to maintain him as far as room-and board is concerned. Other arrangements have not been clarified when you at Max Stern discussed the project with him. I suggest that you instruct them on this point. They plan to engage some of their own students as tutors, but for his language studies he needs a good professional teacher. Furthermore, he needs clothing and books. Pocket money the Yeshivah is willing to provide as if he were a regular student. You know that in consideration of his sensitivity we cannot hand him out second-hand clothing. He will need a clothing-budget of about LI. 250.-- As far as books are concerned, including Tefilin and paraphernalia we shall try to meet the needs between our Ministry and the Jewish Agency.

We share your deep sorrow about the scandalous and provocative commotion regarding the so-called status of the Bnai Israel within the Jewish Community of Israel. [redacted] let me have the copy of the Indian Express, Bombay, Thursday May 11, 1961, featuring on the front page a report from Jerusalem, May 10, under the headline "MARRIAGE BAR ON INDIAN JEWS". You know that something has been smouldering even at the time when you were here. I think the new explosion was touched off by a very stupidly (or viciously) phrased query in the Kenesset by Ruth Hektin (Achdut Avodah Poalai Zion) which allegedly was prompted by rumours about a bar on marriage for Indian Jews "because they are impure Jews". Our parliamentary procedure requires a reply by the Minister in charge of Religious Affairs. The reply has been prepared for him at our Ministry, denying that such ruling exists and deploring the usage of terms like "impure Jews" which has no basis anywhere. The query includes all Jews of Indian origin, even Bagdadians, and knows of no special problem of the Bnai Israel. To my knowledge, the official answer has not yet been given in the Kenesset. The irresponsible element in this affair is the initiative of the reporter, or the person who put him on to it, to broadcast an

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ill-informed question with questionable intent, and tracing its source to a revelation by Israeli Jewish religious authorities. I assure you that there has been no such revelation.

Upon the receipt of the Resolution adopted by the Executive of the O.J.C.I. on 17th May 1961, we cabled back the following:

" Resolution of Union Orthodox Jewish Congregations of May seventeenth based on unfounded misleading information Stop Allegations about Israel Jewish Religious Authorities decision vicious and dangerous fabrication please correct your misinformation Shalom
(Sgd) Gotthold Ministry for Religious Affairs.

In the wake of the commotion there appeared reports about this resolution in Israeli newspapers with insinuations in keeping with election-year pamphleteering. Rabbi Ittamar (Wohlgeleerner) has given an official answer in the "Jerusalem Post". The Director-General of our Ministry, Dr. S.Z. Kahane, has confirmed the indubitably Jewish Status of the Bnai Israel to the numerous inquiries directed to him. A delegation consisting of M.K. Rabbi M. Nurock, M.K. Dr. Z. Warhaftig, and Prof. A. Tartakower of the W.J.C. have called upon Rabbi Nissim prevailing upon him to agree with the decisions of the late Chief Rabbis Uziel and Herzog, and publish an unequivocal statement. Rabbi Nissim claims that no such inquiry has been ~~to~~ submitted to him yet by any representative of the Bnai Israel. He bases his objections also on the travelogue reports by Jacob Sapir who, on his various travels met Bnai Israel in Aden and Bombay (1859). I recommend that you examine the evidence as recorded in Sapir's books.

In the light of the recent developments, and after consultation with our Dr. Kahane, I propose again that you make it possible for Rabbi Aaron Shweika to proceed to Bombay and assume the position of spiritual leader for all Jews there.

With best regards

and Greetings from Zion,

Z. Gotthold

Rabbi Zev Gotthold

Director of the Department for Contact with the Diaspora.

הרב איתמר (Wohlgeleerner) כראא לי היום העתק תשובתו
של הרב שמואל רוזנבוים, אשר פוסק איתר גמור. תשובה זו בשעתה
נחזרה נדי אספק חזר אמתותו של הרב נסים. מאז תשובת
ל' יעקב קלטר (מחריק'ל) המציטטת כבר בקנטרס, משלבת
מריבוא' נדב ל' יעקב ספיר ועד התשובות בדורנו לא החמירו
באף תשובה בנתה. הרב נסים מחנה (!) כי יפיל אצלנו בעלי הדין
והוא הביטוי אפסוק אהם.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

Bombay, Thursday , May 11, 1961

(FRONT PAGE)

Marriage Bar On Indian Jews

Jerusalem, May 10.

Israeli Jewish religious authorities have revealed that Indian-born Jews, particularly those from the Bombay region, are not pure Jews and, therefore, cannot marry members of other Jewish communities in Israel.

The authorities have refused to grant marriage licenses to these Jews, basing their ruling mainly on the fact that there is no organised Indian Council of Rabbis.

The 7,000-strong Indian Jewish community has formed a 60-member "Action Committee" to defend its interests ". They claim that observance of the 2,000-year -old Jewish tradition and of Mosaic law justifies their claim to be " pure Jews ".

They also point out that in 1950 the Grand Rabbi of the European Rite, Itzhak Herzog, sent two holy books of the Torah to Indian Jews still living in the Bombay region.

"How could a Grand Rabbi send Holy Books to infidels? They ask. The President of the Indian Jewish Community in Israel, Prof. Hail Yehezkel, has tried to calm his outraged fellow-Jews.

" As a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, I am p opposed to all voilent methods. " he announced. " We are sure tjat Israel does not wish to set up a caste system ".

The Indian Jewish community lives mainly in the towns of Jerusalem, Beersheba, Kiryat, Schmona and Nathanya. - AFP.