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"Personal Letter." 1964.

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נתימלון ארץ ישראלים בע"מ  
מלון המלך דוד  
ירושלים

October 28, 1964

Dear Friend:

I am here in Israel with the 10th Annual Study Mission of the U.J.A. One fact emerges out of all the meetings and statistics and tours and speeches - the fact that 1965 will be the fifth year in a row of high immigration, which has brought almost one-quarter million people here in the past four years and has caused a huge accumulation of social and human problems in the country.

The Gross National Product is growing at a phenomenal rate - 10% per year - the highest in the world, according to Finance Minister Sapir. Exports are growing as more and more products are sold abroad. But imports are growing as fast or faster - because a larger and larger population must be supported. And as this pattern of growth and expansion continues, the gap does not close, the trade balance remains unfavourable, a huge debt remains hanging over the heads of the people of Israel.

Everything is tied to the policy of immigration. If that were to be stopped, many problems would be solved, including the constant threat of a run-away inflation. But the immigration continues at a tremendous annual rate - and it remains the fixed policy of the Jewish people, in which we concur with full and warm heart, that any Jew who needs or wants to come here should be assisted to do so.

The countries of distress continue to pour forth their human cargoes. Planes and boats arrive in a steady stream - the processing goes forward, with an occasional distressing episode of people resisting their assignment to some development town or other in the far North or South - but in the main it is a beautifully organized system. The people are handled with affection, processed rapidly through the paperwork, and often find themselves in their brand new flats (2 rooms average) a few hours after they have landed on Israeli soil.

The other evening our Mission group stood on the edge of the tarmac at Lydda Airport to watch two El Al 707 jets land within one-half hour of each other. One aircraft came from Vienna carrying 111 persons, among them a man 101 years old who was sprightly and happy. The other came from Marseilles with 195 on board. There are only 142 seats on the jet - all the rest were children sitting on the laps of

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their parents for the entire journey. In our Mission there were first-time visitors to Israel and tenth-time visitors - but the emotional impact of witnessing this home-coming - was strong on all. The act of stepping down from the plane was the finality. For the refugees and wanderers the long journeying was over. They could now light the fires in their own hearths and never again think of flight. They were safe.

Mr. Louis Pincus, the Treasurer of the Jewish Agency, pointed out that on the national level, this immigration, welcome as it is, has created tremendous problems. The numbers are overpowering enough, but the composition and nature of the groups complicate the difficulties even more. 70,000 persons have come from a certain country in the past few years. In this group the average number per family is 6. 50% of this group is under 16 years of age. Most of the fathers are unskilled. Their earning power averages \$65 per month. Certainly life is difficult for these people. They are free - in Israel - at home - welcomed - but struggling. And they have all sorts of health, education, and welfare needs which simply cannot be fully satisfied with the means at our disposal.

Let me give you one example by referring to Malben, which is the program carried on in Israel by JDC for aged, handicapped, chronically ill or mentally retarded. We have had a full series of JDC sessions during the past week, and the Malben director Mr. Ted Feder revealed the fact that he has a waiting list for admissions to the various hospitals and homes for the first time since 1958. The heavy immigration has brought with it blind, sick and aged, in such numbers that the facilities are simply swamped. Malben cares for thousands of people annually in the medical and social fields in Israel - and has 40 institutions. For years there was room for everyone - and now the moment has finally come when the accumulation of needs has surpassed the capacity to care for them.

It is tragic that this moment should have arrived at exactly the time when the JDC annual income will be reduced by at least \$7,500,000. This is because the German Claims Conference money finishes by the end of 1964, and we must somehow function from now on without it. Mr. Feder put it



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well in his remarks: "What do we do? Do we limit our services? Do we retrench some programs? Do we tell the Village of the Blind that we must stop our workshops which provide them a minimum living? Do we mark 'no funds' on the request of tuberculous Moroccan father of 8 children for a kiosk?

The Haftorah for the second day of Rosh Hashonah is from Jeremiah 31, and has particular significance for us in Malben: "And the Prophet said, 'Grant salvation, oh Lord, to thy people, the remnant of Israel. I am gathering them from the ends of the earth with their blind and lame among them...'" Later in the passage mention is made of the miracle that will take place, and the blind and lame will be healed.

I did my best to find out how the miracle was brought about, because we in Malben-JDC are looking for such a miracle to solve the problem of the increased demands for our services and the severe budget cut we must experience next year. It would appear to me that the miracle may well lay in your hands, in your ability to encourage the contributing public in the United States to make even greater efforts in this year of tremendous need."

During the JDC meetings, Mr. Sidney Engel, the country director for Iran, gave a full report on the situation in that country. There is a completely friendly atmosphere. Jews are represented in Parliament. There is full parity in civil rights - no discrimination. The present Shah and his father have worked to establish this environment, and have succeeded in their enlightened approach.

Some say this is the oldest extant Jewish community in the world - going back to the time of Cyrus the Great of Persia. It numbers today 70,000 persons. Before the JDC went to work there in 1948, the infant mortality rate was estimated at 400 per 1000. Life expectancy was in the 30's. Illiteracy stood at 90%. The killing diseases of diphtheria and typhoid were endemic and epidemic.

Today, after 16 years of hard work, infant mortality has dropped to a normal 30 per 1000. Childhood diseases have been completely conquered, as has trachoma. Every Jewish child goes through grammar school - and under the age of



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20 there are no longer any illiterates. There are two high school systems - the Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Otzar Hatorah. It is hoped that within the next five years every child will get a full secondary education in one of these systems.

A medical program concentrates on pregnant and nursing mothers, and on children. All deliveries in Teheran are in hospitals. This represents tremendous progress. There is a home-visiting program by nurses and school-visiting by doctors. 8000 children are fed in schools daily. They get a snack mid-morning and mid-afternoon, plus the main hot lunch. This food represents 90% of what they eat each day, because at home there is almost nothing. Over the summer the children lose significant weight (except those who can be taken into the camp program).

Local committees of ladies are working very hard as volunteers in these schools and kindergartens. They take great pride in the accomplishments, and rightly so.

There were reports by other JDC directors and UJA leaders who had visited various areas two weeks ago, just prior to coming to Israel. Mr. Charles Jordan of Geneva chaired the seminars, and Mr. Leavitt and Mr. Warburg, both came from New York. The reason for all this was that the JDC began the celebration of its 50th anniversary of service to the Jewish people - a fact of which the Knesset took note in special ceremonies honoring the organization.

Security problems continue to occupy a predominant place in the minds of all responsible people. True, after the two Arab summit conferences held in 1964 it does not look as though an Arab attack is imminent. On the other hand, only the timing is in question, for Nasser has constantly repeated that he will destroy Israel - adding only that he will do it when he is convinced he has the superiority. The implication is that he does not have it right yet, but is working steadily toward that day.

The water line is pumping - and we saw it from the point of ingress at the Kinneret, through the open canals, pushing through the Hills of Galilee, being pumped higher and higher, finally to roll by gravity all the long miles southward to the Negev. It is good to know that this massive project - the result of so many years of hard work - has reached fruition.

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It is clear that we have another crucial year's work ahead. The usual questions will arise - a) how long will this go on; b) isn't the immigration drying up; c) isn't Israel getting more prosperous - can't she take care of it herself; d) how can Israel afford to give her people a tax cut in the face of such immigrant absorption and defence problems; and many more.

By now we know the answers to these questions. This process of rescue and resettlement will go on so long as there is any Jew anywhere who wishes to be moved to a place of freedom, in Israel or elsewhere.

Yes - Israel is getting more prosperous, but she cannot take this massive load all alone. Her people are taxed beyond the limit, and that is the real meaning of the tax cut - simply to give some slight relief, especially at the lower end of the earning scale. This tax cut, amounting to a total of IL 30 million out of a national budget of over IL 3 billion, or 1%, is more in the nature of a small wage increase than anything else. With the best will in the world, the people of Israel alone cannot bear all the burdens, including defence. Our help continues to be vital in the area of immigrant rescue and absorption.

At the Annual Conference in New York December 10-13 we will analyze the problems and program for 1965. Please make arrangements to attend, for in a period of 3 days you can hear the whole story told by the people who make the history. There will be a review of the JDC work around the globe - a full report on Israel - a glamorous banquet with Mrs. Golda Meir and Chief Justice Earl Warren. It will be at the new New York Hilton and I urge you to plan to come.

Very truly yours,

*Herbert A. Friedman*

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Executive Vice-Chairman