

MS-763, Box 72, Folder 3 Transcription

Friedman, Herbert A. "A Critical Year Between Crises." 1968

Herbert A Friedman:

We have for many years been operating under the gun of crisis after crisis, emergency after emergency. We've had war, we've had famine, we've had expulsion, we've had flight border crossings, and mass movements. Responding to these headline events we of the UJA have hardly had time to analyze what our long run position is. Stop to think of what's happened in the last few short years. There were the heavy Fadarian raids, murderous raids, deep inside Israel, during which the borders were not safe or secure. And then there were the retaliation raids conducted by Israel against her neighbors. The Hungarian Revolt breaking out and thousands fleeing across the border, eighteen thousands of them Jews.

I'll never forget standing on that bridge at Andau, on a cold winter day as 1956 let in 1957, [01:00] watching the waif like figure of the refugees coming through the fog. Almost at the same time Egypt was throwing out her Jews.

I stood on the dock with Moe Leavitt of the JDC in the city of Naples on January first 1957 and we met the first ship that came in. A thousand people on board, a little red cross flag flying, and the French speaking red cross official acted for us, bringing one by one the tragic and broken figures of men and women who'd lived all their lives in Egypt and were now thrown out.

And as if that weren't enough at the same time there was the war in Israel. The cyanide campaign when I stood and watched the troops going out on paratroop drops. And people trying to get out of Morocco and people trying to get out of Persia, and the gates of Romania opening and closing and Jews pouring out of Russia into Poland. Then coming out of Poland [02:00] in streams down through Vienna and over to Naples. Yes, and through Trieste and through Belgrade. You the Jews of America have stood in a dozen danger places on this inflamed globe in the last half

dozen years and witnessed through me your surrogate, and taken to heart the tragedies of the people who are put through crisis, and torment, torture, and difficulty, all the indignities of psychological fear and deprivation that cause men to wonder if they live on a civilized planet, or in a beastly jungle.

This is the half decade through which we've come. And if in our campaign on behalf of the Jews we have talked crisis and calamity to you; it was because we had no choice.

Now at the beginning of 1960 there's a certain calm there seems to be no emergency, [03:.00] no screaming headlines. And with the calmness comes the opportunity for perspective. The chance to see where we stand, what we've done, what we must do. The chance to take a long look back and a long look ahead.

First the look back, back past the hectic half-decade, back beyond the eleven and a half years of the state of Israel, back beyond the twenty two years of the United Jewish Appeal. Let's look back to the beginning of the century. This has been a century of migration. One of the most incredible centuries that the whole of mankind, certainly the entire Jewish people has ever lived through. The beginning of this century our parents and mine migrated freely to this country. Three million of them came flooding out of Eastern Europe, Poland, Russian, Hungary, Romania.

Now, after a short forty or fifty years, five and a half million [04:00] of us live in this country in circumstances of a golden age, under the most benevolent democracy that man has ever created. And in the middle of that same period of fruition and growth and the accumulation of money and power, freedom and ease, education and health, in the middle of all this, six million of us were done to death. After all those ashes settled, and the smoke evaporated, there came another frantic period of running, running, running, over the face of the globe. Our people lived in camps and they lived on the run, in trains, and planes, and boats, and wagons, on their way to lands of resettlement. The chief land of haven during all these years has been Israel.

The first eleven and a half years of Israel's life we've brought almost 1 million people there, and we've resettled in other free lands [05:00], Canada, Australia, South America, the United States, another three hundred thousand. This we've done, you and I. What remains to be done as the great century of migration goes on? How many others must we be prepared, nay, must we resolve to move to their final resettlement? How many Jews are there in areas of danger or difficulty, or oppression or spiritual suffocation on the face of the globe? How many in North Africa, in Asia, in the satellite countries behind the iron curtain, who yearn to go to a land where they'll be free. Well outside of the Jews of the Soviet Union, in all of North Africa, in Asia, in Eastern Europe, total is only six hundred thousand.

We've taken a long look back and a long look ahead. And in this great area, [06:00] the migration of a people, we find that we've move one million three. Which means we've done two thirds of our job, and yet have only one third left to do. Does that prospect of going on with the job tire you? Now there's no doubt in my mind. I know you well. You will not tire. You will persevere in this, until the day that I can come and say to you, every Jew is at peace and rest. There is no more migration to be done.

Well besides the migration, there's another great area in which we can look back with pride, and look forward with hope. And that's the area of bringing help, zucker, and assistance to Jews in countries from which they cannot or will not move. The Joint Distribution Committee, that wonderful organization, with forty-five years of experience [07:00] acting with monies that you pour into the treasury through the UJA, has provided lifesaving services through the years for countless myriads in need on all the continents of the earth.

This year 1960, over two hundred thousand Jewish women, men, children, in twenty five countries will receive JDC's loving care. I need not document this with a series of large or impressive figures. Let me give you just one figure, one human figure, in just one country of the twenty five in which your money works. Let me give you the figure thirty thousand. What

does that mean? There are thirty thousand Jewish children in morocco. The JDC feeds them. That is you and I, we feed them. We feed these thirty thousand children the only hot meal they eat during the day [08:00} every day of every month of every year, for ten years now. And for ten more if we have to.

We shall not stop until there is no Jew anywhere who is in need of anything. I believe that just as the process of migration, we'll with our persevering work its way out. So the process of providing relief and help to Jews in all the countries of the world where they need it, will also works itself out. Now let the perspective come down into its sharpest focus. Now let's take our longest and hardest look at the most important process of all. That is the successful absorption into the life of Israel, of the million immigrants we brought there. What have we done for the millions? What remains to be done? Have we come two thirds of the way, one third, [09:00] half way, where are we?

Look good friends there's a simple criterion by which we judge when a man no longer needs help. When he's on his own feet, literally making his own living. That is when he no longer needs help from the agencies of relief and instead begins to pay his own taxes. Using this criterion, two thirds of the million refugees we brought to Israel have switched from the relief rolls to the tax rolls. That's a thrilling accomplishment in eleven and a half years. But it leaves out, leaves unsettled, leaves waiting one out of every three we brought there. Three hundred fifty thousand human beings are in need.

Now never forget this. We brought them there, we're responsible for them, [10:00] we, nobody else. In a sense Israel has been the dumping ground for our Jewish conscious. Israel could very well have said no. Bigger countries, perhaps equally humanitarian countries have said no, there are regulations about who can come in. Israel has never said no to anybody. Sick, blind, one leg, no legs, TB'ed, trachoma, epilepsy, eighty two years old, two months old it doesn't matter. The People of Israel with the heroic grandeur of our ancient Jewish tradition of loving our sons and loving our neighbors. The people of Israel have said to everyone, come, our doors open.

But you see we, you and I, we've been the initiators. We've been the committers so to speak. We've committed ourselves. We've told [11:00] these three thousand and fifty thousand people they could go to Israel and we would take them, support them, help them. These, three hundred and fifty thousand are living in Israel today either without homes, without jobs, without farms, without school rooms for the children, without the requisite number of hospital beds per thousands of population, or without this or that, the withouts seem endless. Let's really focus now. Let's take the most important without one by one.

Houses, we want to give these people houses. A new house in Israel is two hundred forty square feet. Think of that. How big's your kitchen? We put four, five, six people in the two hundred forty square feet. A little red tile roof, white walls, that's better than living in a tent or tin [12:00] hut, or canvas shack in the shanty towns. That's rights, shanty towns in Israel. They're called ma'abarot which means transit camps. Sixty thousand people are still living in them. Some have been there for five, six, seven years.

Not very transitory is it? Slow despair in those little tin prison huts. It makes family life impossible. The older sons go off to the army and their glad not to come back to the family. The older daughters run to the nearest big cities and, get into, lord knows what kind of trouble. The children grow up scared by the squabbling and scarred by the squalor. They've waited long enough, people who live in these ma'abarot, now this year during this strange quiet we have, during this breathing spell, we [13:00] have to, we want to, we must build homes for them. The shame of the shanties must be eliminated, or again houses. You know there are slum areas in Israel in the big cities in to which the ma'abarote dwellers have graduated, thinking they were going onto something better. Places like Wadi Salib in Haifa, or the Musrara Quarter in Jerusalem, or the Hatikva Quarter in Tel Aviv. How ironic, Hatikva means hope, it's a slum. What are these places but potential breeding spots of crime, fight, delinquency and the degradation of all the ideas for which we stand as Jews. These cancerous places with their crooked alley ways and their dirty chambers must be eliminated from the face



of the land... or let's turn away from housing now and look at farms [14:00].

Looking back, the statistics about farms are impressive. During the eleven and a half years of Israel's statehood, the Jewish agency, that is you and I with our money have established four hundred eighty five farm settlements all over the land. On these settlements we've put thirty two thousand farm families. I don't know how many people that means, maybe one hundred fifty thousand.

Many of these people didn't want to go to the farms, let's be honest, you and I wouldn't either. If you and I were uprooted from our communities, if we wound up somewhere in some strange part of the earth and if by our past experience we were city dwellers, we were urbanites, we would be in a predicament, we wouldn't know how to go out and pick cotton or plant potatoes, and neither did they. Neither did they those Jews from Warsaw, from Bucharest, from Casablanca, and yet you know [15:00] when they got out there on those blistering hot farms faced with day after day of long hard unfamiliar labor, they did it, they persevered, they kept at it, they kept at it.

What have they gotten for their pains? How many of these four hundred eighty five settlements are farming at full capacity today? How many of these thirty two thousand farm families whom we've transplanted are making a full living from that land? Not one. Why, because the people are indolent? Nah, why, because they don't know how to farm? No, because there're no skillful instructors? No, because they don't have the will? No, no, no, no. The reason that these farms are not self-sufficient, not bringing in enough money to support the families living on them, is that they have simply not received [16:00] the investment they need in order to earn.

We haven't provided, tractors, or irrigation, or electric power, or cars, or something. We haven't provided the full capitalization to make these farms work. We brought the people there, again I remind you, never forget that, and we have not given them what they must have to live full lives there. Well what happens to a man who cannot make a living on his farm? We aren't going to let him sit and starve, so he's put on a truck

and moved down the road away from his farm, ten or fifteen kilometers where he cracks rocks or builds culverts or bridges, or plants trees at the side of the road, or does something else worthwhile or necessary. But it's obvious that this is just a sort of labor subsidy system. He's on a public works projects, and we can give him twelve or fifteen days a month. [17:00] He makes about two and a half dollars a day, because funds don't exist for more. What happens when the head of a family can only earn thirty or forty or fifty dollars a month, obviously not enough to support the family. The wife goes out and tries to work and even the children may have to go out and try to work, and family life again is disrupted. The youngsters again are kept from school in a burden.

Well, now I think we're focused. Now, I think the picture is sharp. Ma'abarot, slum conditions, family disintegration, undercapitalized farm settlements, and under employed farmers, more family disintegration. That's the picture of the daily life of one third of all the immigrants who've come to Israel in the last eleven and a half years who are not fully absorbed. We've taken the long [18:00] hard look and it has told us two things. In these years of migration and resettlement we've accomplished a great deal but we have fallen behind.

I don't think it's necessary for me to say more than that, to show you the urgency behind the United Jewish Appeal Campaign for 1960, this critical year between crises. I know that once you understand a problem, you'll rise to it, and you will rise to this 1960 campaign, yes and the campaigns of '61, '62, and '63. And slowly but surely, we will clean out these pockets of slums, and deficient farms, and all the potential breeding places of vice and juvenile delinquency, none of which we want to see in Israel. And if we go at this with diligence and understanding, with heart [19:00] and, with head then in two, three, maybe four years, we'll clean up this whole back log of unabsorbed one third of the present refugee population. And mind you we will at the same time try to keep up with the new refugee influx as it inevitably comes into Israel. We will not fall behind again. People are alive who wouldn't be except for us. Israel is here and it wouldn't be except for our help. Future lies in our own hands.

Twenty years ago others slew us and we had nothing to say about it. They can't anymore. We've taken Jewish destiny into our own hands. We've said that we will build a state there which will be a model for mankind and the young nations of Asia and Africa go there to learn. [20:00] At the Hebrew University, everyday there are hundreds of people from Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Parma, the little people, the disenfranchised, the weak, the newly emancipated nations. They all go to Israel. They all look there, till they have the feeling and the intuition that the old words of the bible are true and that Torah, Torah meaning science, and learning, and knowledge, and skill, and morality. Torah will come again from Zion that is from Israel. Deep down in their hearts men yearn for something better on this earth. These yearning men from Africa and Asia, blacks and the browns and all the others, look to Israel as the source of that better world.

Was it worthwhile for us to work and to give so Israel would be there as a model for men, not just as a haven [21:00] for Jews. I tell you it was worth all the money we've ever given or ever will give. When you're alone in the still of the night, at that unique moment when man is capable of creating goodness, when he makes himself like an angel, give yourself to this silent thought that you have done, that you can do, that you will continue to do. Year after year building that land, saving people, serving as a model, building a new society and as you do this our children will come to you some day and say, good, good, father you did a good job in your life. What's that worth?

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