

Personal Letter

From

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

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Dear Friend,

Immigration into Israel is going up sharply once again. This is very good news, for it means Jews are getting out of countries from which they desire strongly to leave. And yet this most welcome turn of events now begins to present Israel and us with a new set of challenges.

For the past several months, before April, immigration had been at a rate which we called 25,000 persons per year. In the ebb and flow of this life-saving business, one cannot calculate costs and plans on a monthly basis. Housing, transportation, employment opportunities all must obviously be planned on a longer-term basis. And so we projected a yearly flow of 25,000 or even 30,000 in the budget which was proposed to the UJA Conference last December for the calendar year 1961.

The monthly figures of immigrants arriving during January, February and March 1961 seemed to bear out these predictions and we had hopes that the plans for the year would run smoothly. Of course, as the campaign proceeded it became clear that the UJA would not achieve the \$72.7 million goal which had been adopted, and there would be some serious difficulties in financing. Nevertheless, it was hoped that as the year went along we would find some way. Perhaps the immigration figures would drop, or perhaps the campaign figures would rise.

In April, however, the situation altered radically, when the flow of immigrants into Israel rose to 4000, of whom 2000 came out of a certain European country. The totals for January, February and March had averaged 2000 per month. So you can see that suddenly and unexpectedly the problem doubled. For May, the total figure was 4720, and for the first half of June, the total figure is 2500.

I am certain you know the principal country in question, and am equally certain you understand why we do not even mention its name. There are very large numbers of Jews who wish to leave and publicity will endanger their exit. It is as simple as that. So long as this movement is quiet, unreported in the press, and receives no public attention, it will continue. This has been clearly indicated. And it has been equally clearly spelled out for us that the movement will again be stopped or drastically reduced if there is an undue amount of noise.

We all know how difficult it is to conduct the campaign without publicity, and yet we simply must. We must raise more money and yet are pre-empted from employing the techniques best designed to raise that money. This is a tremendous challenge which only the top leaders of American Jewry, of whom you are one, can solve.

The same conditions apply to another country, in North Africa, from which there is no legal emigration to Israel. Here again, Jews are getting out, and will do so, we hope, in ever-increasing numbers. But there is no way that we can describe publicly what is happening. You must accept it as a fact that this emigration continues, under conditions reminiscent of the time 15 years ago, before the establishment of the State, when immigration was called "illegal."

Total immigration for May was 4720. The breakdown is as follows:

Europe	2552
North Africa	1147
Turkey	240
Cuba	81
India	83
33 other countries, from all continents	<u>617</u>
	4720

No one has any idea how long this will continue. Just as the situation altered sharply for April and May - so it might relapse to its former rate or increase still more. I think we should be very sober in our judgment and very careful in making plans. Yet it is obvious that we shall have to do something if this continues, for in another few months the projected annual rate of 25,000 will be doubled.

I am here now in Israel with the Young Leadership Mission of the UJA. This is the first such group we have ever organized and it is an outstanding success. There are 140 persons in the group, average age 32, and all are people of present or potential leadership in the 49 communities from which they come.

Before coming here, the group went to Vienna for a briefing session by the chief executives of the Joint Distribution Committee. We heard about the work in Morocco, Poland, Iran and Western Europe. We learned of sensitive programs conducted in other places. We were told the story of burgeoning Marseilles, now containing the second largest Jewish population of any city on the West European Continent - tens of thousands of refugees and immigrants in transit. And we were given a bird's-eye view of the network of ORT schools, which are partially financed by the JDC. These sessions were all conducted with map and pointer, in the best academic fashion, so that

at the conclusion of two mornings' work, the participants had a global perspective of the life-saving work being done in the Jewish world by the JDC.

Also in Vienna, we saw some of the new immigrants coming through. We met them at the feeding canteen maintained by the Jewish Agency, and also drove out to the camp on the outskirts of the city which is an old Austrian army barracks rented by the Agency. We saw people who had arrived in the morning by train or plane, and who were being trans-shipped that same evening down to Venice or Naples where they would board the next vessel. Our young leaders had two afternoons of intensive emotional contact, listening to the stories and looking into the eyes of people who were coming to freedom for the first time in almost two decades.

Five days later there was a most remarkable reunion in Haifa when our group boarded an Italian ship and met again the same people they had seen in Vienna. New photographs were taken and new excitement prevailed. The whole story of the real meaning of Israel was concretely demonstrated in this home-coming scene.

The process of the absorption of immigrants is worth noting. Every vessel leaving from a port of embarkation in Europe, whether Marseilles, Naples, Piraeus or any other, has on board a team of Jewish Agency officials from the Absorption Department. These men utilize the several days of the journey to complete the processing of the immigrants. The team is informed of the housing available in Israel. They have a personal interview with each family on board, discussing age, health, profession, location of possible relatives, job opportunities, etc. When this is all done, a decision is made as to where each family should be sent, and this is radioed forward to Haifa, so that the proper transportation and arrangements can be available the moment the ship docks.

Upon their arrival at the Haifa port the immigrants receive the following:

- 1) A contract for a specific house or flat in a specific town.
- 2) Furniture (one bed, mattress and blankets per person).
- 3) Household equipment per family (pots, kerosene stove, etc.)
- 4) Food parcel with eight days food per person.
- 5) Pocket money according to the size of the family.
- 6) Transportation to the final destination.

The following is the breakdown of those we saw arriving on the SS Enotria on 6 June 1961:

<u>Destination</u>	<u>Families</u>	<u>Persons</u>
Elath	2	6
Kfar Yona (near Natanya)	10	31
Ir-Ganim (near Jerusalem)	5	16
Tiberias	8	20
Professionals (specially handled)	6	16
Going to Relatives	4	10
	<u>35</u>	<u>99</u>

The higher officials in the Agency and Government are excited and concerned about this new movement. They are excited because the entire raison d'etre of the State at this moment in history is to provide a home for those Jews who need and want to come here. When the emigration doors of any certain country open a little, Israel's heart beats faster at the opportunity to offer rescue and haven.

But these same officials are also concerned, because decisions must be made which involve large sums of money. Housing starts must be laid down, with planning months in advance. There is not enough money to build everywhere and to have thousands of vacant flats waiting. There is no money to waste in wrong decisions. And other plans must be made involving water, roads, schools - the thousand miscellaneous items that go toward making modern complex civilization possible. So it is easy to understand why the planners should be concerned, as well as excited.

There are other problems in the country, in addition to this new immigration situation.

The defence burden is still a staggering one for the citizenry. Even though there are cracks in the Arab wall, and all is not solidarity in that camp; even though there are often differences between Nasser and Moscow, and they seem sometimes to be in conflict; nevertheless two basic facts remain constant: first, that Nasser repeatedly calls for the destruction of Israel (as recently as February he said in a speech in Syria that he intended to drive the nail into Israel's coffin); and second, that Nasser continuously receives from the Soviet bloc newer and larger shipments of arms. Egypt has already taken delivery of MIG-19 fighter planes, which are superior in speed and armament to any other plane at present in the Middle East. The knowledge of these facts requires Israel to be constantly on the alert. She must steadily replenish her military stores and seek to maintain some balance in quality, if not quantity of materiel. This imposes a tremendous tax burden on the citizens here - and eats up a great portion of the national budget. So long as this continues, it is clear that larger contributions from the local budget toward immigrant absorption can be made only at the expense of national defence. That is obviously impossible. No one

should expect that. Thus the role of the UJA in immigrant absorption will become even more crucial as larger numbers of immigrants come.

There are many other serious problems, not the least among them being education. I have long hoped that there might be a time when we could begin to contribute to education in this country, which is not free beyond the 8th grade. With the traditional Jewish emphasis on higher education, Israel should be a land where ultimately everyone can receive university training. This is a beautiful dream - and we are today far from it.

Water is still one of the most central items to be solved. The huge 108-inch line is steadily advanced. The search for wells goes on. Desalination may be the hoped-for solution. There will be no future for the Negev without water.

I tell you about these things so that we may all be reminded of the work which lies ahead. Israel has made such startling progress in the last few years that some people have a tendency to say there is no longer any need for large-scale assistance. Her progress is clear and indisputable. Exports have increased; health standards have improved beautifully (TB eliminated, infant mortality one of the lowest in the world, etc.); foreign relations with many states have improved; industrial expansion continues apace. One could add to this list.

But it is a short-sighted and incomplete view to suggest that all problems have been solved. Prosperity, whether real or only apparent, growth, progress and achievement must all be applauded. We are happy and grateful to see the life of the people expand and develop. But we would be guilty of immaturity and dilletantism if we felt in any way that our main tasks were anywhere near completion.

The other afternoon we drove to Ashdod, a new port city being developed 25 miles south of Tel-Aviv. Huge bulldozers were levelling sand dunes to prepare for the construction of a tremendous truck assembly factory. And hundreds of building workers were busily erecting scaffolding and pouring concrete for new immigrant housing. On the sand a new city is being born. There is almost no grass - confusion reigns - there are no street signs or numbers - trucks rumble in and out. We disembarked from our busses amidst all this bustle to talk to the new people coming in. The first family I spoke to said they came from the Congo. The second family was from Cuba.

So long as there are Congos and Cubas in the world, our work is not done. Let's never forget it.

Sincerely yours,

Herbert A. Friedman
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