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Rabbinical Advisory Council. Meetings with the American  
Rabbinat and Natan Pelad. 1972.

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Mr. Natan Peled, Minister of Immigrant Absorption, State of Israel, came to the United States on February 13 to address four meetings convened by the Rabbinical Advisory Council of the United Jewish Appeal.

Each rabbi in the United States received an invitation to participate.

Following is an edited transcript of Mr. Peled's presentation.

Mr. Chairman, *Moray V'Rabbotay*, thank you very much for your kind words of introduction. I understand that I am to speak English to be understood by all present here; please forgive me my English. I remember when the first American Ambassador, Mr. James McDonald, was appointed as Ambassador to Israel, he had to make his first public speech in Jerusalem. For some reason English was not very popular at that time in Israel so he opened his first speech by making the same remark.

I shall speak to you about the situation we face as far as the Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union is concerned. In 1970 just one thousand Jews came from the Soviet Union to Israel. In 1971 about thirteen thousand came. We expect to absorb in Israel in 1972 thirty-five thousand, or even more, Jews from the Soviet Union.

As you know quite well, our estimate is not based upon direct information from Kosygin or Brezhnev, not yet anyhow, but we see the trend of the increasing number of *olim*, of new immigrants, who come from the Soviet Union to Israel and we know some facts about the situation there. We know how many Jews apply for permission to go to Israel. We try to analyze and to understand the motivation of the Soviet Government in allowing larger numbers of Soviet Jews to immigrate to Israel. I would like just to mention that this new development, which actually started after the Six Day War, namely that Jews are being allowed to leave the Soviet Union and to come to Israel, is a result of very long, patient and stubborn work which was done in the Soviet Union almost immediately after the establishment of the State of Israel. We made the first contacts with Jews in the Soviet Union. We tried to strengthen among them their national feelings. We tried to supply them with information about Israel. We helped to create the first small group of activists felt and known today as the main force behind the national revival of the Jewish nation in the Soviet Union. As you know, sometimes we have to help in order to achieve a miracle and I would say that perhaps the time has not yet come to tell all about what was done and how this national Jewish movement in the Soviet Union started and has developed in the last twenty years. I would like you to know that something was planned, something was done, some people were active, in order to bring about a beginning of the change which we are witnessing now.

When I was in the Soviet Union in 1960 for the first time, my impression was that the older Jewish generation had not lost its national and religious ties with the Jewish people, with Jewish tradition, with Jewish life. But I was very skeptical about the future of the young Jewish generation in the Soviet Union. I remember when I came to a little town in Georgia, I was told that there was a Jewish community there, and I asked the Intourist man who was with

me, because I was on an official visit, to bring me to the synagogue there. It was in the middle of the day; I did not expect to find anybody in the synagogue beside the *shamash* or perhaps one or two more Jews. But, when I came with my wife to the synagogue at eleven o'clock in the morning we actually found all the Jewish community of that town in the synagogue. And the *Rosh Hakahal* made a speech in Russian, a speech of welcome, in which he told me how happy the Jews in Russia are, in Georgia especially, under the Communist rule. He told me that the Soviet Government is taking care of all the national and all the religious needs of the Jews there. And while making this speech he introduced just one Hebrew sentence: "*Ee efshar l'dabayn kahn. Matay yihyeh Kibbutz Galuyot?*" And he went on with his Russian speech in which he repeated how happy the Jews are there and how tremendously good the Soviet Government is to them. When I made my reply, in Russian, I myself introduced just one single sentence in Hebrew: "*Kibbutz Hagaluyot yihyeh Bim' hayra b'yamaynu,*" - "the gathering of exiles will be soon in our time." I myself did not believe at that time that the gathering of exiles from Georgia and from the Soviet Union would really start as soon as it did, as it actually happened.

Now the big problem is not a problem of history; it is not a problem which belongs only to the understanding of the past; it is the question of what actually happened during the last years in the Soviet Union which brought about this change which we are witnessing now. I had a conversation with a Jew who came last year from the Soviet Union, and I put before him the question, "how did it happen that one day you decided to endanger your position and to demand your right to go to Israel?" He told me there were three main points in his life which changed his way of thinking and his way of acting. He was an officer in the Soviet Army. After the war he came to Poland and to Hungary and he found out that although Hitler was defeated, there was still anti-semitism in Poland, in Hungary and in the Soviet Union. The second moment was when he found out, while spending time in Poland and in Hungary, outside the Soviet Union, that there was a Jewish community in Israel, that was struggling to create an independent Jewish State. This was, he told me, something astonishingly new to him. And the third point was during the days before the Six Day War. The days before the Six Day War were even more important than the War itself. "I suddenly felt how dear and how important Israel was to me as a Jew in the Soviet Union. I felt it the moment I realized that Israel was in danger." These were the three turning points in the life of this Jew from the Soviet Union who is already working with *Chevrat Hachashmal*, with the electric company in Haifa, as an engineer.

I think that as far as the youth, the Jewish youth in the Soviet Union, is concerned perhaps the main factor which influenced them was the Six Day War, including the time before the War. This entirely changed their feeling as Jews. They began to see themselves as young Jewish people who belong to a nation, to a nation they are able to be proud of. I think you will agree with me that the basis for the change we are witnessing today, as far as the Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union is concerned, is in the change of the Jewish approach in the Soviet Union.

Now a second factor is the position of the Soviet Government. What actually happened to that Soviet Government which, for fifty years, was strongly opposed to allowing any Soviet citizen, especially Jews, to leave the Soviet Union? What made that government allow them to leave and to go to Israel? There are many changes happening in the Soviet regime, and in Soviet society. The Soviet Union in 1971-72 is different than it was in Stalin's era or even in Khrushchev's time.

I think the main change which the Soviet Government faced was the fact that a large national group opposed it. The Jews are quite a large national group in the framework of Soviet society, three million or perhaps more. This is the only national group in the Soviet Union which does not have a national territory of its own. The Soviet regime tries to solve its national problems in a certain way. (They actually do not solve the problems but still they have a certain approach.) The Jews are the only large national unit in the Soviet Union with no national territory. They are spread all over the country, concentrated in the most important centers, in all the large cities: Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Odessa, Tbilisi, Kishinev, Chernovitz and Vilna. They occupy very important positions in the economy, in cultural life, in science. The Soviet Government found itself one day facing a strong opposition from this national unit with a very strange orientation toward a country outside of the Soviet Union.

They have had many problems: with the Ukrainians, with the Kurds, with other nationalities in the Soviet Union. But this was unique in that a large national unit was oriented toward a country outside of the Soviet Union, a country which is considered by the Soviet Union a part of the enemy camp.

Now please do not forget that the Jews in their national struggle for the right to go to Israel were able to mobilize international support from Jews and from the general public. I daresay that without the support given to the Jews in the Soviet Union in their struggle by Jews all over the world, by Israel and by general public opinion, perhaps the Soviet Government would have reacted by suppressing this Jewish renaissance which we are witnessing in the Soviet Union. But the combination of Jewish strength in the Soviet Union and the international support which was given to the struggle of these Jews created something new and unusual. The Soviet Government found itself forced to look for a different approach, for a different solution.

I know quite well the history of the Tartars and their struggle. Other nationalities in the Soviet Union were suppressed, cruelly suppressed, by the Soviet Government because they were unable to get the support which the Jews were able to get. I think this is why the Soviet Government came to the conclusion that the best way to solve the Jewish problem would be to allow a limited number of Jews to get out of the Soviet Union; to get rid of the so-called troublemakers. At the same time they thought to threaten the Jewish community by the false trials they would organize. "We shall allow a certain number of Jews to leave but this is something temporary and if it will go on we shall deal with it with the usual means of the Soviet dictatorship." This is how we came to the Leningrad Trial. What actually happened you know quite well. The Jewish reaction to the Leningrad Trial was surprising to the Soviet Government. Jewish youth reacted by saying that if this is the way the Soviet Government will deal with our demands, the only way for us to act is to press more, to get more stubborn in our fight and to mobilize more and more international support for our struggle.

I personally was told by many, many young Jews who are already in Israel, that they came to the conclusion that they had to demand and to struggle for the right to go to Israel after the first Leningrad Trial. One of these young Jews from the Soviet Union tried to explain to me the mechanism of the Jewish reaction in the Soviet Union. He put it this way: in the beginning there was a small inner circle of nationally strong, Jewish young people who decided to begin their struggle for the right to go to Israel. All of the other Jews were in the second circle, the third circle, the fourth and the fifth. The Jews were just standing by the windows and looking out to see what would happen to this small first group.

When they found out that the first group, the small one, was successful, that they received permission to go to Israel, the second circle immediately opened the windows, opened the doors, went out and pushed forward its demands, too.

I met a group of people from one of the Jewish communities in the Soviet Union (Kharkov) and they told me that there were only five families in that large community which applied for the right to go to Israel; all the others were interested but they did not dare to make any concrete move in that direction. The Soviet authorities in that place came to the conclusion that the best way to deal with them would be to get rid of the five families and to put an end to the problem. The very moment the five families received permission to go to Israel, fifty families immediately applied. What we are witnessing today is a chain reaction.

You should know that today there are about fifty thousand Soviet Jews who applied for the right to go to Israel. I would not take it upon myself to tell you today the number of Jews who would be willing to go from the Soviet Union to Israel. I think nobody is able to say because this is a dynamic process, a chain reaction. Still, we have to make ourselves ready for a mass exodus of Jews from the Soviet Union. It is not a matter of one or two years. It is a matter of a long process, of a long struggle.

The outcome of this struggle depends on three main factors. The first of them I have already mentioned: the preparedness of the Soviet Jews to go on with their struggle for the right to go to Israel. The second factor is the support which will be extended to the struggle of the Soviet Jews by world Jewry, by Israel and by international public opinion. The third factor is the problem of the successful absorption in Israel of the Soviet Jews.

I would like to tell you quite frankly that it would be a great mistake to speak about Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union and about the absorption of the Soviet Jews as just an additional ten or twenty thousand immigrants coming to Israel. Our earlier estimate was that we would absorb in 1972 forty five thousand new immigrants. From the experience of November, December and January we came to the conclusion that we have to expect sixty-five to seventy thousand immigrants, among them thirty-five to forty thousand from the Soviet Union. It is not however just a matter of twenty thousand more immigrants.

Please remember that next to the establishment of the State of Israel, the main event in recent Jewish history is the national renaissance of Soviet Jewry. This was a national group which was for fifty years in a full blackout. This is a Jewish community with enormous abilities. It can contribute to Israel not only numerical strength but it could also make quite a change in the very structure of Israel.

Because I am responsible for the absorption of new immigrants into Israel, I am quite familiar with the special problems of the absorption of the Soviet Jews. When we speak about the absorption of the Soviet Jews, we understand it as a problem of people who come to Israel with nationalistic, Zionist, Jewish and religious motivations. They come with a dream but they confront reality.

I have been living in Israel since 1933 and I think that our achievements in agriculture, in industry, in culture, in spirit are great and are unique. Still, there is quite a gap between a dream and the reality which a man faces. I have mentioned already the Jews from Georgia. It is really very difficult to explain

how a Jewish community of seventy or eighty thousand Jews was able to preserve its Jewish and its religious character in the middle of the Communist environment of the Georgian Republic.

(I would like to make clear to you that the position of the Government of Israel and the position of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption is that it is the duty and the obligation of Israel to create the necessary conditions for the Georgian Jew, or for any religious Jew, who comes to Israel to continue his life in the pattern to which he is accustomed and which he chooses for himself. When I was told that the Jews from Georgia, when they come to Lydda, complain that they left their *tallit* and *t'fillin* with their relatives in Georgia, I approached the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Israel and asked that a special representative be assigned to Lydda to give any Georgian Jew or any Jew who requested them, *tallit* and *t'fillin*. When that Ministry found it impossible to provide them from their budget, I made funds available from the budget of my Ministry.

When I was told that some Jews complain that they have no *mezuzah* in the apartments that they are getting from the Ministry of Absorption, I contacted the Minister of Housing and we made arrangements to have *mezuzahs* in every room, on every door in the apartments.

When I was told by the Georgian Jews that they do not feel comfortable in the existing synagogue because they have their own way of *davening*, we made arrangements to put at their disposal flats, intended for housing, so that they might have their own synagogues until the Ministry for Religious Affairs would be able to erect synagogues for them.

Unfortunately, as you know, sometimes religious problems become political problems in Israel. I would like you to know that there is no inclination in the Government of Israel to jeopardize in any way the religious way of life of the Georgians or of any other *olim* who come to Israel.)

The main problems which we face now in Israel, as far as the absorption of immigrants is concerned, are the problems of housing, of jobs and of the education of children.

I would like you to know that we now face in Israel a very strange situation. At the same time that the *aliyah*, the immigration, is increasing, we are confronted with urgent social problems which demand our attention. The two million six hundred thousand Jews who live today in Israel are able to absorb seventy thousand new immigrants. In 1948 the number of Jews in Israel was six hundred thousand and we absorbed, in one year, two hundred thirty-five thousand new immigrants. For a country like the United States a comparable number would be eighty million new immigrants. Even for the United States it would not be so easy to absorb such a large number of immigrants. Still, 1972 is not 1948 and we still have in Israel unsolved problems of immigrants who came to Israel ten and fifteen and twenty years ago. We still have large families with six and eight children living in small flats of forty, forty-five to fifty meters. We have the problems of the young couples who are looking for housing. We are facing this very difficult dilemma.

We must build houses for newcomers; any newcomer who comes to Lydda has to be sent somewhere. The Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, said here in the United States that if millions of immigrants will come at once, he will order the military units to get out of their barracks in order to put the immigrants into them. I am quite confident that he would do it, but this is not the right solution. The army needs the barracks and, as you know, we still need the army. For the newcomers we need now not barracks and not tents; we need housing. Even the idealistic Jews who come from the Soviet Union expect to get proper housing in Israel and jobs. They leave something behind. They leave jobs; they leave experience, they leave their positions; they leave their pension rights. So we face this urgent necessity to create housing and all the necessary facilities in order to be able to absorb the new immigrants and at the same time the equally urgent necessity to cope with the problem of poverty, with the underprivileged who still live and are in Israel. As Minister of Absorption I have the feeling that if Israel will not be able to make at least some certain progress in solving its social problems, the contradiction between the newcomers and the underprivileged oldtimers may create a very serious social crisis in Israel. This, at a time when we need so badly national solidarity, at a time when we need badly that the oldtimers will welcome the newcomers.

I was interviewed last week by a television team of the CBS and they asked me the question: "Will Israel be able to absorb large numbers, hundreds of thousands, of Jews? Yes or no?" You know American interviewers, they know how to ask questions. My reply was that Israel will never reject any Jew who is willing and ready to come. But Israel will not be able to absorb properly those large numbers of Jews if world Jewry will not come to help us. This is actually the meaning of our meeting here.

We in Israel came to the conclusion that this problem of the proper absorption of the Soviet immigrants on which depends the future of the Soviet immigration to Israel must become the central concern of the Jewish people all over the world, and above all, of the Jewish community in the United States. We are quite confident that through you, through the rabbis of America, through the spiritual leaders of the congregations, we can reach every Jew in the United States. We appeal to you as one Jew to another to come to the aid of a third. But we would not ask of you to do something that we ourselves are unwilling to do. We are doing it in Israel, too. We have decided to collect one hundred million Israeli pounds from our own people, for our own UJA. I met last week with a small group of people and one of them told me that he is going to give one million Israeli pounds. All right, so we have already one percent of the hundred million - but we will get all of it and even more. Anybody who knows conditions in Israel knows that a hundred million Israeli pounds in addition to taxes, to purchases of bonds, to a devalued pound, is quite a sum.

When I was asked by the Prime Minister to go to the United States and to speak to these conferences of rabbis, she gave me her message: "Let us see in the problem of the absorption of the Soviet Jews the central problem of the Jewish people in our time; let us bring the feeling of responsibility for that problem to every Jew; let us help every Jew to understand his part and responsibility and to give his share for the solution."

I am telling you quite frankly we are used to facing difficulties in Israel - I remember that a few days before the Six Day War Moshe Dayan made a very important statement when he said we shall never invite even one American soldier to

fight for us, we shall fight for ourselves as Jews in Israel. But as far as the solution of this problem is concerned, I am telling you quite frankly that without your help Israel will not be able to find the proper, the necessary solution. I expect that we shall have hundreds of thousands of Jews from the Soviet Union in the next years. We will welcome them as brothers, but this is really a matter of Jewish responsibility. Please do your utmost to create this feeling of Jewish solidarity. Give Israel and give yourselves the opportunity of solving together the problem of absorbing the mass exodus of the Soviet Jews into Israel. It depends on us, together. Thank you.

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Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman, Executive Vice-Chairman  
United Jewish Appeal - Israel, edited transcript of  
remarks made at Rabbinical Meetings, February 14-17,  
1972

I think we are all aware of the fact that we are facing a matter of major historic dimensions. If we do not understand that, then we do not understand the days through which we are living. A half a century of being closed off, and a few months of being opened up, represent a complete turning point in the fate and future of the Jews in the Soviet Union. And an historic dimension is something which requires an historic response.

It is terribly important that you understand that this is not just another *aliyah*. We have lived through twenty-four years of the existence of the State of Israel. We have seen a million and a half immigrants come into the State. We have seen whole communities transplanted: Morocco, Yemen, Iran, Iraq. Country after country of Jews have come. We have taken this in and sometimes we have a tendency to become blase and we say, "Well, all right, so it will be seventy thousand immigrants in 1972, so what! Why is it that there is such a frenetic sense of excitement being whipped up about this Russian story? It is just another chapter in the movement of Jews as we solve our historic problems by migration. We lived once in Spain. Then we moved from Spain to Poland. We lived once in Poland and we left there to come to the United States. Jews have moved in huge sweeps across all the centuries, so what is so unusual about this? Is it not just another move?"

If you treat it that way, then you simply do not understand what has happened here - because this is not just another move. This is not just a negative reaction against Hitler. This is not just running toward an opportunity now that we have the doors of Haifa open and the keys in our own hands. This is a situation in which for more than half a century we have waited for an opportunity to come.

Mr. Peled told you that the work has been going on for almost twenty-five years because the minute that Israel was born, work started inside Russia with secret emissaries and underground *shlichim*, all kinds of things which would make a fantastic book, if that book would ever be written. People were motivated and stimulated, to reach the point of this miracle of Jewish rebirth and renaissance.

Indeed, we do not always understand it completely ourselves. You can start a cell going and the cell can grow underground year after year. You can send in a *luah* and have the *luah* copied by hand, because for so many decades you could not get a Jewish calendar inside Russia. Jews were not allowed to know when *Rosh Hashanah* was in an official printed book, but in a *luah* circulated underground from hand to hand. Who wrote it? Who printed it? An underground publication system began to develop - the little seeds germinated one by one until the day when that explosion would occur.

You all know that one of the reasons that produced this open door in Russia has been the massive protest movement that has occurred. I am sure that every single person here took part in "Let My People Go" rally after rally - cards to Senators, telegrams to Washington, marches, in parks and in public buildings and in

stadia - you all helped to be the midwife. And all of these things have converged now at a certain moment in history - to recreate the sense of Jewish identity and survival among the Jewish young people in Russia which we have witnessed since the Six Day War.

The magic took place: the listening hours every day to the radio from Israel, the temerity to go on a strike in the Supreme Soviet building and demand rights - the rebirth, a sense of dignity, the willingness to risk, the heroism, the willingness to endure jail. And it was all fed by the knowledge of the back-up that is taking place in the outside world. They know perfectly well of all the protests in New York, Los Angeles, London and Sydney, Australia - it all converges in time and at a moment and suddenly the dream, the hoped for birth takes place.

We are at that point, we are at the point of the birth of the exodus of the Jews of Russia. Now a birth can get throttled and abort and it is entirely possible that that can happen - because no one knows the workings inside the Soviet mind. This may be just something to tease us. This may be something to lift our hopes up, give us twenty thousand Jews, fifty thousand Jews and then close it and deal us a hard blow. If the Soviets decide to abort what is just getting started, then all we can do is weep - we can not control them. What the Minister and I are here pleading for is that we not thwart this birth. If you and I do not do what we have to do, then we are guilty of committing a murder and we will kill at its inception the possible exodus of a hundred thousand, a quarter of a million, half a million, or who knows how many? That is the crucial nature of what is happening.

It is not a matter of whether we get three thousand a month, or three thousand five hundred a month, or four thousand a month. It is a matter of whether the historic process which has happened in 1971, the unlocking of the key, shall continue to the point of completion. And if the point of completion is that a million Jews will exit from Russia and want to come home, (they speak of Israel as home, they are asking to be repatriated), and if we are going to get fifty thousand a year, then it will take twenty years. You and I have to be prepared to stay with something for twenty years!

But, on the other hand, the Russians might say, "You want all the Jews who wish to leave the Russian Motherland and go to the Israeli Motherland? Fine, take them out, and take them in one year." You remember what Iraq said to us in 1950? They told us that there are a hundred and twenty thousand Jews living in Iraq, and everybody who wants to leave can have twelve months in which to go, but after that no more migration. A hundred and twenty thousand Jews came out in twelve months and Israel took them in - in 1950 of all years, when eggs were rationed in Israel, when *olim* were living in tents - we did not even yet have *ma'abarot*! There were no *badonim* (huts of canvass), there were no *pahonim* (huts of tin), there were no *tzrifim*, there were only *ohelim*, tents. We had a quarter of a million people living in Israel in tents. But, if the Soviet Union says take all the Jews who want to go in twelve months, this is the dumping theory, the drowning theory. We will drown you, Jews. We will bankrupt Israel with Jews. We can not sink you on the Suez Canal, but we will sink you with your *olim*! It is a theory, and naturally no one knows whether it is right or not. But if I were a Russian, and I had some ulterior motive, I would think very seriously of doing it this way, believe me I would.

Whether they are going to close it off and make us cry, whether they are going to open it up in some completely uncontrolled and uncontrollable way and make the Jews in Russia crazy and make us crazy, or whether it will go in a systematic, steady way now that the historic process has started, and if, as we hope, it will be irreversible, no one knows how it is going to go. There is only one thing that we have to know now, and this is the moment to know it and to understand it. The evidence is now clear, and it is up to us to keep the process going insofar as we have any control over it. The control that we have is to make sure that the conditions of *klitah* inside Israel are such that it will encourage Jews in Russia to take the dangerous step of applying for an exit visa. That is the message.

I would like to explain to you more about how this whole process takes place. It all works on the basis of affidavits. We send affidavits from Israel to people in the Soviet Union by registered post. Never mind the process by which we collect the names. Never mind whether the name is accurate as far as every recipient is concerned. The legal fiction for this is a family reunion scheme, and that is good enough for us since we are one family and every Jew is its member. As a matter of fact, the Soviets accept this notion also without looking too closely.

We have sent out from Israel in 1969 twenty-five thousand affidavits. The office did not work in Russia in 1970 because 1970 was the height of the Russian war of attrition against us. When Russia introduced missiles and was fighting us on the Suez Canal, they were not going to cooperate in her post offices in Kiev, in Odessa and in Moscow - so we only got four thousand affidavits through in 1970. And in 1971 we got forty thousand affidavits out.

Now the numbers are crucial - twenty-five thousand, four thousand, forty thousand - we have put about seventy thousand affidavits out circulating into the Soviet Union addressed to specific people. In this same three year period of time, 1969, 1970, and 1971, we have had come into Israel in 1969 three thousand Soviet Jews, in 1970 one thousand Jews, in 1971 thirteen thousand Jews. So we have had seventeen thousand Jews entering in the three years during which we sent out seventy thousand affidavits. So we now have fifty-three thousand affidavits still out in circulation inside the Soviet Union. That is fifty-three thousand people who have an affidavit in their hands who, if they are encouraged and have the nerve to do so, can walk into an *Ovir* office, a police office of the KGB, and put that affidavit in and say I want out. Now, during 1972, we are sending in affidavits at the rate of seven to eight thousand per month and we hope to push into Russia during this year, something like eighty-five thousand or ninety thousand more affidavits. Together with the fifty thousand that are still circulating, that makes a hundred and forty thousand. Now, if we can get forty thousand Jews out during this year, that means by the end of this year we will have a hundred thousand affidavits in circulation.

We began this year with fifty thousand affidavits in circulation. If we could begin next year with a hundred thousand affidavits in circulation, and if by that arithmetic every year we can increase the number of affidavits that are out there, and increase the number of Jews coming but still have more affidavits circulating than Jews coming out, and if we can build up the pressure to where there are two hundred thousand and three hundred thousand and a half a million affidavits in circulation, then we will keep the pressure on the Russians. That is our pressure to counter the Arab pressure which tells the Russians to stop it.

Now having affidavits in the hands of Jews as the mechanism by which you can encourage them to go into the *Ovira* office and ask for the exit visa is only the first step, because if you encourage him to do that and then if he gets turned down, or if he gets fired from his job, or if he has an indeterminate waiting period, he has to be encouraged by something else. He has to be encouraged by the knowledge that we will stay behind him no matter how difficult or how long his waiting period is. We have got to begin to circulate the knowledge that no matter what amount of money is going to be involved here, we are going to take care of every single Jew who has applied to get out, and no matter what penalties he suffers or no matter what the duration of his waiting period will be, he has to know that we are behind him.

Now this is not just a hundred million dollar commitment on the basis of a few figures of getting him out and getting him a house in Israel or getting him absorbed in Israel - nobody knows what kind of a commitment this might take us into. To spread the knowledge to every Jew in Russia that if he applies, no matter what the consequences are he will be taken care of by the Jewish people could get us into a multi-hundred million dollar commitment. But, I am telling you that unless we make that commitment we are not going to force the historic situation - and that is exactly what we have to do. They want to come out but we have to help be the midwife, and it is the force of the leverage that is going to bring us to the point that we are talking about - nothing else.

Right now, every Jew inside Russia knows that the rubles that it costs for him to get out can be found. It costs five hundred rubles to repudiate Russian citizenship, and it is four hundred rubles to get an exit visa. Then it is about a hundred rubles for the airplane ticket from Moscow to Vienna. Altogether, he needs about a thousand rubles per person - and that is about twelve hundred dollars. So if you take a family of four people, he needs roughly five thousand dollars. Now just to show you what that means in Russian terms, a doctor inside the Soviet Union earns a hundred and twenty rubles a month, maybe a hundred and forty rubles a month. An engineer only earns a hundred and thirty, a hundred and forty rubles a month. Nobody has three, four thousand rubles saved up. Nobody!

This exit is being financed in two ways. It is being financed first of all by us - and there is no need to go into the details of how that is done. Secondly, it is being financed by self-help among the Jews. When they come out they give us a little slip that states: I received four hundred rubles from such and such a Jew - and when he comes out pay him. There is this heroic self-subsidizing movement going on now, such that when a man comes out and says I have given twelve thousand two hundred rubles to this Jew, this Jew, and this Jew, we do a very simple checking of the records and pay him back his twelve thousand rubles in Israeli pounds. This is his stake to get him started in Israel.

But that system, very frankly, is sufficient only now, at the beginning, for a very few thousand people. As we increase the volume, we have to be perfectly prepared to realize that there is not enough money present among Jews inside Russia to sustain this for very long, and we are now going to have to begin to send in massive, massive doses of money from the outside.

Now, once he gets out to Vienna, at the cost of what I have said is about a thousand rubles, there he begins the trip home. Sometimes it works very fast.

He gets into Vienna in the morning by a train that comes in every day at half past seven, and he can be on a plane to Israel that same afternoon. It works very often that way. Or sometimes he stays over one or two nights.

We now have a capacity of over two hundred and fifty beds in Vienna. It is being increased, though, and in another month it will be three hundred and fifty beds - enough to keep people overnight. And then you have to keep the planes going. Every once in a while you get a backup, you get snow in Vienna and you can not fly in, so you get a load accumulating. That is what happened several weeks ago, when the jumbo had to go in and take out three hundred and fifty people at once. That appeared in all the American newspapers. What a dramatic thing - sending in a jumbo plane to take out three hundred and fifty Russian Jews from Vienna! Well, it should not happen only once just because of a backlog due to a snowstorm. It should happen every night. There should be that much of a flow generated.

But it can not be done by sloganeering. You sloganeer up to a point by saying "Let My People Go" and that is fine and necessary. But then if you stop at that point, and you do not worry about who is going to pay for it or whether you can handle all the flow that you have started, then you are faced with a serious moral question. We should never have started the business in the first place! We should never have started in the first place if we are not prepared to follow through on it, because we are doing something which is unfair. We are raising people's hopes and then we are dashing them.

I think you have to understand a very simple thing. Part of the Jewish community is carrying this load magnificently. At the top the pressure is unbearable and I am the first one to admit to you that we are exerting an absolutely inordinate amount of pressure there. People who are giving a hundred thousand dollars are being called cheap. They are being called all kinds of bad names because they will not give two hundred thousand dollars. A very small, tiny, unfair proportion of the Jewish community of this country is carrying this load. But all the Jews of America are at this moment, I think, morally obligated to enter the picture of the *aliyah* of Russian Jewry. And I mean all.

There is an organized Federation and Welfare Fund in every city in which you live. There is the machinery, there is an IBM system, there are good, solid trained professional men. It can just as well, in the Los Angeles area, accept fifty-eight thousand gifts, which is what it accepted last year, or it can accept a hundred and fifty-eight thousand gifts if you can generate that many.

Most Jews are not contributing one penny. Now most means anything more than fifty percent. If you want my guess in the matter, I think that in the larger communities we are getting maybe a third of the Jews covered and two-thirds not. And in the smaller communities, maybe the ratio goes the other way and two-thirds are being covered and one-third not. But there are literally millions of Jews in this country who wave the banner and say "Save them, save them," but who then abdicate from responsibility in the practical sense. Now that has to change. Everyone has to be involved in this.

The facts of life are not going to be altered. The war is going to go on, the poverty that the Minister spoke about is going to go on. Remedial measures have to be taken toward both things. Airplanes are going to continue to be bought, and help is going to be given to Jews on the lower strata of Israeli society. Shall we disregard the security needs for the Russian immigration? You can not do that. Shall you disregard all the older *olim* for the sake of the new *olim*? You can not do that. Shall you disregard the flow of the new

*olim* because you can not generate enough money for everything? That is the choice at the moment.

We are in February, and nobody knows what is going to happen. I would make a prediction that the UJA will raise in 1972 three hundred million dollars. The UJA raised two hundred and sixty-five million dollars last year. Do you think that is any kind of an increase adequate and sufficient to accommodate this kind of upsurge? In no way!

All that is going to happen is that you and I have to be honest enough to say to a Russian Jew that we do not have a prayer of an intention to satisfy the requirements which he sets down. Say it to him - do not kid him. He asked us not to leave him under any illusions. Well, let us not. We think that about four hundred and fifty million would do the trick, if the Jews in other countries will also respond adequately; if Israel can borrow enough money through the sale of her bonds; together with all the other ifs, then about four hundred and fifty million would do the trick on this job. Yet I see three hundred.

I see the other hundred also, and I think you can generate it, I really do. I think there are Jews, members of synagogues who pay two hundred, three hundred dollars a year dues, who do not pay two cents to a Federation campaign. I think there is only one way to get to them. Advertisements in the newspaper are not going to do anything.

If, in your congregation, you sit down with your president, your Board, go down your membership list, and you appoint a committee, then you approach every Jew in that congregation and you ask him to make his contribution to the UJA Campaign - then you will succeed in encouraging and assisting the birth and nurturing of this baby.

If it continues in 1972 without being held back, and we move into 1973 and it continues and even expands, if we can keep it going one year and two years and three years, it will get harder and harder and harder for the Russian Government ever to turn it off. It will get easier and easier for Jews to walk in and apply for exit visas - and the whole thing will snowball and mushroom.

Is not that really what we want to see, is not that really what it is all about when we say "Let My People Go?" It is help my people go! It is bring my people out! That is what we are talking about. It is a very crucial period now. These are the months - February, March, April - in which the campaigns are reaching their heights after their crescendoes. These are the months in which constructive action can take place. And there is only one way to get to every Jew in America and that is through you - there is no other way.

I would like to read you a poem that a man wrote two weeks ago to show you that there is a way for us to attack this problem. An American Jew wrote this:

"Two Jews met this morning.  
Two Jews met this morning at Lod Airport, outside of Tel Aviv,  
shortly after the sun came up.  
One arrived on a luxury jet from Austria.  
One arrived on an air conditioned bus from a luxury hotel,  
just days after he, too arrived on a luxury jet, from  
California.

Two Jews met in Israel, and for each it was the first time his feet had touched the land of his ancestors.  
Two Jews met in Israel, and embraced, and shed tears without shame, and exchanged only one word:

'Shalom'

These two Jews embraced for several minutes, and wept together. One was sixty and dressed in black and wore a hat and cried. The other was fifty and dressed in double knit and cried. The man dressed in black carried a small package...personal to him.

The man in double knit carried a small package...an expensive camera.

Both cried, and exchanged only the one word.

The man in black, three days before, left his home in Russia.

The man in double knit, three days before, left his home in California.

...these two Jews met this morning.

For the man in black, freedom became his, the dignity to live and worship (if he so desires) and work...and be free for the rest of his days.

For the other man, that which was his freedom - his personal, selfish freedom - was circumscribed, for the rest of his days, and his great treasure and his activities and his heart were no longer his alone.

I do not know the name of the man in black, nor did I see him again after the embrace and the tears, nor do I know from what city he came nor to what home he went.

I am the other man, and I say to you that when two Jews met this morning shortly after the sun came up, they met as brothers and as kinsmen and they exchanged freedom.

I now have less.

I wrote this to you, my children, because I want you to know what happened to your father this day, January 12, 1972."

"I now have less." Each man has less freedom to pursue his own personal, selfish pursuits. Once those Jews of Russia started coming, each of us had less freedom to do what he did before. Our freedom is circumscribed - now we have to do something for them.

One young Russian Jew walked up to a table in Lod after I saw him get off the airplane. He is twenty years old. He took a look at a hundred pound banknote - on which there is a picture of Herzl, the famous picture with the beard which you and I know with our eyes closed. He looked at it and said: "Who is this man?" He had never seen a picture of Theodore Herzl. So the official explained that it was Herzl. He said: "Who is he?" If a Jewish boy twenty years old, who never heard of Theodore Herzl and to whom that name had no meaning, fought his way out of Russia to come home to Israel, what is required of us?

You have less freedom and so do I, until we make sure that every Jew who wants to come out of Russia comes out. Then you and I, who know about Herzl, can go back and do the things we used to do. Thank you very much.

\* \* \* \* \*

## An Exchange of Freedom

by Dov Peretz Elkins

### I - Request to Press and Others to Use Information with Discretion

Before I begin my sermon this evening, I would like to make a request. Because of the nature of the wide publicity given to this evening's talk, it has come to my attention that some representatives from the public media may be present tonight. I would ask that nothing heard this evening be used in any newspaper, radio or TV report, directly or indirectly. I have already obtained a commitment from one editor who is here that this information will not be repeated in any form, and I request the same from any others.

Secondly, to the members of the congregation and guests. Most of what you hear, not all of it, but most of it, can probably be discovered and may very well be written about in magazines and newspapers like TIME, and the NEW YORK TIMES. However, it is important that it not be transmitted by us to anyone who might quote either me, or Israeli government officials or members of the UJA staff. For that reason, I ask you not to repeat anything I say to anyone except immediate family and friends.

### II - Similar Use of Pulpit on Other Historic Occasions Recalled

Prime Minister Golda Meir gave the American rabbinate and the American synagogue the supreme compliment this week, by choosing them as the best vehicle by which to transmit an important message to the American Jewish community. By sending her Minister of Immigrant Absorption, Mr. Nathan Peled, on a special mission to U.S. Jewry, she declared her trust, confidence, and faith that the pulpit of the American synagogue can be the transmitter of her personal wishes to her fellow Jews on these shores.

Being a student of history, I could not help but think of two other occasions in recent history, when the synagogue pulpit was able to function as such a transmitting vehicle of communication when all other more official and openly available media were impossible to utilize. Both of these took place in the period of World War II, a time whose historical circumstances are in many ways so much parallel to the crisis in Jewry that we face today.

One is the kind of sermon which must have been preached in many German synagogues in the late 1930s by men like Rabbi Joachim Prinz, now of Newark, N. J. Rabbi Prinz published one of his last sermons in Germany in 1938, in this month's issue of THE JEWISH SPECTATOR. He warned his people of the impending doom on the Jewish horizon, and pleaded with them to act before it was too late to save Jewish lives. The other was the sermon given by Rabbi Marcus Melchior of Copenhagen, *erev* Rosh Hoshanah,



1943, when a German informant had told the Rabbi about the coming danger to Jewish lives in Denmark, and he, in turn, brought this information to the knowledge of his congregants, and then organized an emergency underground evacuation of all of Denmark's Jews, across the Kattegat to Sweden, before Yom Kippur of that year. That sermon saved 7000 Jewish lives.

The number of Jewish lives that can be saved by sermons from American Jewish pulpits during this month throughout America can possibly be 100 or 200 times that number. I thus begin my heavy tale with a prayer to Almighty God that the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable this evening before Him, and before you, this holy congregation of Israel. For so much is at stake.

### III - The Facts of Mr. Peled's Visit

But now, to the historic meeting I attended yesterday in Miami. Mr. Nathan Peled came to the United States this past Sunday night, (February 13), expressly for the purpose of meeting with America's 2000 pulpit rabbis. On Monday, he met in New York, Tuesday in Chicago, Wednesday in Los Angeles, and yesterday in Miami. By now he is back in Israel. During these four meetings, he met with a large percentage of the American rabbinate throughout the country.

In order to fully understand what he said, it would be helpful to know something about Israel's Minister of Immigrant Absorption. He himself is a Russian immigrant, having been born in Odessa, and came to Palestine in 1933, to work on a kibbutz. Prior to his present post he was Ambassador to Bulgaria and Austria. In Bulgaria, he confronted Jewish life in Eastern Europe first hand. In Vienna, he would frequently go to the Austrian airport to meet immigrants from Rumania, Russia and from Eastern Europe generally. His work also took him to the Soviet Union on several official visits, during which time he made it his business to seek out Jews and Jewish communities to talk to and meet with. Thus, his background as a native Russian, and having had direct personal contact with Soviet and East European Jews, makes his work in absorption more than merely a political task or a governmental obligation. It is *melechet hakodesh* to him - a sacred labor, one of the great *mitzvot* of our day, to save the remnants of Jewry, and to implement the biblical vision of *kibbutz galuyot*, the Ingathering of the Exiles. His task, in essence, is to prepare the State of Israel for the coming of the Messiah, before which time, we are told, all of the scattered remnants of our people must be brought back home.

I cannot, of course, convey to you all of the stories, nor all of the facts, presented to us by Mr. Peled. The important facts which you must know will follow shortly. One brief incident, however, must serve as a backdrop to everything else I have to say.

During one trip in 1961 to a small Jewish community called Gorey, just outside of Tbilisi in Soviet Georgia, Mr. Peled asked his Intourist "Guides" to take him to the synagogue in that town. It was a Monday morning about 11:00 a.m., and of course he expected to meet only the head of the synagogue, or perhaps if fortunate one or two other people if they happened to be there at the time. The communication system among Jews in Russia is

amazingly swift under the circumstances, and word had reached Gorey that an Israeli diplomat would arrive Monday morning. When Mr. Peled walked into the synagogue that Monday morning, the congregation was a full one. Every Jew in town had come to greet him and see him, and, hopefully, to hear him speak.

The *Rosh HaKahal*, the Head of the Community, got up to speak. He warmly welcomed the Israeli dignitary, and proceeded to tell how wonderful things were for Jews in the Soviet Union. However, knowing that the Intourist Guides would not understand Hebrew, he was able to slip in one brief Hebrew sentence, and made it sound like a biblical quotation.

"Mr. Ambassador," said the Russian Jew, "everything here is wonderful. The government takes care of all our needs. Please convey to the Jewish people in Israel and throughout the world the feeling of how happy we are to be here in Russia. There is nothing that we need, or that our wonderful government does not do for us. As in the words of the Bible, *Matai yihye kibbutz galuyot?* When will the Ingathering of the Exiles take place?" God help us get out of this Soviet prison - we can't bear it any longer! And he concluded his speech in Russian.

Mr. Peled responded in Russian, and during his speech, he too added a biblical quotation. "*Kibbutz HaGaluyot yihye binhayra beyamenu!* The Ingathering of Exiles will be soon, in our day! Please God!"

That was ten years ago. Even Mr. Peled could not know then that *kibbutz hagaluyot* would take place soon - in our day - and that by 1970 it will have begun, and that by 1971 and 1972, it would be going full speed ahead.

#### IV - How Many Will Be Let Out?

One of the major questions which is frequently discussed in connection with the issue of Soviet Jewry is "How many Jews will be permitted to leave?" This is a key question, and one that I had in mind in going to Miami, and one which you certainly expected and hoped to have answered in coming tonight. Now that I have heard Mr. Peled, and have spoken with him, I can only say: That depends largely upon us. But it also depends on other factors, some of which we can control, and some we cannot...

First of all, it depends upon the will of Soviet Jews. This is a crucial first step. All the international pressure in the world cannot do a thing, unless the Soviet Jewish activists continue their brave and heroic program of protest and complaint. We have good reason to believe that the Soviet Jews will continue to do their part, if only we will continue to do ours - and I will explain what I mean by that shortly.

The Soviets have been following a two-pronged program in defusing their "Jewish problem", and in trying to reduce the number of applications for exit visas. One is to begin to let out the noise-makers, the activists, in the hope that after their departure, things will quiet down. The second is to intimidate those that remain through such acts as searching apartments, harassment, interrogation, prison sentences, and widely-

publicized trials such as those in Leningrad a year ago.

The reaction, to say the least, has not been what the Soviets expected. Apparently they never read the story in Exodus about the Egyptian enslavement of their Jews 3000 years ago. "The more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites." (Exodus 1:12) Today as well, the more the Soviets oppress the Jews, the more their protests increase, and the more the desire to leave spreads among Soviet Jews.

Just by way of example, in the city of Kharkov five Jewish families arranged a "sit-in" in the office of a local official, demanding that they be permitted to go to their Homeland. The officials decided to localize the issue and nip it in the bud. Thus, they immediately gave permission for them to go. But the week after those five families left, fifty families applied for exit visas. This same chain reaction is taking place all over the Soviet Union, and it apparently is displaying no sign of abatement.

This is something completely new for the Soviets. They have had vocal minorities before, but they have always been able to deal with them rather easily. They merely apply their notoriously cruel suppressive measures, such as KGB harassment, incarceration, exile, and the like, and the sparks of freedom fizzle out. When the Soviets exiled the Tartar leadership to Siberia, no one paid any attention, and the uprising was quelled in short order. But with the Jews, this is not so easily done. The other 100 Soviet nationality groups are all concentrated in one geographic area. Furthermore, the Jews are influential people in Soviet scientific and cultural life. Even more importantly, however, the Jews have support outside the Soviet Union throughout the free world. Wherever Jews live, there have been demonstrations, letter-writing campaigns, approaches to the Soviet ambassador and other officials.

The number of Jews who can leave Russia in 1972 and after also depends upon a number of political factors - some of which we can influence. One is President Nixon's trip to Moscow this coming Spring. If between now and May we can mount a successful pressure lobby on the President to make this question one of high priority on his agenda with Kosygin, then that will add a great deal of weight to the already increasing volume of pressure placed upon the Soviet authorities.

One thing we must be extremely careful to avoid is "compassion fatigue". Once it appears that American Jews are satisfied that Jews are now getting out, and once the pressure relents, that will be the day that the Soviets will begin to cut back the number of emigres. And so, we must continue our campaign full speed ahead.

By now you probably know that the number of Jews leaving the USSR has dramatically catapulted from 1000 in 1970 to 13,000 in 1971, and if it continues on the present level, we hope between 35 and 40,000 during 1972. With the proper combination of lobbying on our part, other help which I will ask of you tonight in a few minutes, and a good political climate, this number could again dramatically climb to even greater proportions.

At the rate of 50,000 per year, it would take, of course, half a century to get all the Jews out. Why the note of urgency, therefore? There is no urgency in the sense that if we do something now, in 1972, we will have finished the job, and can then sit back and relax. The critical urgency lies in the fact that if we fail in this crucial moment of Jewish history to meet the beginnings of this challenge, when the level is still fairly low, we will have created a lost opportunity which will preclude the future possibility of increasing the numbers and saving a large and great Jewish community from spiritual destruction.

To take advantage of this great historic opportunity, we must help solve many of the problems that now face Soviet Jews and the State of Israel.

#### V - What Dangers Face Soviet Jews and Israel?

A Soviet Jew wanting to apply for an exit visa must endure a prolonged period of mental, physical and emotional agony. Since the principle upon which the Soviets are permitting Jewish emigration is repatriation of families, every Soviet Jew making application to the office of OVIR, must bring an affidavit from an Israeli relative. In 1971, 40,000 such affidavits were supplied by various sources, and relatives were "found", "discovered" and "produced" by various Jewish organizations. Thank goodness, there is no problem in this sphere, and that all Jews can be considered one large "family".

Next, the Soviet Jew must, after sharp and sustained interrogation, repudiate Soviet citizenship, and ask for repatriation to his true homeland, the State of Israel. The Soviet officials at that point begin to treat this individual as a disloyal rebel, unworthy of Russian residence or benefits, and as one who is committing treason. Were the Soviet Jew able to leave within days or even weeks after application, that would present no major problems. However, often the waiting period goes into months and, in some cases, years.

Not only must this man without a country now find means of support for himself and his family (since in all likelihood he will have lost his job for his treasonous act) he must also pay the Russian government a huge fee for his education, for the exit visas, and for the plane ride to Vienna - all of which adds up to about 1000 rubles per person, or several thousand dollars per family. A Soviet doctor earns about 150 rubles per month, so you can see what an impossible hardship this imposes.

Were this money not available to the Soviet Jews, which they themselves clearly do not have, the whole Operation Soviet Exodus would have to be aborted. A certain national Jewish organization whose initials begin with U and end with A, will send into Russia, through various means which we need not dwell upon now, the tens of millions of dollars for these and other purposes.

This does not begin to explain the needs of then getting these Jews from Vienna to Israel, housing them, settling them, feeding them, re-training them, and building schools, hospitals, and other facilities for them - which costs Israel about \$35,000 per family - just for bare essentials.

All this at a time when Israel's social problems, problems of finding housing and providing education for Sephardic immigrants of ten and fifteen and twenty years ago, problems of an enormous budgetary drain for defense, have never been more critical.

#### VI - Our Responsibility - Rising to the Challenge, the Opportunity

Just think to yourselves what will happen if Soviet Jews in Israel begin to write letters to their friends and relatives back in the USSR that their problems are not being solved and that living conditions in Israel are impossible; that the dream of the great return to the Promised Land has turned out to be nothing more than a nightmare! What will happen then? What will happen to this long-awaited dream of restoring a huge segment of our people, cut off from us for over a half-century, back into the main stream of Jewish life?

Just think to yourself what you would have done had you been able to save a Jewish life thirty years ago, when no price in the world could have kept six million Jews alive! What sacrifice would you make were we able to turn the clock back and say to ourselves, "If only we pay a certain price for each Jew, we could save one third of our people from gas chambers and crematoria?" Is there anyone in the synagogue tonight who would not sell his home, give up his car, wear old clothing, and eliminate all vacations and luxuries - if only we could turn the clock back and save six million Jewish lives?

Well, unfortunately we cannot turn the clock back. And I don't think the Jews in the USSR will be shot if we don't ransom them. But there is something that is worse than physical death. And that is spiritual death - death not by gas but by shame; death by disgrace, death by purposelessness; death by humiliation; death by loss of pride, dignity, faith and hope. And if affluent American Jewry is not willing to ransom their brothers, why should they have hope, and faith? In whom can they trust, if not in us? If they give up their last source of deliverance in the world, then why go on fighting and struggling and endangering their lives and their jobs and risking separation and exile and imprisonment?

Unless we American Jews rise to the greatness of this unprecedented opportunity, we will have written a chapter in Jewish history that is far worse than the one written by the Nazis 30 years ago. For they were madmen, racists, power and glory hungry maniacs. If we lose these three million Jews, or two million Jews, or one million Jews - or however many want to escape the Soviet prison, then it will not be because of a deranged megalomaniac in Europe. It will be because of selfishness, and greed, and callousness and insensitivity. We will have done to our own brothers what Hitler never succeeded in doing to us.

We have now been protesting and demanding from the Soviets to let our people go for almost a decade. Finally, they have begun to listen to us. Now the ball is in our court. The Russians are saying to us, as it were, "either put up or shut up. Here's your chance. Take it or be quiet, and stop all the noise." We cry out, Let My People Go! Now, we - yes, we, American Jews, must let our own people come by providing for them the wherewithall with which to make this Messianic pilgrimage, and to forge a new life in the Land of Promise when they arrive.

The sad fact is that half the members of synagogues in this country gave zero to UJA last year. Our Board of Directors passed a resolution last year asking that all our members make a contribution to the United Jewish Welfare Fund. This year I hope we will implement that resolution. I personally will want to know of any Jew in my congregation who commits the obscene act of ignoring the desperate plea of his brothers. In my opinion, the most vulgar expression in the English language is not any four-letter word, but "So What!", "I don't care!"

#### VII - An Exchange of Freedom

In conclusion, I want to read to you a letter written by a gentleman from Orange County, California to his children, last month. The author of this letter was a participant in a UJA mission to Israel in January, 1972, and he describes in it what happened to him when he met a plane of arriving immigrants from Russia at Lod Airport.

"Two Jews met this morning.

Two Jews met this morning at Lod Airport, outside of Tel Aviv, shortly after the sun came up.

One arrived on a luxury jet from Austria.

One arrived on an air conditioned bus from a luxury hotel, just days after he, too, arrived on a luxury jet... from California.

Two Jews met in Israel, and for each it was the first time his feet had touched the land of his ancestors.

Two Jews met in Israel, and embraced, and shed tears without shame, and exchanged only one word:

'Shalom'

These two Jews embraced for several minutes, and wept together.

One was sixty and dressed in black and wore a hat and cried.

The other was fifty and dressed in double knit and cried.

The man dressed in black carried a small package...personal to him.

The man in double knit carried a small package...an expensive camera.

Both cried, and exchanged only the one word.

The man in black, three days before, left his home in Russia.

The man in double knit, three days before, left his home in California.

...these two Jews met this morning.

For the man in black, freedom became his, the dignity to live and worship (if he so desires) and work... and be free for the rest of his days.

For the other man, that which was his freedom -- his personal, selfish freedom -- was circumscribed, for the rest of his days, and his great treasure and his activities and his heart were no longer his alone.

I do not know the name of the man in black, nor did I see him after the embrace and the tears, nor do I know from what city he came nor to what home he went.

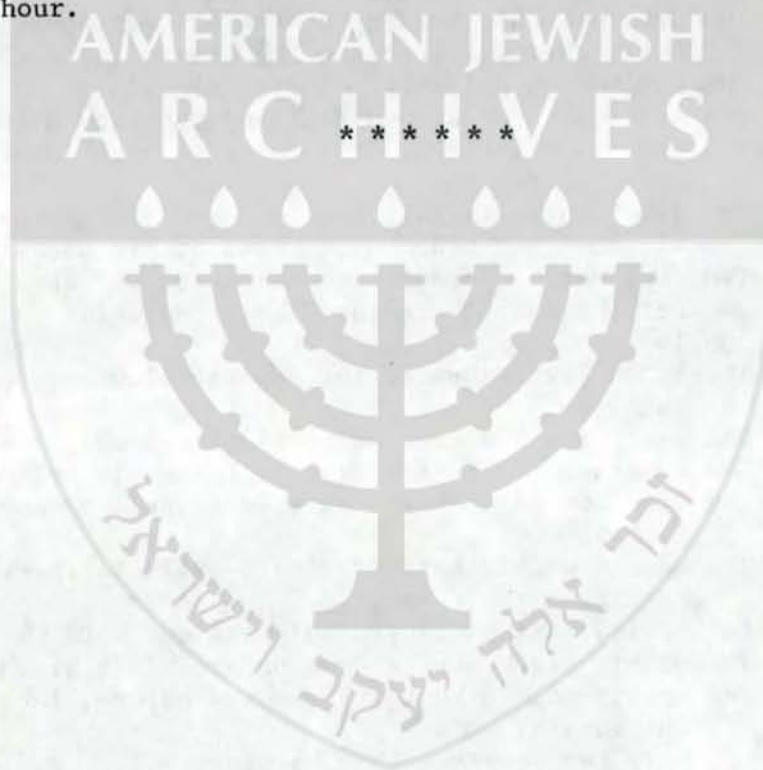
I am the other man, and I say to you that when two Jews met this morning shortly after the sun came up, they met as brothers and as kinsmen and they exchanged freedom.

I now have less.

I wrote this to you, my children, because I want you to know what happened to your father this day, January 12, 1972."

My dear friends, we too must give up some of our freedom, in exchange for theirs. Every Jew in this synagogue tonight must give up some of his freedom, because his treasure, his activities, and his heart are no longer his alone. We are all of us prisoners with the Leningrad nine, and with the Soviet three million. And we will not be truly free until every Russian Jew who wants to can go to Israel!

When Mr. Peled concluded his address, he said, "We demand from you, on behalf of Soviet Jewry, Israel, and the world Jewish people, to give us the ability to face and to solve our problems." I believe that our bearing the name Jew means that he has the right to make that demand upon us. I hope we will be great enough Jews to rise to the challenge of this historic hour.



*rabbinical  
meetings*

MEMORANDUM

Date February 28, 1972

To Mr. Irving Bernstein

From Rabbi Earl A. Jordan

Subject Meetings of the American Rabbinate with Mr. Natan Peled, Minister of Immigrant Absorption and Rabbi Herbert Friedman. (Feb. 14, N.Y.C., Feb. 15, Chicago; Feb. 16 Los Angeles; Feb. 17, Miami)

Genesis

As a result of the Steering Committee's meeting with Irving Bernstein in which the current large scale immigration from the Soviet Union was discussed, it was decided to convene as many of the American rabbinate as possible, together with their key lay leadership, for an information-sharing and inspirational session.

Because of the restrictions on the use of the mass media imposed on us, we felt that the rabbinate would be one of the most effective ways to bring the story to the wider American Jewish community.

In addition to the information-sharing function of these convocations, we determined to use them as the setting in which we would prevail upon the rabbinate to adopt a meaningful action program on behalf of U.J.A., the major element of which would be the 100% Plan.

Program

While the format changed slightly from city to city, it was composed of four basic elements:

1. A presentation by Mr. Peled which dealt with the Russian Aliya and the problems of absorption.
2. A presentation by Rabbi Friedman which filled the gaps left by Mr. Peled and emphasized the arduous<sup>ness</sup> and difficulty experienced by Russian Jews trying to obtain exit visas.
3. The outline of an action program to be undertaken by rabbis and synagogue leaders. Rabbi Ehrenkranz made this presentation.
4. A description of the materials in the packet distributed at the close of each meeting. EAJ did that.

There was also ample time for questions of the panel and for discussion among the men.



In each city, a local rabbi of prominence in his community who serves as a member of our R.A.C. chaired the meeting, introduced the speakers, and moderated the question and answer period.

Action Plan

We called upon the rabbis to do the following:

1. Call a meeting of their synagogue Board of Trustees in order to brief them on the current Soviet immigration and the needs which it has created.
2. Call for a 100% Plan Resolution by the Synagogue Board.
3. Compile, with the aid of the local Federation or Welfare Fund Office, a list of congregation members who are non-contributors.
4. Organize a committee, with the help of the Board, to solicit non-contributors who have not been successfully reached through the local drive.
5. Write a personal note of thanks to each congregant who has participated in the Campaign.
6. Write to each non-contributor, after he has been unsuccessfully solicited by a member of the synagogue committee or by the rabbi himself, expressing his disappointment and the hope that whatever circumstances prevented the member from making a gift at this time will soon be altered.
7. Speak on Russian aliyah from the pulpit. The Sabbath before Passover (*Shabbat Hagadol*) and Passover itself, are to be emphasized. Speak of the history, the current facts and the needs created or aggravated by the Russian immigration.
8. Write items for the congregational bulletin. Samples were provided.
9. Publish UJA visual pieces which were supplied, in the Bulletin. They are copies of 1972 campaign posters. Their use in the synagogue bulletin will relate the synagogue's campaign to that of the community.
10. Contact the R.A.C. for any further materials or information.

ATTENDANCE

<u>City</u>	<u>Rabbis</u>	<u>Presidents</u>
New York City	185	21
Chicago	86	17
Los Angeles	68	19
Miami	<u>32</u>	<u>4</u>
Totals	371	61

## MATERIALS

Each participant received a packet of materials containing the Pollack lecture on the history of Soviet Jewry, several useful articles about the situation of Jews in the Soviet Union as well as their absorption in Israel (for use as Sermon material), a comprehensive fact sheet, sample synagogue bulletin articles, copies of UJA Campaign posters for use in bulletins, and a copy of Leonard Shane's letter.

## FOLLOW-UP

1. Every rabbi who attended will receive a personal letter from Rabbi Friedman, mailed from Jerusalem.
2. Every rabbi who attended will receive a check-list to be returned to the R.A.C., indicating what action he has taken. He will also receive an edited transcript of Mr. Peled's and Rabbi Friedman's remarks.
3. Every rabbi who did not attend will receive the packet of materials distributed, together with a cover letter explaining what the rabbis are expected to do. He will also receive the transcripts.
4. The Federation Executives will receive all materials sent to rabbis, as well as a list of the rabbis in their respective areas who attended our meetings.

## EVALUATION

Mr. Peled was brilliant, sensitive, believable, and very low-key. His credentials as the Minister of Immigrant Absorption made him the most credible person we could have invited to our meetings. He charmed his audience in each of the four cities we visited and the stories he told were most useful for the rabbis' writing and speaking.

Herbert Friedman was Herbert Friedman. He filled the gaps left by Mr. Peled because of the limitations of time which he imposed on himself. HAF emphasized the drama of the process of leaving the Soviet Union and was also the source of innumerable quotable quotes.

Rabbi Ehrenkranz came through as a dedicated, sincere and highly motivated colleague who successfully serves a congregation and the Jewish people. He did not preach or harangue. He asked nothing of the men which he has not done or would not do himself.

The logistical problems were minimal and cooperation everywhere was superb.

EAJ:er

## MEMORANDUM

*Date* February 28, 1972

*To* Rabbinical Advisory Council

*From* Rabbi Earl A. Jordan

*Subject* Meetings of the American Rabbinate with Mr. Natan Peled, Minister of Immigrant Absorption and Rabbi Herbert Friedman. (Feb. 14, N.Y.C., Feb. 15, Chicago; Feb. 16 Los Angeles; Feb. 17, Miami)

### Genesis

As a result of the Steering Committee's meeting with Irving Bernstein in which the current large scale immigration from the Soviet Union was discussed, it was decided to convene as many of the American rabbinate as possible, together with their key lay leadership, for an information-sharing and inspirational session.

Because of the restrictions on the use of the mass media imposed on us, we felt that the rabbinate would be one of the most effective ways to bring the story to the wider American Jewish community.

In addition to the information-sharing function of these convocations, we determined to use them as the setting in which we would prevail upon the rabbinate to adopt a meaningful action program on behalf of U.J.A., the major element of which would be the 100% Plan.

### Program

While the format changed slightly from city to city, it was composed of four basic elements:

1. A presentation by Mr. Peled which dealt with the Russian Aliya and the problems of absorption.
2. A presentation by Rabbi Friedman which filled the gaps left by Mr. Peled and emphasized the arduousness and difficulty experienced by Russian Jews trying to obtain exit visas.
3. The outline of an action program to be undertaken by rabbis and synagogue leaders. Rabbi Ehrenkranz made this presentation.
4. A description of the materials in the packet distributed at the close of each meeting. EAJ did that.

There was also ample time for questions of the panel and for discussion among the men.

In each city, a local rabbi of prominence in his community who serves as a member of our R.A.C. chaired the meeting, introduced the speakers, and moderated the question and answer period.

#### Action Plan

We called upon the rabbis to do the following:

1. Call a meeting of their synagogue Board of Trustees in order to brief them on the current Soviet immigration and the needs which it has created.
2. Call for a 100% Plan Resolution by the Synagogue Board.
3. Compile, with the aid of the local Federation or Welfare Fund Office, a list of congregation members who are non-contributors.
4. Organize a committee, with the help of the Board, to solicit non-contributors who have not been successfully reached through the local drive.
5. Write a personal note of thanks to each congregant who has participated in the Campaign.
6. Write to each non-contributor, after he has been unsuccessfully solicited by a member of the synagogue committee or by the rabbi himself, expressing his disappointment and the hope that whatever circumstances prevented the member from making a gift at this time will soon be altered.
7. Speak on Russian aliyah from the pulpit. The Sabbath before Passover (*Shabbat Hagadol*) and Passover itself, are to be emphasized. Speak of the history, the current facts and the needs created or aggravated by the Russian immigration.
8. Write items for the congregational bulletin. Samples were provided.
9. Publish UJA visual pieces which were supplied, in the Bulletin. They are copies of 1972 campaign posters. Their use in the synagogue bulletin will relate the synagogue's campaign to that of the community.
10. Contact the R.A.C. for any further materials or information.

#### ATTENDANCE

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EAJ:er

## MEMORANDUM

*Date* March 23, 1972

*To* Mr. Irving Bernstein

*From* Rabbi Harlan Wechsler

*Subject* FOLLOW-UP ON RABBINICAL MEETINGS

I want to keep you up-to-date on the follow-up in which we are engaged as a result of our four Rabbinical meetings:

1. The Rabbis who attended the meetings have since received:
  - a. A personal letter from Herbert A. Friedman in Jerusalem.
  - b. A mailing from us containing transcripts of talks by both Israel Minister of Absorption Natan Peled and Mr. Friedman.
  - c. The sermon prepared by Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins.
  - d. A sample 100% Plan Resolution.
  - e. An additional statement on the "Maror" to be used at the Seder.
  - f. A questionnaire which asks what the rabbi has done to follow up the meeting in his own congregation.
2. We have just begun to receive the returned questionnaires (25 as of the moment). Most have passed new 100% Plan Resolutions, two-thirds of the rest had already passed such resolutions, and the rest have congregations which are reticent to pass resolutions, but are setting up committees to achieve 100% participation. All these rabbis reported to their Boards on the meeting, and all are using their positions to push the issues raised in the meetings. (Sermons, personal solicitations, school involvement.)
3. We have received many bulletin articles by rabbis from all over the country, addressed to the issues of Soviet Aliyah, trying to mobilize synagogue support for the campaign.
4. All Federation Executives have been informed of the rabbis in their community who were present at the meetings, and Executives were asked to urge these rabbis to mobilize their congregations for effective participation in the campaign.

Mr. Irving Bernstein

Follow-up on Rabbinical Meetings ...2.

5. Every rabbi in the country who was not present at the meetings has been sent all the materials that the others received. Each of these rabbis received a detailed letter from Rabbi Ehrenkranz, explaining exactly what actions we want from him and his congregation.
6. All Federation Executives, Executive Staff, and Field Staff have likewise received all the materials distributed to the rabbinate. We have asked their cooperation in making use of the rabbinate as allies.
7. Our future actions depend partly on the feedback we receive. There will be certain communities where the rabbis are anxious to act, but unsure of what to do, where we will have to use our resources to see that something constructive is indeed done. There are some significant communities in which there was sparse or no representation at our meetings. We will handle these separately.

The Rabbinical Assembly, the organization of approximately 1,000 Conservative rabbis, passed a resolution at their Annual Convention last week, urging all their congregations to adopt the 100% Plan, and thereby increase their participation in the UJA campaign.

We shall be coordinating our future publicity to these congregations with this new fact. There are in this group a very large number of rabbis who are anxious to help us.

To make the course of action which the Rabbinical Advisory Council advocates clear to the Rabbinate, we are currently preparing a simple brochure for mass distribution. This will describe a one, two, three action program, which rabbis in synagogues are asked to follow in order to achieve 100% participation by their synagogue in the Federation campaign. This should be ready in about two or three weeks.

By and large, we are hearing voices which we haven't heard before, which are raised to urge the congregational community to not only march for Soviet Jewry, but to now pay. This is good to hear, and we shall continue to press this as new developments occur.

HW/bga