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Personal Letter

From

RABBI HERBERT A. FRIEDMAN
Executive Vice-Chairman, United Jewish Appeal

165 West 46 Street, New York 36, N. Y.

PRIVATE -- NOT FOR PUBLICATION

1 February 1962

Dear Friend:

I wrote to you last on 15 June 1961, from Jerusalem. That letter began with the words "Immigration into Israel is going up sharply..." During the eight months since that letter, the rising immigration has come to be the central opportunity which now exhilarates and challenges us.

This immigration is of such an unusual and delicate nature that we have all agreed not to record it on paper or to discuss publicly the various figures and facts of it--lest this information find its way into the press and serve, in some way, to hamper the flow of those coming out who now have a chance to leave.

The movement continues - it ebbs - it flows. There are weeks when the figures rise startlingly - other weeks when technical difficulties cause slow-downs. But month after month, it continues and grows. During the year 1960, the total immigration into Israel was 24,000; during 1961, 46,600; during 1962 it will be much higher, perhaps dramatically so. There are those who believe that 1962 may be a year of the highest migration in a decade, especially when one takes into account those who are settling in lands other than Israel.

The organizational task of coping with such numbers of people on the move can escape attention, unless one thinks about it for a moment. Every means of conveyance is used - train, plane, truck, boat. People must be loaded and unloaded, baggage handled, feeding arranged en route, medical care made available, lists checked, tickets distributed, passports checked. All this takes place at literally dozens of railroad stations, airports, way stations, barracks, camps, collecting points, harbors, in many countries on several continents. It is a massive job of shepherding - conducted by a minimum staff, under conditions which could easily cause tempers to snap and men to despair. Instead, as I have observed the process, it is done so smoothly, and with such tender loving care, that one's heart swells with pride and respect for the men of the Jewish Agency who work night and day at this rescue operation.

Responsible for all of this is the Department of Immigration of the Jewish Agency, headed by Mr. S. Z. Shragai, a most dedicated and wonderful man. His principal assistant, Mr. B. Duvdevani, a fearless person, and indefatigable traveler, always on the move, and his other assistant, Mr. Dominitz, are both men whose efficiency and zeal it would be difficult to match anywhere.

I have a report which describes a typical scene at a typical airport. Here are some relevant paragraphs:

"The time is 2:30 a.m. The spacious and pleasant halls of the airport are quiet and deserted. The few officials and policemen on duty had been driven by the cold to the heated rooms. All were eagerly awaiting the dawn.

"Suddenly two Israeli officials of the Jewish Agency - the Director of the Immigration Office in the city and his assistant - entered the hall at a trot. A representative of the Air Company came forward to greet them and to inform them that the plane was expected to touch down in about half an hour's time.

"At that moment 46 immigrants, all carrying parcels, young and old, men and women with babies in their arms, and all boiling with excitement over the thought that their long and arduous journey was coming to an end, burst into the hall. For many of them this was their first trip by air. They had come here from a nearby transit camp. They had been awake all night. At 11 o'clock they had to turn in equipment that had been distributed to them when they arrived two or three days ago, and at 1 o'clock they had to enter the buses which transported them to the airport. While they were drinking the hot coffee and munching at the sandwiches, the aeroplane that had been sent from Israel to fetch them arrived.

"The plane took off and quickly disappeared from sight. Those engaged in the work of transportation remained behind to await other planes and boats. The staff of the transit camp sent the blankets for a quick disinfection, filled in new forms and made urgent inquiries at a local hospital for the admission of a sick immigrant. They also issued orders for the preparation of a meal for another group of immigrants due to arrive in a few hours."

Once the immigrant is safely deposited on the shores of Israel, the Department of Absorption of the Jewish Agency takes charge of him. The head of this Department is Mr. A. Zisling, a veteran in Israeli public life, a former Minister of Agriculture, one of the early pioneers. His principal assistant, Mr. A. Cygel, and the director of the Haifa office, Mr. K. Levine, are two men whose compassion in the handling of uncertain newcomers and skill in reducing confusion to order are a delight to observe.

It is difficult to comprehend what "absorption" means, if we speak only in generalities. What are the details behind the vast job of social engineering designed to transform a penniless, perhaps frightened man into a free and rooted citizen of an independent nation? I suggest we focus down on a specific situation, and for this purpose, am including a report from Dimona, a new development town in the Negev, south of Beersheba, which was created seven years ago, with a starting population

of under 100, which has now grown to 7,000. More than two-thirds of today's arriving newcomers are sent to such development towns and similar settlements, so if we study the problems in Dimona, we will truly know what is happening with the majority of the immigrants.

The following are extracts from last month's meeting of the Absorption Committee in Dimona which had in attendance the Jewish Agency representative, the Mayor, a social worker, the manager of the local textile factory, the chief of police and delegates of the various immigrants' associations:

"The Mayor said the load on the local welfare office was becoming unbearable. Its case load had risen from 90 to 160 in recent months. Dimona is still too young to absorb so many social cases who should be moved to more solidly based towns.

"He also complained about the fact that blankets issued among the immigrants were inadequate; during these cold nights the families were sleeping in shifts. The Jewish Agency man said that the Agency's policy in issuing one blanket was based on the idea that the family would buy additional blankets out of their means. The Mayor said this was unrealistic, since the daily wage at the factory was IL 7.60 (approximately \$3.75).

"The factory manager said many of his workers did not have warm clothing, and it is a miracle that there were not more illnesses since those on the night shift went from the 75° controlled inside temperature to 44° outside.

"The police chief complained that the Agency was sending boys without relatives to Dimona where there was no one to care for them. The Agency was putting three or four of them together into a hut, but this frequently did not work out. The boys were coming to the police for help. Sometimes youngsters were being sent to Dimona because they said they had relatives there, yet the uncle was liable to have eight children of his own and no room for the nephew.

"The social worker said that immigrants traveling from Dimona to Beersheba to attend vocational training courses were getting their fares reimbursed by the Agency, but only when they showed their ticket stubs at the end of the month. With what are they going to pay their fares? Could they be given a loan in advance? The Jewish Agency man said that if the social worker made the necessary applications he would see to it that the immigrants would get the loan for bus fare in advance.

"The factory manager spoke about the difficulties he is having in training immigrant workers because of the language. He is trying to conduct a training course for 14 participants speaking four different languages."

In addition to this great task facing the Jewish Agency, there is the tremendously challenging responsibility which confronts the Joint Distribution Committee. Ongoing programs in 26 countries must be maintained. This means, very simply, milk for children, books for pupils, vocational schools for teenagers, clothing for the needy. It means hospital beds and nursing care and social welfare and packages of food and needed medicines for tens of thousands of Jews. Any reduction in this program would mean suffering and want. It is a constant strain to maintain the life-line of aid and support, but it is a duty which American Jews assumed many years ago, and wish the JDC to continue.

This is the story we can and must tell this year. We must publish and broadcast it, tell it face to face, spread it into every corner of American Jewish life. I am certain that when the Jews of America understand this story, when they know the human side of the absorption needs arising for the new immigrants, they will respond handsomely.

They already have. As you may know, the advance gifts of 158 men announced at our annual conference in December reached the magnificent sum of more than \$8,000,000, which was 50 per cent more than these same men gave last year, and most of the increase was earmarked for the Special Fund for new immigrants. It is imperative that this outstanding success be repeated at the Annual Inaugural Dinner on 11 February at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York.

I should like to urge you to attend this dinner in New York. General Lucius D. Clay is coming from Berlin to speak. You will recall that he was Military Governor in Germany in the immediate postwar period, and I can personally testify, having worked on his staff at the time, of his deep concern for the welfare of needy and homeless Jews in the camps. He has a long-standing relationship with our problem. General Chaim Herzog, of the Israel Defence Forces, son of the former Chief Rabbi, will also be present to speak. These two men will provide a most inspiring evening.

History has given us an opportunity in 1962 to assist again in a great rescue operation. An extraordinary response is required if we are to seize this hour and make the most of its life-saving potential. We shall have to measure up to the highest standards we set more than a decade ago.

Very truly yours,

Herbert A. Friedman
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Personal Letter

From

RABBI HERBERT A. FRIEDMAN
Executive Vice-Chairman, United Jewish Appeal

165 West 46 Street, New York 36, N. Y.

PRIVATE -- NOT FOR PUBLICATION

10 May, 1962

Dear Friend:

I have just returned from a brief visit to Europe and Israel. Everything that I saw and learned underscored the magnitude of the tasks facing us in the large immigration now underway. By now I am sure you are thoroughly aware of the fact that Israel is receiving its largest influx of immigrants in more than a decade, and that the Jewish Agency is engaged in a gruelling, around-the-clock struggle to cope with it. But you may not be fully aware of the extent of Jewish movement into Europe, especially into France, or of the fantastic strain this has imposed upon the resources and personnel of the Joint Distribution Committee.

We all know in more or less general terms that JDC is the part of the UJA which takes care of needy Jews all over the world, including sick and handicapped in Israel itself. It is everywhere and deals with everything which affects Jewish life, especially the lives of children. It feeds and clothes and heals and teaches.

I shall never forget standing on the Austro-Hungarian frontier one day in 1956, together with Moe Leavitt, executive head of the JDC, watching Hungarian refugees - cold, hungry, penniless - crossing the border into safety. About ten per cent of these were Jews and their first question as they came upon Austrian soil was, "Where is the Joint?" They knew from many years of experience that when they found "Joint" they would receive help, that their physical needs would be met and that they would find, in addition, warmth and consideration and the certitude that the Jews of America had not deserted them.

One of the most devoted and capable men I know in the entire field of international Jewish social service is Charles Jordan, overseas Director General of the JDC, whose headquarters is in Geneva - and who has around him a wonderful, capable staff of men and women. These are the Jewish civil servants, who serve long years abroad, in far-off lands, nameless to most of us, but without whose expertise our money could never be translated into the succor and assistance we wish to give our brother Jews in need. We seldom have the chance of thanking this loyal cadre for the magnificent work they do.

As to the work going on, it is obviously impossible to describe the full JDC program currently being conducted in 26 countries. I can only touch on the present topical highlights.

In the last year and a half, an estimated 50,000 Jewish refugees have flooded into France alone. Much of this influx is the direct result of turbulence in North Africa: the violent street-fighting in Bizerte, Tunis, last July, which triggered a continuing exodus; the growingly perilous crossfire in which Jews have been caught in Algeria; the increasing tenuousness and uncertainty of Jewish life in Morocco. Most of these refugees pass through Marseilles, some to go on to Israel, but for the majority the great magnet, the city to which they eventually find their way, is Paris.

In Paris, they are literally swamping the Jewish social service agencies. Ask any of the harassed men in Paris running the local welfare agencies, canteens, youth services, schools and clinics -- and they will tell you: "It's like 1945 all over again." Think of 1945, with its deluge of returnees and refugees pouring into Paris, sleeping and eating where they could, turning for help to a French Jewish community not yet organized or prepared to sustain them. Those people were, literally, able to survive only because of the heroic work of the Joint Distribution Committee. And in the face of today's emergency conditions, the French Jewish community, better prepared now but still unable to cope fully with the needs, is turning once more to the JDC for emergency funds and sorely needed personnel.

Urgent pleas are made daily. From an emergency reception center: "200 new North African families a month ask aid in getting jobs, housing, residence permits." From a family welfare agency: "New cases up from 40 a month to 361" (involving a total of over a thousand people). From a youth service agency: "Scholarship funds exhausted. 115 Tunisian students stranded in Paris." From a refugee canteen: "Over 1,000 kosher meals served daily, a 50 per cent increase in six months."

That canteen, the Foyer Amical, provides even the casual tourist in Paris with direct visual evidence of the deep refugee crisis there. The dining room is on the second floor, but when the time comes - at midday - to serve the single daily hot meal, the queue of Jews lining up for their meal tickets extends down the staircase, jams the foyer and floods out the door and down the street. Food lines like that haven't been seen in Europe since 1956, when refugees from Hungary and expellees from Egypt streamed simultaneously into Austria and Italy, requiring help.

But the story of Jewish refugees in France is more than just a story of canteens. There are problems of every sort -- vast problems. Perhaps no country in Europe is as short of housing as France. All over Paris today - and in many other French cities - refugee families have moved in with friends and relatives and are piled up at the rate of three, four, five, ten - and even more - people to a room.

Here is a concrete example of what this means in human terms: One Tunisian family - twenty-two people - is living in two small dark damp ground-floor rooms, without heat. In the first room, there is a gas

stove, a sink, a kitchen table and a couple of stools; the other room holds a narrow bed and a chest of drawers. Three suitcases are piled against one wall, and in one corner there is a pile of blankets. These have been given to the family by the CBIP (Comite de Bienfaisance Israelite de Paris), a family welfare agency trying to meet the situation with JDC emergency funds.

The greatest number of those in Paris needing help are Tunisians, who do not arrive with the advantage of French nationality. It is much more difficult for them than for the others to obtain work or even temporary relief. During the three months it takes to convert their visitors' visas into temporary residence permits, allowing them to find work, they are totally dependent on the CBIP. In many cases, the French Jewish community has to guarantee they will not be dependent on the state, to assure their entry. The drain on the financial base of JDC operations in Paris because of these factors is tremendous.

To fill the gap, skilled personnel from various JDC field centers and offices throughout the continent are being called on to assist in Paris. Emergency calls of this nature go out of the JDC nerve center in Geneva. And where are these people called from? From scores of other areas where lives depend on them. JDC workers are figuratively being forced to be in two lifesaving places at once, and they too are saying: "Yes, it's like 1945 - or 1956 all over again."

The JDC operation overseas today has all the feeling of a disaster operation. It is as if an international lifesaving organization like the Red Cross had been asked to stretch its funds, equipment and personnel to the limit - and beyond - to cope with simultaneous catastrophes in a dozen different widely-scattered areas.

These crisis conditions will not be eased in the foreseeable future, for the flood of refugees into France from the entire North African salient is bound to continue.

The Algerian Jewish community is in the untenable center of the strife in that torn country and is having difficulty maintaining a program and coping with communal needs. The head of the JDC office in Algiers, a man with a large family, received a threat of death, and had to be pulled out of the country - but the work goes on. Right now, the key work is rendering assistance to some 5,000 persons through cash relief, educational and feeding programs and medical aid to children. But soon, perhaps sooner than we think, there may be a large-scale exodus. The Jews of Algeria, who have lived there for 2000 years, may reach the conclusion that there is no longer a possibility of meaningful Jewish existence in that country. Most of them will go - at least at first - to France; and can you envisage what added burden that will throw on JDC's programs there?

Everything that happens in North Africa and the Middle East, it seems, adds to JDC's problems - from a crop failure in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, threatening hundreds of Jewish marginal families with starvation, to Syria's defection from the United Arab Republic, resulting in a severe

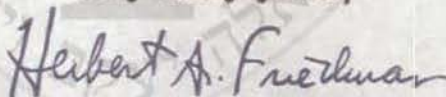
economic squeeze on Egypt's 7,000 remaining Jews. The same JDC which feeds and houses refugees in Paris; copes with a Jewish population explosion in Marseilles and stands solidly by the shaken Jews of Algeria; must spend gruelling hours on muleback bringing desperately needed food to remote Moroccan villages; and must be prepared to help Egypt's Jews get out of the vise in which they are caught and start new lives elsewhere.

In this Jewish refugee year of 1962, the Joint Distribution Committee, which for so many years was able to concentrate in an orderly fashion on rehabilitation work, is now seriously and critically back in the refugee business - and the desperate work of insuring survival.

That is the kind of work which the JDC, with its 47 years of lifesaving experience, knows how to handle and handle well. But anyone who has seen the overworked JDC faces at the Geneva headquarters and in other critical areas knows that experience, even when bolstered by ingenuity and compassion, cannot do the job alone. It takes money - immediate hard cash in large quantities - to get it done.

The Chairman of the JDC is Mr. Edward M. M. Warburg. He goes to his JDC office in New York every day. He sits in active control of JDC's multi-million dollar program. He is a past General Chairman of the UJA and one of our most tireless workers. Right now we are working to achieve a flow of cash - and have scheduled a UJA National Cash Meeting at the Savoy Hilton in New York for June 11; the target date for our midyear cash goal. In writing recently to some contributors, Mr. Warburg said - "First we must give our pledges to help - then we must redeem those pledges with cash as quickly as possible, or human suffering will occur. It is our duty to avoid this." This could serve as a slogan today for American Jewry.

Very truly yours,



Herbert A. Friedman