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December 11, 1961

Rabbi Solomon Sassoon
15 Sollershott East
Letchworth Herts. England

Dear Rabbi Sassoon:

I feel somewhat guilty in writing to you because of my neglect in doing so until now. My visit with you in London last January left a very deep impression upon me and I, by all means, should have corresponded with you instead of merely exchanging regards through various visitors and via correspondence with others.

The matter about which I write to you about now is quite urgent. I am sure you are in close touch with the complex developments in Israel on the Bene Israel question. The situation as it stands today is that Rabbi Nissim has announced a permissive decision, but has not yet instructed the local Rabbinate to act on the basis of this "heter." A good part of the "right wing" of the Israeli Rabbinate has been quite articulate in opposing the decision.

I spoke with Rabbi Unterman via overseas telephone this morning and he informed me that one of the key issues is the announcement made by the leaders of the Sassoon Synagogues in Bombay, reversing the old ban on intermarriage with Bene Israel and urging Iraqi Jews to welcome the Bene Israel as their brothers. It seems that simultaneous with or shortly after this proclamation the archives of the correspondence with the Beth Din in Baghdad were ~~burnt~~. *quite a few years ago* *destroyed*

In a series of articles in the Agudists newspaper in Jerusalem, Rabbi Waldenberg has pointed to this event as proof that the Baghdadi Beth Din never permitted intermarriage and that the action of the community leaders was one of open resistance to the religious authorities.

Rabbi Unterman now seeks clarification of this somewhat mysterious event. His own analysis of the episode is that the community leaders of Iraqi Jewry in India were all pious and devout people and would not have done what they did without the ecclesiastical approval.

What is needed, therefore, is a clarification of what happened at that time. Do you have any specific information about this event? Do you think that, in any event, the community leaders would have taken the law into their own hands against Rabbinic advice? And if the announcement concerning the Bene Israel was approved by the religious authorities, how can one explain the destruction of the archives?

I would be most grateful to you if you were to forward that information to me and, at the same time, to Rabbi Unterman and perhaps Rabbi Nissim. Alternatively, you can let me know the answers to these questions and I will notify the Israeli authorities.

Rabbi Solomon Sassoon

Please do be kind enough to respond to my letter as soon as possible, and please convey my warmest regards to Rabbi Feuchtwanger, and if they are still in England at this time, to Mr. and Mrs. Ellis Meyer.

Sincerely yours,

RABBI NORMAN LAMM

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cc. Dr. Weiss