

TR-3800 Transcription

Friedman, Herbert A. "The Critical Year Between Crises." 1960.

Herbert Friedman: [00:00] This is Herbert A. Friedman, Executive Vice Chairman of the United Jewish Appeal. I want to present to you the story of the human needs behind the UJA campaign in 1960, a year which I call the critical year between crises. 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 fedayeen 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, [01:00] the Hungarian revolt breaking out and thousands fleeing across the border, 18,000 of them Jews. I'll never forget standing on that bridge at Endau on a cold winter day, as 1956 let in 1957, watching the wraith-like figures 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 1957, and we met the first ship that came in, 1,000 people on board, the little Red Cross flying, and the French-speaking Red Cross official who 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, [02:00] the Sinai 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 Russian and into Poland, and then coming out of Poland 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 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.

[03:00] And if, in our campaigns on behalf of these Jews, we have talked crisis and calamity to you, it was because we've had no choice. Now, at the beginning of 1960, there's a certain calmness. There seems to be no emergency, 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 11 and a half years of the State of Israel, back beyond the 22 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, [04:00] has ever lived through. At the beginning of this century, your 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 40 or 50 years, five and a half million 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. And 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, [05:00] 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. In the first 11 and a half years of Israel's life, we've brought almost one million people there. And we've resettled, in other free lands, Canada, Australia, South America, the United States, another 300,000. 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 [06:00] where they'll be free? Well, outside of the Jews of the Soviet Union, in all of North Africa, in Asia, in Eastern Europe, the total is only 600,000.

We've taken the long look back and the long look ahead. And in this great area, the migration of a people, we find that we've moved 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? No, there's no doubt in my mind. I know you will. 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, beside the [07:00] 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, succor, and assistance to Jews in countries from which they cannot or will not move. The Joint Distribution Committee, that wonderful organization, with 45 years of experience, acting with monies that you pour into the treasury, through the UJA, has provided life-saving services through the years, for countless myriads in need, on all the continents of the earth. This year, 1960, over 200,000 Jewish women, men, children, in 25 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 1 country of the 25 [08:00] in which your money works. Let me give you the figure 30,000. What does that mean? There are 30,000 Jewish children in Morocco. The JDC feeds them. That is, you and I, we feed them. We feed these 30,000 children the only hot meal they eat during the day, 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 will, 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 work itself out.

Now let the perspective [09:00] 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've brought there. How do we stand? What have we done for the million? What remains to be done? Have we come two-thirds of the way, one-third, halfway? 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've brought to Israel have switched from the relief rolls to the tax [10:00] rolls. That's a thrilling accomplishment in 11 and a half years. But it leaves out, leaves unsettled, leaves waiting one out of every three we've brought there. Three hundred fifty thousand human beings are in need. Now never forget this. We brought them there. We're responsible for them, we, nobody else. In a sense, Israel has been the dumping ground for our Jewish conscience. 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, trachoma, epilepsy, 82 years old, two months old, it doesn't matter! [11:00] 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 door's open."

But you see, we, you and I, we've been the initiators. We have been the committers, so to speak. We've committed ourselves. We've told these 350,000 people they could go to Israel and we would take them, support them, help them. These 350,000 are living in Israel today either without homes, without

jobs, without farms, without schoolrooms for the children, without the requisite number of hospital beds per 1,000 of population, or without this or that. The withouts seem endless.

Let's really focus now. Let's take the most important withouts, one by one. [12:00] Houses. We want to give these people houses. A new house in Israel is 240 square feet. Think of that. How big's your kitchen? We put four, five, six people in the 240 square feet. A little, red-tile roof, white walls. That's better than living in a tent or a tin hut or a canvas shack in the shantytowns. That's right, shantytowns 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. That's not very transitory, is it? The slow despair in those little tin, prison huts makes family impossible. The older sons go off to the army [13:00] and they're 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, the people who've live in these *ma'abarot*. Now, this year, during this strange quiet we have, during this breathing spell, we 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, into which many of the *ma'abarot* dwellers have graduated, thinking they were going on to something better, places like Wadi Salib, in Haifa, or the Musrara Quarter, in Jerusalem, or the Hatikva [14:00] Quarter, in Tel Aviv. How ironic. *Hatikva* means hope. It's a slum! What are these places but potential breeding spots of crime, vice, delinquency, and a degradation of all the ideas for which we stand as Jews. These cancerous places, with their little crooked alleyways 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. Looking back, the statistics about farms are impressive. During the 11 and a half years of Israel's statehood, the Jewish agency, that is, you and I, with our money, have established 485 farm settlements, all over the land. On these settlements, we've put 32,000 farm families. I don't know how many people that means, maybe 150,000 people. Many of these people didn't want to go to the [15:00] 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 do they. Neither did they, those Jews from Warsaw, from Bucharest, from Casablanca. And yet, you know, 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. And what have they gotten for their pains? How many of these 485 settlements are farming at full capacity today? How many of these 32,000 farm families whom we've transplanted [16:00] are making a full living from that land? Not one! Why, because the people are indolent? No. Why, because they don't know how to farm? No. Because there are no skillful instructors? No. Because they don't have the will? No, no, no. The reason 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 the investment they need in order to earn! We haven't provided tractors or irrigation or electric power or cows 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 [17:00] 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, 10 or 15 kilometers, where he cracks rock and builds culverts or bridges or plants trees at the side of the road or does something else worthwhile and necessary. But it's obvious that this is just a sort of a labor subsidy system. He's on a public works project. And we can give him 12 or 15 days a month. And 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 \$30 or \$40 or \$50 a month, obviously, not enough to support the family? His 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 and are burdened.

[18:00] Well, now I think we're focused. Now I think the picture is sharp. *Ma'abarot*, slum conditions, family disintegration, undercapitalized farm settlements and underemployed farmers, more family disintegration. That's the picture of the daily life of the one-third of all the immigrants who've come to Israel in the last 11 and a half years and who are not fully absorbed. We've taken a long 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 [19:00] crises. I know that, once you understand a problem, you rise to it. And you will rise to this 1960 campaign, yes, and the campaigns of '61 and '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 with understanding, with heart and with head, then, in two, three, maybe four years, we'll clean up this whole backlog of the 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 [20:00] behind again.

People are alive who wouldn't be, except for us. Israel is here and it wouldn't be, except for our help. The 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'll build a state

there which will be a model for mankind and the young nations of Asia and Africa go there to learn. At the Hebrew University, every day, there are hundreds of people from Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Burma, the little people, the disenfranchised, the weak, the newly emancipated nations. They all go to Israel. They all look there. For they have the feeling and the intuition that the old words of the Bible are true, and the Torah, *torah* meaning science and [21:00] 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. And these yearning men from Africa and Asia, the 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 that Israel would be there as a model for men, not just as a haven 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, [22:00] 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, your children will come to you someday and say, as I hope mine will come to me, "Good. Good. Father, you did a good job in your life." What's that worth?

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