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"Act Now" memo. 1994.

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ACT NOW

A proposal by
Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman
May 18, 1994

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A PREVIOUS PERIOD OF INACTIVITY

THE 1930'S AND 1940'S

During this period there was bitter fighting over ideologies. The two major organizations disagreed as to objectives. The Joint Distribution Committee felt that emphasis should be placed on the rescue of and assistance to endangered populations of Jews, rather than on the development of Palestine which seemed to be a distant goal, ill-suited to an amelioration of the present dangerous situation.

The Zionist-oriented forces, campaigning under the banner of the United Palestine Appeal, resisted and resented the JDC approach, as being short-sighted and unaware of the tremendous yearning of East European Jewry for a place of its own where it could be at peace. Further, there was an underlying uneasiness between the two societies, due to the differences still prevailing between German and Russian-Polish elements. The JDC had been founded by the "uptown" German Jews, while the Zionist movement derived its support from the masses of Russian-Polish immigrants.

The arguments over ideologies resulted in fiercely competitive fund-raising. This situation prevailed over a number of years and existed not only on the national level but infected the local communities as well. Neither campaign did well. Bereft of adequate funds, both goals languished and struggled along while the fate of millions of Jews overseas grew increasingly perilous. Finally the moment arrived when it became obvious that the major fund-raising would have to be conducted in a united fashion in order to mobilize American Jewry. The moment was Kristallnacht, the night of November 8-9, 1938, when a massive attack raged throughout the entire country of Germany against synagogues and business establishments which came crashing down in a blizzard of broken glass. The Nazi goal became clearer. The two antagonistic organizations launched the first united campaign within eight weeks, following years of suspicion and separation.

| Year | Goal | Raised |
|------|-------|----------|
| 1939 | \$20M | \$16.25M |
| 1940 | \$23M | less |
| 1941 | \$25M | \$38M |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 1942-1944 | The JDC continued to receive more than the UPA. |
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AMERICAN JEWISH

In 1942 - The Zionists passed the Biltmore Resolution, calling for the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. This caused tension in the fund-raising arena and a renewed sense of competition.

In 1943 - There was established the American Council for Judaism, a violently anti-Zionist pressure and propaganda group, largely supported by the Reform movement, which fought openly and hard against the idea of a State. This also affected the fund-raising climate.

In 1944 - The goal was \$32 million - amount raised was \$27 million.

Between 1939 - 1945, inclusive, a total of seven years of uneasy cooperation, interrupted by frequent fights and suspicions, a total of \$124 million was raised, for an average of 17.7 million per year.

American Jewry could not agree on the nature of the danger nor on the method to counter it. The only positive fact was that the UJA managed to hold together, because both sides compromised, but the campaign limped along.

ACTION DURING THE 50's - 90's

American and Diaspora Jewry simply decided, once the State of Israel was established, that this should be the priority. The campaign took on a focus, ideological quarreling ceased, and the upbuilding of the new country assumed center stage. Absorbing immigrants (rescue), security and the economy were the highlights. There were ups and downs in the yearly campaign totals, but slowly the momentum gathered strength; the wars developed a sense of maturity and realism; the thrill of creation provided additional stimuli, and the net result of a half-century of concentrated effort elevated the campaign from a \$60 million level to more than one billion.

This focus and concentration must continue at a high level for the balance of the decade, or so long as the migration from the ex-Soviet Union maintains itself at the 50 - 70,000 annual level.

MEANWHILE, WE MUST PREPARE FOR THE NEXT HISTORIC PERIOD

Everyone in the leadership ranks is fully aware of the terrible danger regarding the future survivability of the organized Jewish community. The term "CONTINUITY" has, in the short space of one year, become a dreadful cliché - so badly overused that most people are ashamed to use it. The word is hollow because there is no action flowing from it. Actually, from the time of the CJF General Assembly in November 1992, when the issue was first raised in a manner which brought it to the attention of the entire community with great impact, until today, there have been reams of speeches describing what must be done, and almost no concrete steps have been implemented.

Yes, there are continuity committees in every city and in every organization and in many synagogues, and there are small beginnings, but no action on a national level, and not even the slightest rumblings of a master plan or parts of a plan or anything resembling a galvanization of energy and will to address the matter on the proper scale. There is an awareness that the drift toward indifference and dissolution can be ameliorated, slowed down, perhaps even reversed by certain

programs, such as a rejuvenated Hillel on the college campuses, a massive number of teen-agers being exposed to an Israel Experience, and a network of superior day and boarding schools on the upper level. Faint beginnings have been made in all these areas. But what is needed - a major shock to awaken consciousness, to lead the way toward widespread action - is not being spoken of, let alone showing up on anyone's drawing board.

No - we are not paralyzed by ideological arguments as were our predecessors in the 30's and 40's. Happily there is no argument or disagreement as to the diagnosis or the prescription. There is simply continuous fumbling, with no one taking the lead.

We need one or more national personalities to mobilize a small group of caring people who will:

1. Form a new non-profit tax-deductible 501 c 3 corporation which will create and supervise master programs in six areas:

- A) Israel-centered Experiences for youth, ages 10 - 25.
- B) Boarding Schools, of high calibre, with Judaic-secular curricula, for grades 9 - 13.
- C) Hillel Foundations, on college campuses, to encompass both undergraduates and graduate students, ages 18 - 22, and 22 - 28.
- D) Summer Camps in U.S.
- E) Sabbatical Year in Israel, for adults.
- F) Family Life Seminars, for adults.