

CHANGING RELATIONSHIP OF JEWISH FEDERATIONS AND ISRAEL

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There is something in me that does not mind having a street named for Kansas City in our neighborhood in Tiberias. There is some other part of me which cringes when I see musical instrument cases with tags on them which say "provided by Project Renewal."

There has been the feeling among Israelis—and it seems to be growing—that they are the builders of the State, and recipients of largesse from Jews in the Diaspora who are the “observers” and fund-raisers. Most Federation personnel who have been in touch with members of the Israeli government and even with academics, have been told, often in irritation and sometimes with great passion, that our money is an impediment to their independence. As one Jewish Agency official put it, some Israelis see it as a “corrupting” influence. Those outside Israel, industrially engaged in intense fund raising campaigns in behalf of Israel are taken aback and have to ask themselves what this phenomenon is all about.

We do understand that the need for help can also breed resentment of these to whom one must turn. In the Israeli consciousness there are all the effort, risk and sacrifice they underwent to build a Jewish State and all “they” do is give money. One can begin to understand the source of that feeling, which by now has existed over several generations going back even prior to the establishment of the State.

Of course, the means exist for a *partnership* rather than such a splitting of roles to mark the relationship of Israelis and Jewish Federations. The Jewish Agency acts as the link between the government of Israel and Jews outside Israel.

However, very few Israelis know about that and perhaps even a smaller proportion of American Jews are aware of the structure for such a partnership.

The questions could well be asked: are the Israelis the only ones who are tired and irritated with American fund raising? Do American Jews need more excitement and stimulation to their giving beyond periodic wars? What about the Israelis themselves? Bubis recently stated that “the present struggle between American Jewish leadership and Israeli leaders of the Agency grows out of American Jewry’s push for personalization and accountability within the Agency. It is also a struggle against centralization and the Israel style by Jews abroad as well as the desire for more involvement in the decision making process. Bubis calls for the development of a new combination of “private and public sectors in Israel.” He asks for innovations in social services, in developing fees, in possible utilization of endowment and foundation funds of Federations.¹

Dan Elazar and others have called for greater participation by the Israelis themselves, coordinating fund raising and delivery of services, creating an Israeli United Way or Federation. Ideas and even a push in these directions are, I believe, accompanying and being stimulated by Project Renewal. From Israel is felt a counter reaching out for more aid even while trying to be more independent.

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1. Gerald B. Bubis, *Israel and the Diaspora; Economics and Philanthropy*, This Journal, Vol. 62, No. 1 (1985), pp. 19–22.

Project Renewal was created as a technique to meet a need in Israel, to obtain additional support and to sharpen giver interest. There is no denying that it is one of the most successful urban renewal, people developing projects that any of us have ever known. It did strike a chord in individuals who need more direct participation and who want to see the effects of their assistance. Local neighborhoods have developed councils, participated more in decisions affecting their own lives, arrested the attention of government, constructed physical facilities and developed educational and social services programs. That has been Project Renewal at its best.

Project Renewal at its worst is: delegations from our communities alighting from buses and distributing candy, money, baseball caps, and toys and being hosted by those who are helping. Forgotten is the principle of the *tzedakah* box, the recipient of which knew not who the giver was while the giver did not know who the recipient was and the dignity of both was preserved and enhanced.

There is something in me that does not mind having a street named for Kansas City in our neighborhood in Tiberias. There is some other part of me which cringes when I see musical instrument cases with tags on them which say "provided by Project Renewal." I can identify with the Israelis' feeling and the reaction to all the plaques and road signs and the commemorations of gifts received from the Jewish communities and individuals throughout the world. They can't do without it, but oh the feelings they must have!

Another aspect of Project Renewal is the "phase-out" period. Does Project Renewal remain another division of the Jewish Agency? Can the neighborhoods really continue to improve and have economic development that they require to fully utilize all the positive changes that have taken place? Can continuing relationships with the paired Israeli cities and the Diaspora cities be maintained without the

uneasy feeling that special projects may need continually to be funded?

Some communities which were twinned had an American community or cluster of communities that were not able to provide as many funds as were needed. Other communities haven't been twinned at all. This resultant inequity is quite like that in local American communities where on occasion an effective professional and/or an influential lay leader promote their own agency to get an increased allocation from the Federation plus even a fair amount of supplemental and capital fund giving. That agency may not be the one that needs it the most. Another agency, not in such a strong bargaining position, may be serving a greater community need of higher priority. Federations strive toward a budgeting system in balance, recognizing priorities and needs over a period of time.

The whole nation of Israel is so bureaucratic with so many different interests and publics both within and outside of Project Renewal that the resultant complex begs for a greater coordination and some centralization, with the participation of the Israelis themselves. Some neighborhoods have done it. Why not more neighborhoods doing it while developing a continuing and improved relationship with government? It should be possible to have a voluntary sector and government partnership.

We have seen the growth of project funding as making possible an actualization of people having greater identification with their own project. It is also, of course, an effective fund raising tool. Various universities may continue to campaign individually, but on top of that we have individuals gathering together in a New Israel Fund for special projects. We have at least one and possibly more Federations which have considered setting up funds for Israeli projects to await their applications. The author's own Federation recently received a request for a capital grant from Kupat Holim for its Golda

Meier Medical Center at the Hasharon Hospital in Israel. To consider it, there is still available an Israel Education Fund for development of various, special projects in Israel. Another example: Houston has joined with the Jewish National Fund to raise \$450,000 for developing parks outside of its Project Renewal "twin" in Israel.

This is a confusing time, but long standing principles still guide us. These principles concern preserving the dignity of both recipients and the givers. They are consistent with Jewish tradition and social work ethics.

We clearly need to raise more money within our Federation as new needs evolve both within our communities and within Israel itself. In our Federations we point to target groups in order to broaden the base of significant givers. We recognize needs as they develop in the community, and we relate to them. In that way we tap new donors—people concerned about those needs. If we don't do that others will. It is incumbent upon us to deal with the project funding idea in as dignified and professional way as we possibly can while at the same time reaffirming, and re-educating ourselves to, the principle of central funding, budgeting and planning.

For a number of years United Way has affirmed what they called "designated

donor giving." This permitted and even encouraged contributors to specify beneficiaries of their gifts. United Way's survey found that people had more respect for the United Way and were more inclined to give more after learning about the allocation process, than those who preferred to earmark funds.² Federations need to develop greater conviction about that, even in the face of the growing number of individuals who feel that they are "their own Federations" and who want to select beneficiary agencies themselves.

The building of community, through the use of the community organization process involving budget, planning, research and utilizing fund raising as the means by which to carry all this out is our continuing task.

We must do whatever we can to encourage and assist the Israelis in developing their own central system, even as we note the growing number of independent social services. We must also obtain clearer definitions and guidelines of our relationship to the Jewish Agency.

2. "Volunteer Allocation and Donor Option: Resolving a Dilemma," in *Community*. United Way, September 1985.