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Correspondence. North Africa and Israel trip. 1955.

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1955

Overseas Correspondence





HOTEL EL MANSOUR

HOTELS SOUS LA MÊME ADMINISTRATION

TANGER EL MINZAH
* HOTEL RIF

EN ESPAGNE

MADRID FENIX
BILBAO CARLTON
EL ESCORIAL FELIPE II
GRANADA ALHAMBRA PALACE
MALAGA MIRAMAR
SEVILLA MADRID
VALENCIA REINA VICTORIA

AUX ILES CANARIES

SANTA CRUZ DE TENERIFE MENCEY
PUERTO DE LA CRUZ (TENERIFE) TAORO
LAS PALMAS (CANARIAS) PARQUE
* SANTA CATALINA

27, AVENUE DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE

TÉLÉGRAMMES : MANSOURHOTEL - TÉLÉPHONE : 650-11

CASABLANCA

August 3, 1955

Dear Mel,

Casablanca is quiet right now. The city is still under martial law and there is still a curfew in the evening. But there have been no large street riots or demonstrations for the past several days. Individual incidents still occur and there are shootings and bombings each day.

About two weeks ago, when the rioting was at its height, more than a thousand Jews fled to the European city from the Mellah, the Jewish ghetto quarter. They were running from the Arabs. They sought refuge in the Talmud Torah building. I went directly from the airport to see these people. They were really afraid. If we were able to put all of them on a ship to Israel immediately, they would go en masse.

In view of such episodes, the desire to emigrate is increasing. One morning I went down to the port to see a group embark on the "LYAUTEY" for Marseille, for transshipment to Israel. Their baggage was pathetic, tied with thin pieces of string to protect their few belongings. But their faces were eager because the great new adventure was beginning. They were packed in the deepest hold of the ship. My first thought was that this must have been the way my father came to America from Russia fifty years ago in steerage. It was dark and there was much confusion. Children were crying and people were shouting, trying not to lose each other. In the midst of all this I tried to talk to them. I asked one man, who was 43 years old and had ten children, with no occupation at his command, what he hoped to do in Israel. He said he would do any work, even if that meant cleaning lavatories. He wanted to live some place where his children would be safe and where he himself would be treated as a human being. After talking to others, I could see that this was the general feeling.

I have had hours and hours of conferences with people in all spheres of life, including American Consular officials. It has become crystal-clear to me that there is no future for the majority of the Jewish population of Morocco. If I were asked to state the reasons, as simply as possible, I would offer the following four factors: -

(1) Morocco is a theocracy

The Koran governs this land. All non-Moslems are without protection. There are no civil courts and there is no writ of habeas corpus. A Jew has no place in a Moslem theocracy.

over/...

(2) Danger of life

I do not want to say that every Jew is in danger of being murdered, but as one responsible official wrote: "Anarchy, confusion and riots, which are originally directed against someone else, usually include the Jews as scapegoats". There is no danger of a mass pogrom. But there is constant danger of unexpected outbreaks.

(3) Economic displacement

Jews are gradually being squeezed out of the economy and their functions taken over by Arabs. Under an independent Arab government, Jews will find it increasingly impossible to obtain licenses, permits, franchises, which are necessary for doing business.

(4) Existence of the State of Israel

In a camp just outside of Casablanca, where the people wait to go on board the ships, a lovely blond girl of 17, with a spirit of dedication shining from her eyes, said that she saw no reason to waste her life in a country which was not hers. She said that she wanted to join the Israeli army to help defend the land and to build a better life for herself. Her brother, a mechanic aged 25, said that Morocco was not his country. He wanted to go to his country, and even if equal rights were to be given to Jews here, he would not remain. The people feel that Israel is their own and they want to go home.

This boy and girl, like many others I met, are good stock. They are Jews as we are. Their language may be different but the books they study are the same. They know the meaning of Jewish identification and they can be counted upon to struggle for Jewish survival once they are successfully integrated in Israel. I am convinced they are worth saving. I am also convinced that we must increase the tempo of the program which has been developed for them.

The Joint Distribution Committee has done wonders. I really cannot praise it too highly. It teaches, feeds, heals and makes independent. For the first time in Morocco, Jewish youth a few days ago staged a demonstration, in which they raised their voices to the French and Arabs, demanding equal treatment and protection. The JDC had nothing to do with the demonstration, but it was obvious that a new spirit was being born. We Jews of America have reason to be proud if we have in any small measure contributed to this new feeling of independence on their part.

Sincerely yours, I

Herb

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman
Executive Vice-Chairman

P.S. I am writing this in Casablanca but it will be mailed from Paris. We have decided to do this for security reasons. In view of the present tense situation it is perhaps wiser to mail letters to America from Paris rather than from here. I shall write again, either from Tunis or Yugoslavia.

c.c. Mr Melynh S. Goldstein,
UJA, New York.

AMERICAN JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE
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Rome Date 5th August, 1955.

Mr. Louis Bennett,
United Jewish Appeal
165 West 46 Street,
New York, 36, N.Y.
U. S. A.

Dear Lou:

I am writing you, because, as I recall, you are now back from vacation and Mel has gone.

I arrived in Rome today, and found a couple of letters from him, to which I wanted to reply.

1. Let me finish up the matter of Jimmy Rice. After receiving Mel's cable indicating the negative conclusion to which you fellows had come, I cabled Rice as follows :-

"FIRST REACTION MY OFFICE NEGATIVE IF YOU ARE PRESSED FOR ANSWER UNITED HIAS SUGGEST YOU MAKE DECISION INDEPENDENTLY STOP EMPLOYMENT UJA NOT OUT OF QUESTION IN FUTURE BUT PRESENTLY NOT FEASIBLE STOP SEE YOU MUNICH DISCUSS FURTHER".

When I see him in Munich I will explain fully your reasoning which I now have. I would not want to shut the door on him for good, because I think he is a person who would be helpful to us. I rather suspect he has already accepted the United Hias offer if they were pressing him, but that does not mean we might not want to keep our eye on him for the future.

2. I am certainly willing to accept your reasoning about the Study Mission not leaving New York on the Sabbath. Go ahead and lay on the departure for Friday, October 14th. This simply means that in a pinch we will have to cut one or two days in Israel if the men object to being away from home longer than two weeks. We can keep that flexible.

I agree that there is no point in interjecting the side trips to Tunis and/or Iran at this juncture. Let us first accumulate the members of the Mission. Later we can inform them of these additional possibilities.

Rome, 5th August, 1955.

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3. I received the cable concerning the suggestion to have Senator Lehman as the guest of honour for the January dinner. Has anything further been accomplished along those lines? I would appreciate hearing by the time I reach Israel, because, as you will recall, I was going to plunge in immediately to try to get Ben Gurion for that meeting. I shall certainly go ahead with that scheme, because it would be quite a program to have both men. Information about Lehman's reaction might help me to sell the idea to B.G.
4. Mel wrote that Sid Cohen had asked if I could be kept free for September 11th to attend the opening dinner in Boston. I will be glad to do so. I think we must be very cooperative with them this year, in view of the better deal we have. Have we heard anything from Joe Schwartz about getting Mrs. Weizmann? What further news is there about Truman? If you have not already done so, please call Abe Fineberg and get the latest dope on that situation.
5. Am very glad that you invited the National Chairmen to the meeting on September 6th. If you think it should be enlarged by the addition of anyone else who might benefit by having a report of this trip, please discuss it with Bill Rosenwald and use your judgment. I have really accumulated a tremendous wealth of material, and feel that as many of our leaders as can hear it, should do so.
6. Am delighted to hear about the dates which are working out for various caravan meetings in the fall. Keep at it. You know how often we have spoken about the importance of this. If Pittsburgh is arranging a meeting for September 21 with its most influential people, then perhaps Warburg's suggestion that Eban be called in, should be put into effect for that day. Please discuss it with Eddie to see how he thought Eban could be most effective.
7. Mel wrote about some possible change in date for the Women's Division Mission. He said that he "had not been able to take it up with anyone yet," but would try to do so in the next few days and would keep me informed. I would appreciate your thinking on this matter by the time I get to Israel, so that I can discuss it intelligently with Eisenberg.
8. Mel's letter of August 2nd concerning some publicity on the North African situation, was waiting for me in Rome today (three days is not bad time from New York to Rome). The problem he raises is one with

Rome, 5th August, 1955.

- 3 -

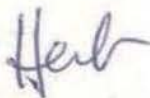
8/with....

which I have been struggling for ten days. There is an explosive situation in Morocco and a much less critical one in Tunisia. If we were able to pull out all the stops, we can really run another "rescue" campaign. But everyone with whom I have spoken seems to be deathly afraid of large-scale publicity in America. I tried to explain that this ties our hands, and they all shrugged their shoulders fatalistically. The Israel officials are afraid that publicity in the States about increased emigration would cause the French to clamp down on that emigration. The local Jewish leaders are afraid that publicity in the States about the bad treatment of Jews, would cause the Arabs to increase that bad treatment. It is a rotten paradox that they need to be helped and yet cannot permit us to set up a sufficient holler to raise more money with which to give them help.

My instinct tells me that it is always better to speak out when there is a dangerous situation. But I may be naive. I really do not know how to answer the question about increasing the publicity, because I do not know how to answer the larger question of how to conduct the campaign itself. You must have by now a copy of the letter about Casablanca which was mailed to the master list. I am also enclosing a copy of a confidential letter which went just to the five people whose names you see at the end. Discuss this with Rosenwald and see what he thinks about pulling the lid off a bit more. I shall also take the matter up in Israel and we will try to formulate a line.

I am sorry that this letter is so long, but it is good that we keep in touch on all these details. Hope you had a good vacation. I shall certainly need one by the time I get back.

As ever,



Herbert A. Friedman.

enc: Copy letter.

c.c. Mr. Melvyn S. Goldstein,
United Jewish Appeal,
New York.

Hope you are
having a good
vacation.

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HAF file
HS/KWA

UNITED JEWISH APPEAL

165 v. 46th St. NYC

MAGKAY RADIO

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES

AUGUST 9, 1955

LT
ERINBURG FRIEDMAN
JOINTFUND
VIENNA (AUSTRIA)

INITIAL RESPONSE LETTER FROM CASABLANCA AUGUST THIRD EXCELLENT. SUGGEST
CONTINUANCE SAME INFORMAL INFORMATIVE DESCRIPTIVE PERSONALIZED NATURE OF
SUGGESTING LETTERS STOP RELATIVE LEMAN JANUARY TWENTYFIRST DINNER
CONSENSUS HE NOTBE APPROACHED ON EVE HIS DEPARTURE TOMORROW INSTEAD
WE ASK HIM ON HIS RETURN FIRST WEEK OCTOBER STOP BY ALL MEANS URGE EFFORT
OBTAIN RESCURION JANUARY TWENTYFIRST WITHOUT REGARD TO POSSIBILITY LEMAN
INVOLVEMENT STOP IMPACT MY JUDGMENT RESCURION COULDBE MORE PRODUCTIVE AND
ENABLE US HOLD LEMAN FOR NINETEENHUNDRED FIFTYSEVEN STOP KEEP ME POSTED
REARDS

BENNETT

H
Bar
HAC file of his trip

Hotel Sacher
Wien I, Philharmonikerstrasse 4

August 12, 1955.

Dear Mel,

From Morocco I flew across North Africa to Tunisia, a country in which 100,000 Jews live amidst 3,500,000 Arabs. There is no mood of tension or terror as exists in Morocco. I would not say there was even any serious physical danger. But there is, nevertheless, a very strong and increasing desire on the part of most of the people to leave the country and emigrate to Israel. In all of last year, 700 left. Now the rate is 700 per month.

Luckily for me, on the day I arrived in Tunis, there happened to be a meeting of the presidents and leaders of all Jewish communities in the country. I had an unusual opportunity to hear a total cross-section of opinion from the largest cities down to the tiniest isolated villages. The Grand Rabbi of the island of Djerba was pointed out and I was eager to speak with him. He has a lovely face, a long white beard, and centuries of rabbinical ancestors. Djerba has been occupied by Jews continuously since the destruction of the first Temple twenty-five hundred years ago. The Grand Rabbi, Shushan Cohen, said he and his people now wanted to leave. This was quite amazing, because they knew they would be destroying a chapter of history if they liquidated the island. And yet he said they did not feel secure about the future and they wanted to go home. For twenty-five hundred years Djerba was still not home.

There are three main reasons why the people want to leave:

1. Fear, insecurity, apprehension about the future, as the Arabs obtain their rights to self-government from the French.
2. Economic squeeze which is resulting from the new slogan "Arabs trade only with Arabs."
3. Good news from Israel, which is trickling back to those whose relatives have already gone ahead and are now reporting back the good tidings about a free life.

The JDC has developed a wonderful program here. Trachoma, tinea, and TB (which I call the Three Terrible T's of North Africa) are slowly being controlled through an extensive medical program. I saw cartons of cheese and butter being distributed, children being fed, teachers being trained, advice being given. It was heartening to know that all this was possible. Those who are emigrating to Israel are going much sounder in body and in spirit as a result of what is being done for them.

over/.....

So, here again in Tunisia, I saw the successful double program of JDC giving assistance inside the country and the Jewish agency helping to emigrate large numbers outside the country - to Israel.

From the hot, backward, poor North African land, I flew northward to Rome and spent a few days discussing the situation of Italian Jewry. There are about 35,000 Jews in Italy of whom 12,000 live in Rome. Roman Jewry is on the whole quite poor and there is an extensive ghetto section in which extreme overcrowding and poverty are apparent. New housing for approximately 400 families is a real necessity.

The JDC works closely with the Union of Italian Jewish Communities and makes its subventions and grants to various organizations through that body. The Union tries to get Italian Jews and the Italian Government to match the help brought in by the JDC from American Jewry. Very often this is successful so that, for instance the CRT schools and the OSS clinics are the beneficiaries of more Italian money than American. This is very good, for it develops a factor of independence on the part of the local agencies and committees. In the long run, the very best we can do for any overseas Jewish community is to help put it on its own feet as quickly as possible.

In line with this, there is a need for a Jewish secondary school in Rome. All education in Italy is Catholic and the Jewish community must create its own schools. So far there are only primary grades. It is obvious that there should be further opportunities for study in Jewish or general subjects. This matter of a secondary school has the Union officers worried because they do not have the funds. And yet they see the need.

The one key question I asked concerned the future of Italian Jewry and I was assured that progress had been made in the last ten years and would continue to be made. There is no doubt that this community will survive and improve, as it works its way, with our help, toward self-support.

Sincerely yours,

Herb

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman
Executive Vice-Chairman



August 18, 1955

After finishing in North Africa and Europe, I came to Israel. My last trip was almost two years ago, and I was prepared for changes. But what met the eye was really startling. There are so many new houses, new villages, new gas stations and new people that even an old visitor must catch his breath. Without being able to describe everything happening here, let me say that the strongest single impression is one of new immigrants being made useful and empty land being filled with crops and settlements. The reclaiming of people and land is the story of Israel in one sentence.

Yesterday I visited several hospitals and old folks homes of Malben (the name under which the JDC operates in Israel). Thousands of social cases -- chronically ill, paraplegic, sclerotic, cerebral palsied, paralytic -- are being slowly nurtured back to maximum rehabilitation. If Malben were not doing this, there would be a crushing burden on the government. Additional thousands of old folks are being enabled to lead dignified lives in pleasant surroundings. At one home in Givat Hashlosha sheltering 500 old people, more than 400 gladly assumed simple chores and duties which keep them busy and earn for them a few pounds of pocket money each month. This gives them a sense of usefulness and self-respect.

There is a perfectly marvelous program of sheltered workshops in which handicapped persons are retrained and employed under constant medical vigilance. I saw hundreds working in carpentry shops and metal shops. Some of the most beautiful furniture in the newest hotel in the country was made in one of these workshops.

In a hospital at Mahane Israel I saw a girl who had come from Iraq four years ago, literally unable to walk and crawling on all fours. Her name is Fortuna, and now, after several operations, good fortune is really beginning to smile on her. She wears heavy orthopedic shoes but at least walks upright. She kept saying "Toda l'Elohim v'toda l'Malben (Thanks to God and thanks to Malben)."

All of this comes under the heading of reclaiming people and making them useful citizens in a new country where every pair of hands is needed. Our money spent in this fashion can really give us great satisfaction.

Today I stood in the midst of a great green field containing a thousand acres of cotton. I have one of the fluffy white pods on the table in front of me as I write. Out there under the hot Negev sun this afternoon, looking at the green and white, so different from the parched brown of previous years, I could only think of the miracle of birth. Give sweet water to thirsty soil, apply dedicated hands, and new life comes forth.

On the way to the Negev, an official of the Jewish Agency Colonization Department explained that he was going to show us something new. He said that food was now plentiful in the land. The new emphasis is on industrial crops. With great enthusiasm he pointed out the really extensive fields of cotton, sorghum, peanuts and sugar beets.

At the end of the journey, deep in the Negev, we stood together at the huge concrete reservoir marking the terminus of the Yarkon-Negev pipeline. It holds a million cubic meters of water. Looking out over the desert surrounding us, he predicted that these industrial crops would soon cover the sand now that the water was available. It was hard to believe, but they have always done the unbelievable in this country.

There is another aspect to the question of filling the Northern Negev with crops and settlements. That is the aspect of security. Empty land is always an invitation to a potential aggressor. The Northern Negev lies uncomfortably close to the Egyptian-held Gaza strip. Once it is filled with people, farm machinery and homes, everyone will realize that it is less vulnerable.

I have had several conversations so far with Mr. Ben-Gurion, Mr. Eshkol and others. Most of these talks have had to do with the question of immigration from North Africa, concerning which I have written to you previously. There is no doubt that a larger immigration is in the offing. There is also no doubt that this will again wreak havoc with Israel's economy. How do you match the human needs of North African Jewry against the economic needs of the State of Israel for stability? In the past Israel has always answered this question by giving priority to human needs. Her leading officials are prepared to do so again, but they are worried.

I have several more days of conferences and visits. Then I shall write again, summing up all my impressions.

Sincerely Yours,

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman,
Executive Vice-Chairman.



file
HS/...

Aug. 29, 1955

Dear Mel:

I had wanted to write this last letter in a calm and orderly fashion. But the headlines from Morocco grew bigger and blacker each day. Virtually the entire population of Israel, from highest official to lowest laborer, has been thinking about the fate of North African Jewry. A great argument is raging. How many new immigrants can be taken in and how quickly? There have been marching demonstrators in the streets almost every day during the past week, urging open immigration.

This overpowering fact of North Africa should always remain at the back of your mind as you consider the following major conclusions:

(1) Technical progress is substantial.

One of the greatest thrills of the entire trip came when I visited a jet plane base somewhere in Israel. The whistling planes circled the countryside in quick, flashing maneuvers, and the ground crews looked skyward with pride. The Commander of the field is a 31-year-old Colonel bearing one of the country's most illustrious names. He has been flying for 14 years, in the RAF and the Israel Air Force. To me the most remarkable fact about the base was that all of his jet pilots were native-born Israelis trained in this country. They were handling hot equipment with the customary cockiness of the Sabra.

This technical progress was obvious not only in the realm of mechanical things such as aircraft but also in the whole field of social planning. The ship-to-settlement program, for example, is perfectly amazing in the skillfulness with which it is executed. Trucks are at the dock at Haifa when the ship carrying new immigrants arrives; within hours the newcomers are at the new settlement in the Lachish (or any other) area where a planning officer is ready with a list of housing assignments; a ten-day stock of food is in the cupboard; all supplies, ranging from beds to a kerosene cooking stove, are already in place; farming implements are waiting to be used. All of this requires coordinated planning of the most advanced kind. I do not think this would have been possible in Israel seven years ago. Today it is accepted as the normal standard of operation.

(2) An inflationary trend is beginning.

Without going into all of the economic details, it is painfully apparent that the country is faced with an inflationary trend. Prices are going up slowly but steadily and therefore wages are going up, even though the government is trying to hold the line. When I expressed concern about this to one of the officials of the American Embassy, he said that the constantly expanding economy of any new country must always be inflationary. It would not necessarily be so serious if there were not this impending new immigration. The counter-inflationary measure is to absorb the new people into the new settlements and make them productive as quickly as possible instead of leaving them for unproductive periods of time in transit camps.



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(3) Pressure from North Africa is mounting.

I spoke at the very beginning about marching demonstrators. These parades have been orderly but firm. The slogans shouted in the streets could be heard inside the committee rooms where officials were struggling with the question of absorption and financing. The man on the street, himself a recent immigrant, was pleading for the Jew in a distant land. The man in the committee room was struggling with the financial facts of life. On the streets there were shouts of setting up an "illegal immigration," such as in the old days of British rule. In the offices there were grim smiles at the irony of such suggestions.

This past year 30,000 have been received from North Africa. The government and the Jewish Agency are both in debt on this problem because not enough funds were supplied from abroad. For the year ahead a figure of 45,000 has been tentatively agreed upon. Obviously, if pogrom situations develop, that number will be vastly increased. But even that number represents staggering financial burdens.

(4) Sources of funds must be increased.

Fortyfive thousand new immigrants do not appear to be many when compared to the 750,000 taken in during the past seven years. On the other hand, during those years several new sources of income were developed. The Bond Drive was conceived; Grants-in-Aid were voted by Congress; the German Reparations schedule was evolved. All of these have helped in various ways to set the country on the road to self-sufficiency. A new large immigration now, without a corresponding new source of revenue, represents a terrific problem. There is not a single individual in this country who would close the door in the face of a single Jew in need. Yet this is sheer bravado unless the Jew in America is also willing to share in this problem. We, in the UJA, must face this fact squarely and we simply must rise to this occasion.

The American Ambassador to Israel, the Hon. Edward Lawson, said in our conversation, "The trouble with Israel is that she always manages to do the impossible. Everyone therefore takes the impossible for granted."

The American Foreign Operations Chief, Dr. Lincoln Hale, told me that "if any other government ever had to resettle lots of people, it should come here and hire the leadership. These Israelis can do anything."

The two senior American officials in this country were expressing their admiration for Israel. The words were good to hear, and from them we can draw both pride and challenge.

Sincerely Yours,

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman,
Executive Vice-Chairman