

THE CHANGING PARTNERSHIP: AMERICAN AND ISRAELI LEADERSHIP

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Israelis will no longer be simply the recipients and spenders of funds, but they will see their role in a fuller sense of working with American leadership to plan cooperatively, and to provide and evaluate services as they work together to build a stronger Israel.

INTRODUCTION

A remarkable phenomenon in the American Jewish community has been its deviation and dedication to the State of Israel. The organized Jewish community raises hundreds of millions of dollars for needed services in Israel and the Jewish Agency is the major recipient.

The lay leaders of American communities raised funds that simultaneously met local community needs and a growing commitment to assist Israel. The process of raising funds has been inherently also a process of strengthening their communal leadership. This well developed process of inviting and educating appropriate members of the community to assume leadership positions continues to be an outstanding quality of the American Jewish community.

This article will explore the functioning of American lay leadership in their partnership with Israeli leaders. A conceptual model for enhancing the present relationship will be suggested. Parenthetically I am using the term "partnership" to refer to a relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities (as in a common enterprise).

THE PRESENT ARRANGEMENT

There has always been a "one-sided" relationship between American fundraisers

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(i.e., local community Federation leadership) and Israel. The implicit agreement was that American leaders raised the money and the Israeli leaders spent it: in other words, a limited partnership. An excellent discussion of the historical development of the American Jewish communal relationship to Israel can be found in *Good Faith and Credit*, by Gottlieb Hammet.¹ In a summary perspective, Charles Silberman points out in *A Certain People* that the funds were raised out of an overriding emotional connection to the Jewish State.² Until the founding of Israel, it was not easy to raise money for the Yishuv in Israel. Once the State was founded, the American Jewish community took a new view toward supporting a now formally recognized homeland for the Jews.

In 1947 the UJA raised \$57.3 million and after the War for Independence they were able to raise \$200.7 million in 1948. The emotional pull of a post-war period has a great impact and it was repeated twenty-five years later. In 1973, the UJA raised \$364.7 million and in 1974, following the Yom Kippur War, the American Jewish community contributed \$667.7 million.

The increase in donations was reflective of several things including:

1. greater identification of American Jewry with the State,

1. Gottlieb Hammet, *Good Faith and Credit*. New York: Cornwall Books, 1985.

2. Charles Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today*. New York: Summit Books, 1985, pp. 199-202.

2. effectiveness of newly developed professional campaign techniques and
3. increased identification with Israel by lay leadership through active participation in missions.

The missions provided donors and potential donors the opportunity to experience Israel in a personal, first-hand basis. No longer did the volunteer solicitor have to *convince* the contributor of the validity of the cause.

Once the community member participated in a mission he or she not only increased the next pledge but also was prepared to assume a leadership role. Growth in the number of new lay leaders and their desire to be active have caused a change in their expectations of the partnership with Israel leaders. The American leadership no longer wishes to be passive; they not only continue to *raise* funds but they are also beginning to take an interest in *allocating* those funds. The partnership can no longer remain status quo. Rather the central issue has become, "What form will the change take?"

In order to appreciate the dramatic impact made upon the American community and the Israeli community we can look at Project Renewal as a specific example. Charles Hoffman, in his new book, has pointed out that Project Renewal allowed for the Diaspora community to be involved not only in the raising of funds, but also in the decisions as to how those funds would be utilized.³ Most federated communities have participated in rebuilding Israeli neighborhoods and in shaping new leadership in Israel. For the first time, American fund-raisers were able to meet face-to-face with Israeli community leaders to decide how the funds would be spent in the communities.

One of the most exciting aspects of Project Renewal was that no one, neither

on the American nor on the Israeli side, was able to anticipate the overwhelmingly positive impact on Israeli communities of direct Diaspora involvement. After overcoming fears of being told what to do in their local communities, Israelis were able to learn from the experience of meeting with Diaspora leaders. They were incorporating the American community process into their own activities. Local leaders were developing their skills and were able to encourage the participation of other Israeli citizens.

This form of international community process has extended the nature of the partnership. The major focus had been raising money to help save "poor," "old" Jews in Israel and now there was a person-to-person contact causing Americans to take a closer look at who these Israelis really were and, conversely, the Israelis had to rethink their conception of the Americans as sources of limitless funds.

The Project Renewal experience alone could serve as exemplar from which to draw all of the central principles of this paper. But there are issues on a macro-level to discuss that elaborate further the concept of the changing partnership. The concept remains the same—Americans and Israelis working together not only to raise the funds, but to plan and carry out the programs.

On the highest level this can be seen through the functions of such national organizations as the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) and the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF). These organizations represent local constituencies through national mechanisms and they are the vehicles for any substantive change in the dynamics of the way the leadership groups relate to each other in America and Israel.

To review briefly the routing of funds for services: the share of the money raised by local Federation campaigns for overseas is passed on to UJA and allocated to the United Israel Appeal, Inc. (UIA) and the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The JDC sponsors programs throughout the

3. Charles Hoffman, *Project Renewal: Community and Change in Israel*. Jerusalem: Halberstadt Communications, 1986.

world with a special program in Israel. The UIA allocates its portion of the funds to the different programs of the Jewish Agency, and the UIA is responsible for monitoring and accounting for the funds expended in accordance with United States tax laws. It is additionally important to note that the governance of the Jewish Agency is fifty percent political through the World Zionist Organization and fifty percent through the fundraisers, UIA and the Keren Hayesod.⁴

Until the Jewish Agency was reorganized fifteen years ago the major program decisions were primarily political. However, following the reconstitution of the Jewish Agency, the Diaspora leadership began to take a greater interest and larger role in the governance of the Agency. At the present time 37 of the 74 seats on the Board of Governors are filled by Diaspora leadership and 22 of them are from the United Israel Appeal, Inc. The UIA members should be representing the interest of the American Jewish community and be concerned about the \$350 plus million the Agency receives each year.

A key issue is how the American Jewish community can have an impact on the funds sent through the Agency and how the partnership can be equalized so that there is mutual responsibility? More than thirty communities have formed Jewish Agency committees and the CJF has called together lay leaders from all over the United States and Canada to examine issues concerning the functions of the Jewish Agency. This is a monumental step forward and has set in motion a series of events still to come.

4. In order to appreciate fully the governing process one must understand the structure and function of the Jewish Agency Executive, Board of Governors and Assembly. Since the reconstitution of the Agency there have been changes in the guidelines for decision making. I recommend the publication, Daniel J. Elazar and Alysa M. Dortort, ed. *Understanding the Jewish Agency: A Handbook*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 1985.

Of course, it would be simple to be able to sit back and analyze the trends in retrospect, but we are now witnessing the beginning of a quiet revolution. I am sure that once the Israelis realize there is a movement for change in the wings they will fight back. The start of this movement inheres not alone in the formation of the CJF Jewish Agency Committee, but in the parallel development of local Federation Jewish Agency Committees. Once a local Federation assumes responsibility for following the activities of the Jewish Agency, then the local lay leadership will begin to recast its approach to allocating funds for Israel.

No longer will allocation discussions in local Federations divide between an in-depth examination of the local agencies' budgets and a seamless vote of support for the block allocation to Israel. Their increased awareness and knowledge will lead to a desire on the part of volunteers to advance their views of the policies and the programs, as well as the budgets, of the Jewish Agency. In a number of years, the Federations may find themselves with an involved, knowledgeable, lay leadership seeking to have an impact in a substantive way.

The rationale for participating in the decision-making and evaluation of the programs of the Agency is twofold. One, the American Jewish community has responsibility for the funds and, two, the Israelis need to develop a procedure for evaluating programs and this can be learned from Americans. As was pointed out earlier in this article, Project Renewal extended the American participation in the partnership beyond raising funds and permitted Israelis and Americans actually to work together. A more active involvement of American Jews will permit them to become full partners while, simultaneously, communicating a new image to their Israeli counterparts. The Israelis will eventually see the American as being more than a source of funds and this will open doors for additional kinds of joint

ventures.

Of course, this can only come about with an end to the political patronage in the Jewish Agency administration. There is a need to re-define the role of the WZO in the process of determining the services that are to be offered through the Agency. This can come about only through the constructive and pointed efforts of the lay leadership who serve on the boards of directors of national Jewish organizations. At the pivotal position of the triumvirate of UJA, CJF and UIA, is the UIA precisely because UIA community representatives serve on the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FEDERATION STAFF MEMBERS

It becomes clear that local Federations have the crucial role of orienting and educating the leadership to initiate the change process and to participate fully in the partnership. For obvious reasons, the initiative for a fuller participation must come from the American leadership. Israeli colleagues will be most content to continue the present structure.

This result will not occur unless Federation staff members begin to reorient their work on behalf of Israel. It means not only marketing Israel as "The Dream" or "Jewish Homeland" in the exotic sense to increase pledges alone, but also reconceptualizing Israel as the recipient of Federation funds and the Jewish Agency as the provider of human services to a particular constituency. The same demands for accountability must be placed upon the Jewish Agency as are made on service providers in local communities. The American Jewish professional staff are in the position of beginning to frame the new image.

More of Local Federation staff need to familiarize themselves with the structure, function and process of both the administration and service delivery system in the Jewish Agency. The context of the

network of government and voluntary services must be understood as a background for appreciating and for viewing with a critical eye the Jewish Agency's role in Israel. Without this knowledge base, the local Federation as an organization cannot accept the task and fulfill the objective of educating the lay leadership to become full partners in the provision of needed services in Israel.

THE LAY LEADERSHIP'S ROLE

Following the efforts of the professional staff to understand the Israeli side of the UJA-Federation's mission, the local communities should begin to formalize their interest and investment in changing their role in the partnership. Structurally, the establishment of a standing Jewish Agency (or social service) committee should be understood as a basic requirement. (The term, "Israel Service Committee" may be preferred because many Federations may want to use the same committee to review all their allocations to Israeli organizations. The paradigm presented here would apply to all allocations and not only those through the formal campaign). The Committee becomes the formal vehicle for the local communities' interest in the services delivered in Israel and formalizes the leadership's responsibility for knowing how the funds they allocate are used overseas. Without the institution of the Committee in the formal structure, the global interest of the Federation, and the particular interest of the lay leaders, will be lost.

Once the Committee is established, clear goals need to be formulated, and not uncommon to this process is the self-education of the group. During the discussion of issues, the members can decide which are significant, interesting and timely for their community. After they have immersed themselves in the subject the local community can begin to receive information about the Federation's work in taking a closer look at services in

Israel and in re-defining their role in the partnership.

An experience of the author with a Federation Executive Board in a small city typifies the problem. In discussing the expenditure of funds and the involvement of the American community in the allocations process, the author spoke about changing the nature of the partnership. This upset one of the members of the Board who said "I give my money to Israel, for Israel, and it is up to the Israelis to decide what to do with it."

I am not sure how prevalent this attitude is but it does represent the need our lay leaders have to rethink their connection with Israel.

An active local Jewish Agency Committee should not lend an anti-Israel quality to the involvement. It means a change in the conception of the role for lay leaders, and in order for this to take place, each community may have to allow local leaders to participate in a process of re-defining their relationship to Israel. Outcomes cannot be predicted (in this area, as in many others), but the role of the professional is to provide the leadership with the experience of reviewing the present system and to explore the possibility of changing the practice of their involvement.

To continue the scenario, once local communities have adopted the new Committee, they will be in a better position to utilize the present structure to communicate their ideas and to seek answers to their questions. The system provides for local community representation, as well as for organizational representation, on the UIA Board of Directors and in turn, on the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency. Unless the leadership feels they have the right to be involved and knows how to use the organizational structure, they will continue to remain silent and to be uninvolved. We are at a turning point! There is a timely interest in the local leadership.

THE IMPACT ON ISRAEL

The formulation I am presenting cannot be complete without a word about the impact on the Israeli leadership. The Israeli group is composed of:

1. politicians,
2. professionals and
3. a small group of lay leaders.

The author's experience in monitoring the Board of Governors and the administration of the Jewish Agency is that they do not really understand the American system of allocating funds and of evaluating the services provided by those funds. However, as Israel is only 38 years old and is very much a developing country, so too the social service system is very much in a process of developing.

Through changes introduced by the American lay leadership there will be an impact upon the Israeli system and the Jewish Agency. The effect can only be positive, although the struggle is a difficult one and may, indeed, take a long time. A transplantation of the American system is not necessarily being suggested. If the American Jewish community re-examines its relationship to the services it is providing in Israel and takes an active role, then the Israeli leaders on all three levels will learn from the experience. The incorporation of the American system of decision-making in voluntary services was done in Project Renewal and it can be accomplished in the Jewish Agency. This will in turn change the Israeli conception of their role in the partnership. Israelis will no longer be simply the recipients and spenders of funds, but they will see their role in a fuller sense of working with American leadership to plan cooperatively, and to provide and evaluate services as they work together to build a stronger Israel.

CONCLUSION

Several ideas have been presented toward re-defining the partnership between American and Israeli leadership. At the pivotal position is the professional staff of

the Federation, and the role accepted by the lay leadership will depend upon the support and guidance received from that professional staff.



ANNUAL MEETING



*Conference of
Jewish Communal Service*

May 25-28, 1987

*Concord Hotel
Kiamesha Lake, New York*