

December 31, 1962

Mr. Abraham Jhirad
U.O.J.C.I.
c/o Magen Hasidim Synagogue
8, Moreland Road
Bombay 11, India

Dear Abraham:

I just received, this morning, a copy of the latest Mebasser (December 15, 1962). In general, I was quite satisfied with it. However, I have always been honest with you and hope to be so in the future, and must therefore take exception to your column on the next to the last page, "Answers to our Correspondents."

The first section of that column could easily have been written by a Reform writer, or by an avowed secularist. If you think that the Bene Israel problem will somehow be solved through the abandonment of religious weddings in Israel as the only officially recognized form of marriage, you are gravely mistaken. It can only be exacerbated beyond words.

You know how I feel about the Bene Israel "problem" as it has developed these past two years. I believe you read my letter to Mr. Isaiah Shapurkar. I think you know me sufficiently, from personal contact and from exchange of correspondence, to appreciate that I am not insensitive to the anguish that my dear friends of the Bene Israel community have experienced. However, by shedding tears of sympathy in your column for the "Progressive Congregations" and bemoaning Rabbinic supervision of marriage, and especially quoting favorably the opinions of The Jewish Chronicle (which has, in effect, become an organ for Conservatism) and, worst of all, apologizing for the "League Against Religious Coercion" -- this vitiates everything both you and we stand for. That the U.O.J.C.I. finds itself in a peculiar dilemma, I understand and appreciate quite well. But I do think that presenting the demands of militant agnostics in a favorable light is a luxury none of us can afford.

I repeat to you what I have said so often in the past -- the Bene Israel situation is not an insoluble problem, and that time will heal much more than we can appreciate at present.

You know very well that in Israel there are bona fide Rabbis who will marry Bene Israel with other Jews, and that Dr. Solomon Gaon, the Haham of the Sephardim in England, with whom I am in constant contact, treats Bene Israel as no different from any other Jews in any aspect of Jewish law.

I assume, therefore, that the publication of such material is a kind of "slip" that all editors, myself included, are sometimes guilty of. While it is no great tragedy, I would make every effort to avoid that kind of over-statement in the future.

Please let me hear from you in general as soon as possible. And please be assured of my continuing interest in and deep friendship for you and each and everyone of my Indian Jewish friends.

Most sincerely yours,

RABBI NORMAN LAMM

NL:ff

CC: Mr. Moe Feurstein, Dr. S. R. Weiss