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University Study Mission. Student evaluations. 1970.

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Philip Handleman
Earlham Hall
Whittier College
Whittier, California 90608
September 11, 1970

Mr. Herbert Friedman
Executive Chairman
UNITED JEWISH APPEAL
1290 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10019

Dear Mr. Friedman:

Following through on your suggestion, attached is my analysis of the University Students Mission this summer.

The Mission was a most exciting and rewarding experience for me, and I am so pleased to have had the opportunity to spend the time in Israel.

My best regards.

Sincerely,

Philip Handleman

The University Students Mission of the United Jewish Appeal can be the most meaningful, productive, and rewarding trip abroad for American college students. The extent to which this is realized depends basically upon two factors. These two major factors are: 1.) the itinerary; and, 2.) the group itself. (I consider this the more important factor.) It is my feeling that with a poor itinerary the trip can still be fruitful if the group is a good one. Of course, the converse is true, if the group is not good then regardless of the itinerary, the trip will not be a fruitful one.

You may ask what is meant by a "good" group? Actually it means precisely what the UJA wants it to mean. That is to say, the UJA could choose the loudest, rowdiest young men, could call them appropriate for the Mission and thus they would be "good". It would probably even be a meaningful trip for the young men. Yet for all those concerned including the UJA's future, it is my firm opinion that a relatively

serious, mature, and diverse group of young people must be chosen for the University Students Mission. It must be realized that such a group will not be waiting to enroll each year at the steps of the Sperry Rand Building. The person(s) in charge of selection should also be cognizant of the fact that there will have to be many more applicants than mission members in order to achieve an astute group. It is a virtual impossibility to have forty potential leaders out of a total of forty applicants. I know that choosing who should and should not go is a most difficult task; one, in fact, I would not desire. The job of selection must be done, however, and to make it possible a massive campaign publicizing the Mission should be started as soon as possible. It is only through a large advertising effort that the UJA will receive the great numbers of applicants it needs in order to have the truly good mission. I strongly urge that one's academic record and parents' UJA status play absolutely no part

in the selection process. Rather, strong leadership potential as evidenced through past activities should be the guiding factor as to whom is chosen for the mission. The existence of a very large pool of young people from which to draw (numbering in the hundreds of thousands) should be an encouraging factor if the UJA decides to become more selective.

Qualities of leadership should be accompanied with qualities of character, maturity, and the necessary serious-mindedness. Once again I acknowledge the difficulty involved in being (or trying to be) so accurate in the selection process, and of course some mistakes will always be made. Yet through this process the University Students Mission should become a more productive and meaningful experience.

Specifically, what do I mean by a more serious group? For instance, when our group visited Dachau, everyone was extremely serious inside the camp. However, once outside, the mood changed too suddenly in my opinion. The

same is even more true of our visit to Maut-
hausen. In addition, many group members were
saying during and after the visit to Mauthausen
that they needed someone (namely Rabbi Friedman)
to put them in the proper mood. I think anyone
who has to be placed in the proper mood at a
concentration camp lacks an essential feeling
he should have if traveling on the UJA Mission.
Everyone with the group should be automatically
touched in response to seeing these horrors of
a few decades ago. And while it may be helpful
for someone to add to the prevailing atmosphere,
it should not be necessary.

It was also stated by certain group members
that only Jews could truly empathize with the
visits to the concentration camps. I dispute
this idea on the grounds that certain human
beings regardless of their heritage can feel just
as much as any other human being or be just
as compassionate. If I recall correctly there
were about 2,000 priests killed at Dachau. In

my opinion it is sheer nonsense to think that gentiles cannot feel as much for their tortured clergymen as we Jews feel for our dead rabbis. I think, therefore, non-Jewish college students should be invited to participate in the Mission. They can, as explained, experience the ultimate feeling a Jew can experience, and it is mainly for that reason that it would be worthwhile for them to come. Ideally, the trip would get the Jew and the gentile to recognize the loss is just as great whether it be a priest or a rabbi and to prepare each for the prevention of an other holocaust. From a practical standpoint having non-Jews along would be obviously beneficial in future fund-raising campaigns considering that now the UJA is beginning to actively seek non-Jewish donors.

There has been some question as to whether or not it would be wise to have a coeducational mission. This depends upon the nature of the group. If female college students accompanied

the 1970 Mission it would have been an utter failure. However, I think it is possible to have a meaningful coeducational mission. The only major stipulation is that the mission members must be at the adequate level of maturity. This would make the selection process even more difficult, yet in the end I think it would pay off because the presence of girls would make it a more relaxing journey. Their presence would add to the educational experience, not detract from it as some believe.

The 1970 itinerary was imaginative, exciting, and solid at most points. It tended to emphasize the proper places and people. Having not traveled to Israel or three of the other countries prior to this trip, I am unable to truly know all that we might have passed over. It seems to me, though, that the major points of interest were covered.

The virtue in the 1970 itinerary lies in that its creators realize education needs not be painful. The trips should continue to cover

most of the places visited this year. To get an idea of what people are doing for Israel today, the mission members should see the JDC offices in Geneva, meet with Louis Pincus, tour the old-age homes, etc. To better understand Jewish history they should again be led to the Wailing Wall, pass through the crematoriums, visit some ancient ruins, museums, and especially Yad Vashem. Of much importance are the visits to military installations and Nahals. Briefings by the local commanders should be continued as should meetings with noted personalities such as the commander of the "Exodus". Meetings such as those bring endless inspiration to mission members.

Perhaps the lectures by the professional "Joint" and Jewish Agency people could be a little less frequent and not quite as lengthy. More encounters with leading figures from the intellectual and artistic world would be of great value in rounding out the trip. The mission members would then leave Israel with a more

enlightened sense of what is going on in the country. In other words they must see that Israel's growth has not been merely physical.

Having frequent group dinners is not wise in my opinion unless it is accompanied by a lecture. Mission members might wish to explore around at night on their own, and thus attendance at group dinners with no lectures should not be mandatory. This policy would be beneficial to the group leader because he would not have to be bothered with acquiring proper restaurant accomadations and taking head counts.

The experience on the kibbutz is maybe the most enjoyable and rewarding of all. I think one week on a kibbutz is sufficient time to gain just the most fundamental concepts of kibbutz life. Remaining on one for an extra week, two weeks or month would not add essentially to one's understanding of it. Only a very prolonged stay at a kibbutz could do that. Therefore, I suggest that the one week stay on a kibbutz be continued in future missions. I only hope

that the UJA and JA can develop a less cruel way of taking mission members off the kibbutz after only seven days of work. A special tie exists between the kibbutz and mission members as in the case at Miz Gav'am. The more gently they can be pulled away the better for both parties. After all, the kibbutz is counting on the group to stay about two weeks and they might really need that extra help.

With regard to disciplinary action, it should be taken only as a last resort and avoided if at all possible. Hopefully the selection process will eliminate at the outset any need for disciplinary action. The important thing for the UJA to recognize is that it must not threaten action and then fail to take action upon appropriate circumstances. If the UJA does act in such a manner then it is in a small sense, a paper tiger. When a member(s) of the Mission is caught possessing illegal drugs they should, generally speaking, be completely sep-

arated from the group and maybe even sent home. (While it may be that personally I feel certain illegal drugs are on a trend towards legalization, that is irrelevant. What is important is to remember that those few possessing illegal drugs are placing the group as a whole in jeopardy.)

Finally, it is normal for us to make mistakes. That should not overly worry us. It is when we continuously repeat those same mistakes that we are in trouble. Perhaps the lesson at the concentration camps applies to some extent to the Mission. Only by remembering past mistakes will we be able to prevent them from recurring in the future. It is with hope and a feeling of pride that we should look to improving the UJA University Students Mission for I am sure they will be improved.

Philip Handleman