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General Assembly of Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare
Funds speech [Toronto, Canada]. 16 November 1956.

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ADDRESS BY RABBI HERBERT A. FRIEDMAN

to General Assembly of
Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds

Toronto, Canada
Friday, November 16, 1956.

RABBI HERBERT A. FRIEDMAN, New York, U.S.A. :

Julian, Ladies and Gentlemen: I think we are highly under the spell, and I think it is tremendously inept for anyone to be thrust upon you after that. You should be left alone to sit in silence and think.

My father once said I was a lucky fellow, the way things turned out in my life. I am not very lucky right now, to try to talk after that is an almost impossible chore!

~~There is one thing Abe didn't say.~~ In relating the record of the last 25 years, ^{Abe Harman gave} ~~the way he began and~~ ~~going, as he did,~~ to the clearest explanation you will ever hear in your life of what happened in the last two weeks, ^{but he} ~~he suggested,~~ ^{in just 20 many words,} but did not say, what the essential meaning of that event of the 29th of October was.

The essential meaning of it was that that night represented the stopping of Hitler at the Rhine in 1936, because if somebody had done to Hitler in 1936 at the Rhine, when it would have been cheap to do what Israel tried to do two weeks ago, you and I and the world would have been on their knees in thankful gratitude. ^{to another Hitler}

And I say, because this is my reading of history,

that there will come forward yet those who will be on their knees in retrospective gratitude that Israel did what she did!

Now, enough, because I can't talk about that any more after ^{abc} he did.

I want to say a simple thing: From October the 1st, ¹⁹⁵⁶ until today, November the 14th, there came into Israel, during the days of the fighting, before and after, 12,000 human beings — 12,000 fresh men, women and children came to country at the time when others ~~sought to run, and when~~ ^{it might be hard to} still others could not understand what would motivate, what would impel people, and what would direct a thrust of immigration ^{during} at those very days and nights.

I would remind you that in 1948... ~~this is the way~~ I shall begin and in a few moments ~~this is the way I shall~~ end... ^{life and} in 1948 during the first year of her fighting and ~~her end,~~ one quarter of a million Jews came to Israel, and in 1956 and 1957, during the year of her fighting and the achieving of her peace which shall come, scores and scores of thousands of Jews, perhaps not a quarter of a million, will come to Israel, and this is almost as though time had stopped for eight years. We began this

thing with war and with immigrants, and I believe that in the ninth year time will start to move again, because I believe that war will be over and peace can come.

How did 12,000 people come in in these six weeks?

They came in because there was a decision made around a table which is ^{an} apparently undramatic way to do things, yet the way by which mountains are moved and nations are built, ⁿ there was a decision around a table which is epitomized on one sentence: Whoever can come out can come in.

Simple! Undramatic! Whoever can come out will come in.

And this same ^{Apa} ~~Av~~ Harman asked a question of us in Jerusalem a few days ago. ^{In paraphrase his question went thus,} ~~He put this question this~~

~~way and he said,~~ Why should a man with a wife and children living in Warsaw in October 1956, knowing what is going on in Israel, why should that man take his wife and his children and perhaps his aged parents, and bring them with him on the long trek to what? To imminent bombs over Tel Aviv perhaps. Why should he do it? He does it because in the very City of Warsaw he looks at the ruins of the ghettos and he thinks back to that

Passover

~~passive~~ week in 1943 when there were Jews who wanted to fight back but who did not possess what he called the objective capacity to do so, ~~and~~ leaving the smell and the ashes of that Warsaw ghetto, where his friends a few year ago tried to fight back and lost their lives doing so, he says, "I shall move on to a place where whatever the situation is, where again I may be killed, nevertheless I have on thing that I don't have here I have got a chance to fight so that my children may live."

That is why he moved. That is why he is on the road. That is why in the closed confines of this room you should know, not for any publication, that week in and week out, two hundred, two hundred fifty, three hundred, ~~may have come from the places in Warsaw to Vienna, and from~~ *have come from Poland* there they are air-lifted to Lydda.

And there are people in this room who saw him, *those* that Jew from Warsaw, stepping off the plane in Lydda, after eight years in a Communist prison, after ten years of being separated from freedom, after fifteen years of being separated from other Jews.

There is nothing secret about this in the sense that we are trying to hide something of which we are ashamed.

I said this is not for publication because there are behind ~~him~~ the three hundred who come each week, the thousands who want yet to come, and there is nothing we should do to jeopardize them, and a public description of this might jeopardize them.

Why does ^{the Jew} he come from Morocco? The simple person ^{of the village} perhaps ~~that~~ uneducated ^{one} person, that man who in his stage of life and culture might be expected to be most terrified of the death which could rain down on him from the skies, why does he come?

When I asked him that in a camp outside of Casablanca a few weeks ago, he brought forward out of his midst an old man whose ear was cut with a notch -- a big chunk taken out of it -- and he brought the man to me and he said, "This is why we go. Never mind what happens ^{That there might be war in Israel.} there. No one will cut our ears and cut our throats and blind our eyes. That is why we go."

You heard about Hungary. I want to say something about Hungary. I am ashamed. There is a place called ³ Nikolsdorf, a small village on the border between Hungary and Austria. For nine days ~~Nikolsdorf~~ was the door to Freedom. If you and I had placed somewhere in Europe money and

Nikelsdorf

manpower we could have thrust the long arm of rescue into Mikolfdorf and pulled out five thousand, ~~then~~ thousand, fifty thousand.

You may say this is a theoretical possibility --- we don't keep treasuries abroad we don't keep a cache of manpower abroad we don't have a small army of Jewish rescue workers working somewhere to be thrown into the fray when a fire breaks out. We could -- we should!

The only clue is money. The political opportunity was there.

The Jews in Hungary report that they were caught in a trap. They were shot at from both sides. The rebels shot them because they called them Communists and the Communists shot them because they called them agents of the West.

There is no future there. Who knows when that Mikolfdorf or any other Mikolfdorf will be open into which we can put the arm, but not a weak, impotent arm which has not strength behind it. It has to be an arm with a muscle which is flexed with millions. Then that arm has got strength.

Now we ask you for two things this year, because we told you about two predictions. We said to you, all of us in this room who had the responsibility of coming to talk to you, and almost every one in this room had the responsibility of talking to others, we said to you that there were two things that would happen this year for which vast quantities of money were needed.

We said that there would be military danger for Israel and we said that there would be a time when the clock would run out in Morocco.

Both things happened. We didn't even exaggerate. *I would like to say two things*
I said, and you mark this well, here and now, in
November of 1956, and I tell you two things. There will
please mark them well.
be in the period ahead of us, in my judgment, and I speak for no one but myself, ~~very much more military situations~~ *with brackets* in which Israel will be involved. But we can break through to peace, and I told you before that I thought the breakthrough was possible in the year ahead.

The second thing that I will venture to say is that the tear in the Iron Curtain which has now made itself clear can be ripped asunder in a really massive way.

If the Communist Empire begins to crumble or

weaken or suffer sledge hammer attack upon it which will make it less monolithic than it was, we, bold and clever if we are, can rip it asunder to the end that we will rescue some Jews -- some -- many, many. That is the possibility in the year ahead.

And I forget not the Jews of North Africa. We don't use them only for one year and throw them away and forget them. There will be thousands of Jews from North Africa who will also come this year, but there is a new opportunity.

If we came to you last year and made two predictions that two things would happen, and ask you to respond because these two things were overpowering in their compulsion upon us, I come to you now and I say that the two things which I bring you now are so much more ~~compulsive~~ and compelling that you and I must manage to find a response this year which will make last year look like a very small campaign.

I submit the premise to you that all extraordinary methods are valid this year for us to achieve what we can.

If Russia attacks Israel, if even in Egypt there develops another Korea, we may be able to do nothing but

pick up the ashes later.

If World War III emerges, if even a Korea develops, I am not sure that we, by our power alone, can stand against such gigantic and catastrophic forces. But short of that I tell you simply what I see. I see that there must be burned into the minds of Jordan, Syria and Irak, what I am positive is now burned into the mind of Egypt, that military adventure against Israel is not possible, and she will not be destroyed, and that she is here to stay, and when they learn that lesson there will be peace. That is the break-through. There will be peace when they know that there cannot be destruction.

Before we get to the point of the break-through, on the threshold of which I feel we are, I say quite solemnly I think there must be further military adventure. The dynamic of the current history calls for it.

If that is the situation, then I say that this is the year when, like you break through the sound barrier with a jet plane, and you need the maximum thrust in the engine to break the sound barrier, following which you are out in the peaceful quiet of success--this is the year when if the break-through is possible, we provide the thrust to go through the barrier. ^{must}

Now, I have written these sentences out. I say, most solemnly, that urgent aid is needed from American Jewry in unprecedented proportions, and I say that aid to Israel at this moment overshadows, by so far as to be incomparable, all other problems currently existing in American Jewish communal life. Nothing else we are doing comes near it.

I know that there are two objections to issuing a call in language as strong as I have just used.

The first objection is that if you are calling for an all-out effort now, what about next year? I am interested in next year. Israel will need us next year and next year and next year, for a long time. Everyone knows that. But next year to me is an eternity away, to which I must come alive before I can think of it.

I trust the Jews of America for next year. I know that you will not be found wanting next year or any next year.

I say next year let us see what Israel's position is and then try to decide what to do about it. That is the only answer I have to the objection that if we go all out now what about next year?

The second objection is that if you say Israel first, which is what I have said, what about our own communal growth and apparatus and development?

I think I know as well as anyone the value of a strong and growing American Jewish community. Thank God for it, because out of its strength has come all the aid to Israel that has been possible up to now. I don't suggest neglecting it or destroying it or allowing it to deteriorate. I suggest holding it at a level of suspension when other things must come first, and, as I say, this can be done if there are present within us three concepts: ^{we} If ~~you~~ we have an understanding of history and ~~if~~ we know the meaning of the moment; secondly, if we have a sense of proportion; and, thirdly, and perhaps this is most important, if we have courage and skill.

Skill. Things which have to be suspended can be suspended and not allowed to be broken or deteriorated or disappear, but can be held in suspension if we have the skill by which to hold things in suspension.

We refinance, we hold off. We deep-freeze -- we take it out and eat it next year.

I call here upon you, the delegates to the official body of the Jewish Welfare Funds and Federations of the United States, to listen to this program which I would most humbly submit to you, and would ask you to find the ways and means of implementing.

One, let the Welfare Funds and Federations revise their allocations sharply to give to the United Jewish Appeal in 1956, where possibly, or certainly in 1957, the largest possible share of your community campaigns.

When I say "sharply", I do not mean one or two or three per cent---I mean sharply, if you accept the premise.

Two, let the Welfare Funds and the Federations search their Reserves and give to the United Jewish Appeal these unusual ^{contributions} ~~breaks~~ which obviously cannot be repeated, once you give them up and which the Welfare Funds might well have been saving for many an important worthy purpose. There is no denying that. In the simple vernacular, I can only say this is the rainy day for which we have saved up, if we have anything saved up.

Thirdly, let Welfare Funds and Federations investigate

with other Jewish agencies in their communities, their beneficiaries sometimes or not, whether those other agencies have reserve funds which can be called forward by loan to the Welfare Funds or loan to the U.J.A. or by any other means.

There are many agencies in our Jewish communal apparatus which happily have reserve funds.

Fourthly, let all special interest groups, synagogues, fraternal organizations, all similar groups of this sort, make gifts out of their treasuries to the Welfare Funds and the Federations, and provide workers out of their constituencies to help raise a better campaign. I don't just say workers, but I say monies out of their treasuries is a reasonable right to expect at an hour of Jewish decision.

Fifthly and lastly, I say let the Welfare Funds and the Federations attempt to reschedule their bank payments where this is judicious and would not be normal, ^{dangerous} so that the United Jewish Appeal can have more money.

Are we talking about something we cannot do? You and I know that there is almost nothing that we can't do if we want to. The Jewish will is like the hardest diamond.

It is beautiful to look at. It can penetrate the hardest granite. Our will is like a diamond which can do anything, which thrills us by its sparkle, and which achieves miracles time and time and time again. We have nothing that is worth more. The Jewish will is to live.

We have stood here in America for Jewish survival and living. We could have taken the easy way out through assimilation in a free environment. We didn't do it. We built into our communities and apparatus, and we built into our children an attitude designed to protect us from disintegration in a free land where it might have been easy.

This Jewish ^{option} operation for survival here in a free United States makes no sense to me if, simultaneously, we do not protect it everywhere else. Jewish survival in the world is indivisible. It cannot exist in ~~Dayton~~ ^{Wilmington} if it does not exist in Warsaw, and it cannot exist in Casablanca if it does not exist in Camden.

This is an algebraic equation in the ^{Jewish} world, whether it is New York to Hatanya, or London to Lydda or Johannesburg to Jerusalem. No section can live or long endure, not

matter how large or powerful when it is cut off from the other brackets.

The Jewish will has brought us here through thousands of clouded years of history. Here is the fantastic moment of birth, challenged so quickly. The clock stopped for these eight years. The Break-Through -- perhaps only after more war to peace -- the Break-Through -- perhaps only after more frustrations to that vast treasury of European Jews.

I think that you would not want to make yourselves ignoble after such a long record of generous support, and I think that at this possible moment of Break-Through, the Jewish will can carry all of us to incredible heights of achievement.

I call you back to the high mood of 1948, and I call you forward to the highest giving in 1957 which we ever have achieved and I call you forward to it because I know two things, as sure as I know that I am alive: I know that you can do it, and I know that you want to do it.

Thank you very much.

"The heaviest immigration in years is now coming to Israel and is creating a vast new emergency for the people of Israel at a time when they are confronted with the most critical problems of survival since achieving independence," Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman, Executive Vice Chairman of the United Jewish Appeal today warned delegates to the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. "Since the beginning of October alone, right through the most tense days of fighting, immigration continued and more than 12,000 people entered Israel," Rabbi Friedman said.

In an appeal to the delegates, the UJA Executive head declared: "Tens of thousands of Jewish lives can be saved only if American Jews come to the prompt and full aid of the people of Israel as they struggle to take in and absorb those who plead to come in now. These are days of the greatest opportunity for rescue."

The immigrants who are coming are arriving from countries whose doors were thought to be closed. They constitute a life or death immigration. Either they come in now or they may never have another chance. In addition hundreds of thousands of earlier arrivals to Israel have not been getting the financial help they need to complete their absorption.

Israel has been overwhelmed in recent months by border raiders, suicide squads of Egyptian invaders, and an environment of threat, attack, blockage which has made the security problem one of uppermost concern. If the security position of the people of Israel made it hard for them to share in meeting the humanitarian needs of the newcomers in 1956, think of how much more difficult it will be in the future. When this whole situation exploded in the events of the past two weeks, it became clear that the hard-pressed people of Israel would be unable to give very much financial help to new immigrants. The immigrants who would continue to come, should be the total responsibility of the Jews of the free world. Israel could keep her doors open even in the face of everything. But our help became even more indispensable.

And the immigrants continue to come. Jews living in various countries, are

leaving areas of danger and oppression in a bid to reach haven in Israel. They know what they are walking into. They know full well the threats of the Arab world to destroy Israel, threats which were repeated by Iraq just the day before yesterday. And yet they are not deterred, for life in a land of freedom is their most precious objective.

We must not forget that in 1948, when Israel was attacked by five Arab armies, nevertheless scores of thousands of refugees and immigrants poured in. They are coming now again, and it is our task to save them.

Nothing the American Jewish community is doing is more important than this. Support of the people of Israel and this current immigration possess an urgency of life and death which must take precedence over all communal projects. We must prepare for a fundraising effort which will be greater than anything we have ever done in the past. We must take extraordinary steps to meet the most extraordinary needs.

The UJA chief executive said: "I call upon the Welfare Funds and Federations across the entire United States to begin all necessary planning. Every possibility for raising more money must be explored. Allocations from Welfare Funds to the UJA should be sharply increased. Unusual grants from community gr reserves should be made. Agencies which have reserve funds should loan them to the Welfare Funds to be made available to the UJA. Special groups such as synagogues, fraternal organizations, and others should hasten to the support of the Welfare Funds with contributions from their treasuries and workers from their constituencies. There must be a total mobilization of the philanthropic apparatus of the American Jewish Community to meet the unprecedented needs of these critical times. Anything less than this will be an inadequate response to the demands of present day history."