

# BEYOND FUND-RAISING: NEW TRENDS IN FEDERATION RELATIONSHIPS WITH ISRAEL

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*Jewish Affairs Reporter, The Jerusalem Post, Israel*

*. . . [local Israel-related program] developments could also stimulate a much-needed reexamination of Israel-Diaspora relations by prodding communities to grapple with the distinctions between promoting the centrality of Israel in the cultural and social life of a community, as opposed to putting the stress on the centrality of fund raising for Israel.*

**T**rends in a number of large Federations point to the emergence of an array of Israel-related programs that go beyond conventional fund-raising activities and concerns. This enhances the possibility for making meaningful distinctions between Federation activities fostering the centrality of Israel, as opposed to those stressing the centrality of *fund-raising* for Israel.

Those who view the level of Federation allocations for "overseas needs" through the United Jewish Appeal as an overall barometer of Federation attitudes and policies towards Israel have reason to be concerned about recent trends. Since the peak campaign at the time of the Yom Kippur War in 1974, the overall level of Federation campaign receipts allocated to the UJA has dropped steadily both in relative and absolute terms, that is as a percentage of the total amount raised and in dollar levels adjusted for inflation: from 1976 to 1984, the percentage of campaign funds allocated to UJA dropped from 60 per cent to 52 per cent; and the overall amount dropped during that time from \$430 million to \$340 million.<sup>1</sup>

The main recipient of UJA funds is the Jewish Agency, which provides services for education, immigrant absorption, rural settlement and other activities in Israel. The

Jewish Agency is governed jointly by the leaders of the World Zionist Organization and the leaders of the main Diaspora fund-raising organizations. Some leaders of the WZO see the weakening primacy of "overseas needs" in Federation allocations as a cynical betrayal of the principle of the centrality of Israel. According to this view, Federations continue to "raise money on the back of Israel" while diverting an increasing share of the receipts to local needs. What is more, according to this perception, the Federation leadership have compounded their alleged betrayal by stepping up their drive to wrest effective control of the Jewish Agency from the Israeli and WZO political establishment.<sup>2</sup>

These perceptions, which are without a doubt colored by considerable self-interest, are based on the premise that a Federation's commitment to Israel is to be judged primarily in terms of how much money it raises for the Jewish Agency. But even those who would challenge the above interpretations of the drop in allocations

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1. See figures compiled by the Committee on Scope and Function, United Jewish Appeal, New York.

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2. See statements made by Jewish Agency and WZO Chairman Arye Leon Dulzin and other WZO leaders at sessions of the WZO General Council in June 1987. For further information about the Jewish Agency and WZO, see the five-part series of articles by the author entitled *Where Do All Our Dollars Go?*, published by the *Baltimore Jewish Times* in May and June 1986; and Daniel Elazar and Alysia Dortort (eds.), *Understanding the Jewish Agency: A Handbook*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 1985.

to the UJA, might still accept the accuracy of the premise that a Federation's primary relationship to Israel is expressed through philanthropy. This paper seeks to describe and analyze certain trends emerging in some of the larger Federations that point, at least potentially, to a new basis for their relationship to Israel that goes beyond fund-raising.<sup>3</sup>

#### NEW TRENDS IN FEDERATION TIES TO ISRAEL

The overall trend for greater direct Federation involvement in Israel or Israel-related activities in the community has been apparent since the late 1970's. Since then specific trends have emerged that have not only deepened and expanded this involvement, but have also begun to change the nature of the relationships between American Jewish communities and Israel. These trends have emerged in the following areas:

##### *Missions to Israel*

Fund-raising missions to Israel have long been regarded, and rightly so, as the most effective way to raise the Jewish consciousness of participants who had been only marginally involved in Jewish life and to increase the giving levels of those already contributing to the Federation campaign. Typical missions for those in Israel for the first time used to provide a whirlwind tour of major historical sites and institutions or settlements where participants could see American Jewry's contribu-

tions at work, with visits to army bases also thrown in. Participants would be kept on the run from morning till night while vicariously experiencing the drama of "From Holocaust to Rebirth," one of the central myths of the belief system of American Jewry propagated by Federations and the UJA. The experience was designed to be both emotionally exciting and physically exhausting, since this combination would yield the biggest contributions, especially if the "caucus" for declaring pledges was held immediately after a wrenching visit to the Holocaust memorial at Yad Vashem.<sup>4</sup>

Usually absent from this format were opportunities to meet with "real" Israelis, as opposed to official spokesmen or guests intended mainly to dazzle the participants by their presence. Also missing were opportunities for in-depth study of issues connected with the expenditure of UJA funds in Israel, such as immigrant absorption, or of controversial issues in Israeli society, such as religious pluralism, Arab-Jewish relations or, for that matter, the role of the Jewish Agency in Israel. Also absent from the image of Israeli society projected to mission participants were former Americans who had made *aliya* to Israel, the assumption being that it would be better for fund-raising purposes to expose the participants to more "exotic" immigrants such as Ethiopians.

In recent years a critical reaction to this mission format has set in, due mainly to the recognition by some Federation professionals that its manipulative thrust was increasingly obvious and distasteful to the new generation of more sophisticated contributors, who are willing to encounter Israel with both their hearts and their heads. Thus the absent features noted above are gradually finding their way into mission formats. This is true not only of missions

3. During March 1987, I conducted interviews with Federation professionals and lay leaders and gathered materials on these issues while on a lecture tour of nine Federations: Washington, D.C.; Houston; Los Angeles; San Francisco; Detroit; Chicago; New York; Boston; and Montreal. This was supplemented by discussions with UJA and CJF officials in New York and by interviews with the following in Jerusalem: Don Scher, director of the JWB Israel Office; Allan Pakes, director of the Division for Communities from Abroad in the Project Renewal Department of the Jewish Agency; and Stephen Donshik, director of the CJF Israel Office.

4. For a discussion of the role of missions in reinforcing these myths, see Jonathan Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986; chap. 5.

organized directly by Federations, of which there are a growing number, but also those organized by the UJA.

Lastly, we should note the emergence of the "non-solicitational" mission. This type of mission, which is still considered heretical in some quarters, has emerged in several communities as a way to introduce sophisticated potential givers to Federation and Israel without the solicitation rituals that have previously turned many of them off.

#### *The Israel Experience*

It has become widely accepted in Jewish professional circles that Jewish teenagers or young adults who take part in a well-run Israel tour or educational program usually come back with an intensified sense of Jewish identity and a stronger commitment to organized Jewish life. This, perhaps in addition to some deeper desire to strengthen Jewish commitment to Israel, has led more Federations to provide scholarships for young people seeking to take part in what is becoming known as an "Israel Experience." In addition, more Federations are organizing such trips from their own community, usually in conjunction with the WZO. But some Federations have been willing to invest the money and effort to mount independent Israel programs due to their dissatisfaction with some of the WZO departments—despite the fact that by doing so they must forfeit the program subsidies that the WZO provides.

In addition, some Federations, in conjunction with local bureaus of Jewish education and the JESNA, have begun systematic planning for the introduction of an Israel dimension into the curriculum of Jewish schools in the community.

The Otzma program, which began in 1986/87, took this involvement several steps further. This program, in which Federations have invested considerable amounts of money for promotion, recruitment and scholarships, sends a small number of college-age youth to Israel from each participating community for a year of volunteer work in various sectors

of Israeli society. Upon their return, they are expected to do volunteer work for the Jewish community. In 1986/87, 56 young people from 11 communities took part in Otzma, and the numbers increased slightly for 1987/88.

Otzma is a partnership arrangement between the Council of Jewish Federations participating Federations and the Israeli Forum, a non-party volunteer organization of younger Israelis working in the area of Israel-Diaspora relations. The Federations and the CJF see Otzma as a special kind of Israel experience that provides the participants with extensive people-to-people contact in Israel, as well as a vehicle for leadership development in North American Federations. The program is carried out in cooperation with the Jewish Agency and the Youth and Hehalutz Department of the WZO.

#### *Aliya*

While the word *aliya* (immigration to Israel) was once taboo in Federation circles, as well as on the broader American Jewish scene, several dozen Federations have in recent years shown a growing interest in providing financial and other assistance to *olim* from their communities and in promoting the notion that *aliya* is a legitimate option for Jewish fulfillment. More ambitious programs for Federation support for *aliya* known as "*aliya* pilot projects" emerged from the so-called Caesarea Process launched in 1981, which has redefined the relations of the Diaspora fund-raising leaders with the WZO and the Jewish Agency.

The most advanced *aliya* pilot project was launched in 1985 by the Los Angeles Federation, in cooperation with the WZO *Aliya* Department, while other projects are planned for Milwaukee and Miami. In these pilot projects and in other communities, Federations are taking greater responsibility for coordinating and funding the work of various types of WZO *shiluhim* (emissaries).

### *Project Renewal*

Project Renewal, the comprehensive rehabilitation program for disadvantaged areas in Israel, in which Diaspora Jewish communities are "twinned" with Israeli neighborhoods and towns, has been widely hailed as a positive precedent for direct involvement by Federations in Israel. But only a handful of larger Federations out of the dozens of American communities that completed the first stage of the project are seeking to fund programs in other neighborhoods for the second stage; and several others have fallen short of their fund-raising targets for their original twinned neighborhoods.

Some of the Diaspora communities now winding down their funding of programs are seeking ways to maintain the people-to-people contacts that proved to be one of the unanticipated benefits of Project Renewal. Youth exchanges, twinings of schools in the respective communities, exchanges of social service professionals and teachers, economic investment and regular visits by Diaspora groups are some of the paths now being taken to preserve the ties built up during the first phase of the project.<sup>5</sup>

While the positive experience of direct involvement through Project Renewal has stimulated the San Francisco and Los Angeles Federations to open offices in Israel, other Federations maintain regular connections with Israel on a broad range of matters through the people who serve as their special representatives to their Project Renewal neighborhoods. Furthermore, the "hands-on" involvement and direct accountability that made Project Renewal popular among the top level of Federation leadership has now stimulated the UJA to look for funding opportunities linking donors and communities directly with welfare projects in Israel that go beyond the traditional functions of the Jewish Agency.

### *Direct Funding of Projects*

The decisions of the San Francisco Federation in 1986 to direct \$100,000 of its overseas allocations to projects in Israel, thus bypassing the UJA and the Jewish Agency, stirred up considerable controversy. Meanwhile, the nearby Federation of San Jose has followed suit with a direct allocation of \$35,000. But the political thrust of San Francisco's move, intended to stimulate change in the Jewish Agency, obscured some of its other dimensions. For example, San Francisco did not simply allocate money directly to beneficiaries in Israel, as some other Federations do with funds from their regular budgets or endowment funds. Rather, San Francisco set up a non-profit association to encourage the involvement of an Israeli peer group from the volunteer sector and to give them a say in how the funds are allocated. In addition, the funds were directed to projects in areas such as democratic education, Arab-Jewish relations and religious pluralism—areas in which the Jewish Agency has historically not been active.

### *The Jewish Agency*

While the national leadership of the UJA, the CJF and the United Israel Appeal—which transfers UJA funds to the Agency and monitors their expenditure—have had a role in the governance of the Agency since 1971, Federations as such have not been directly represented in this process until recently. Nevertheless, many of the demands for change in the Agency's structure and functions have emanated from Federation leadership.

This new involvement has been systematized by the establishment of Jewish Agency committees in about 30 Federations, thus ending the long-standing anomaly of Federations allocating over half their funds to an overseas body without attempting to take a serious look at how that body spends the money. The work of these committees feeds into a CJF Jewish Agency Committee, which formulates recommendations for change that

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

are brought to various Jewish Agency forums. In addition, study tours for Federation executives are now being organized by the CJF to give them a broader perspective on Israeli society and the Jewish Agency than was provided in the past by conventional fund-raising missions. These efforts reflect a growing tendency to demythologize the Jewish Agency by subjecting its functions and expenditures to a critical examination like any other social service agency.

#### NEW PATTERNS OF ISRAEL-DIASPORA RELATIONS

Aside from the intrinsic importance of this broadened range of Israel-related Federation involvements, the trends noted above also point to changing patterns of relationships between Diaspora Jews and Israel. Instead of being the passive recipient of information or services provided by others, Federations are taking a more active role, for example, in seeking out information about Israel in general or about what happens to UJA dollars in Israel, and in organizing their own fund-raising missions or educational programs in Israel.

This has led to a broader range of direct involvement and activity in Israel, in contrast to activity previously conducted indirectly on Federations' behalf through intermediary bodies such as the UJA, UIA, Jewish Agency and the WZO. This seems to be part of a long-term trend in many areas, and not only in those related to Israel, in which local community bodies have increased their range of initiative and responsibility and are relying less on the direction provided by national agencies.<sup>6</sup> A recent example of such an initiative was the CJF Board Institute held in Israel in February 1987, which gave Federation

leaders an opportunity for direct contact and dialogue with sectors of Israeli society that they have not encountered in the Jewish Agency or WZO.

Also part of the changing quality of relationships is a desire to encounter Israel in a serious, realistic manner instead of relying on myths, stereotypes and emotionalism to provide a "quick fix" for fund-raising or other purposes. This approach began with Project Renewal and has now spread to other areas such as missions, programs such as Otzma and Jewish Agency committees.

All this has contributed to a greater Diaspora assertiveness and effectiveness in dealing with the Jewish Agency and WZO on a variety of levels. These initiatives are also seeking to break down Israeli stereotypes of Diaspora Jews and to help promote Federation values such as volunteerism in Israeli society.

Given the historical tendency of Federations to extend their responsibility to an increasing range of areas, through community-wide planning, coordination and funding, it seems likely that Israel-related activities will also be subject to a similar process. Indeed, this is already happening in communities such as Detroit, Boston, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., where Federation professionals and lay leaders have begun to think systematically about what role Israel can or should play in the broad range of activities aimed at building community and cultivating a sense of Jewish commitment.<sup>7</sup>

There seems to be a growing awareness that the type of commitment to Israel traditionally fostered through fund-raising is not sufficient by itself to sustain a broad

6. These trends are described in Daniel Elazar, *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980; chaps. 9-10.

7. See "Narrowing the Gap," a paper presented in March 1987 to the San Francisco Federation by Brian Lurie and Earl Raab; and *Toward a Working Agenda*, a report of the Committee on Communal Objectives of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston, 1984. Similar ideas prepared in a paper presented by Steven M. Cohen to the 1986 General Assembly, entitled "The Excesses of Jewish Survivalism."

Jewish identification among the generations that have grown up since 1948, and it requires reinforcing by more serious educational means, including those involving Israel. It is noteworthy that in some of these communities, the tendency is not to regard Israel as just another area of programming, but as a pervasive presence that should be "an integral part of our community and our lives as Jews," in the words of one federation professional.

#### THE CENTRALITY OF ISRAEL

If the trend deepens for Federations to relate to Israel on a broader plane beyond the organizational and motivational needs of fund-raising, then certain problems on the macro-level are likely to arise. While each community will no doubt follow its own course in this process, there is nevertheless no need for each Federation to reinvent the wheel, which is happening now to a great extent. There is a need on the North American side for an organization or group of organizations to act as a clearing house for ideas and programs and as a facilitator for interorganizational coordination. As a body devoted exclusively to fund-raising, the UJA has traditionally not dealt with such a broad range of activities. And the CJF, which could in principle carry out such a function, has not yet responded to these trends in any systematic way.

On the Israeli side, the obstacles are more formidable, because the organization that has historically dominated the field of Israel-Diaspora relations, the WZO, operates from certain ideological assumptions that might clash with the new types of relationships described here. Despite the nod given in the WZO platform—the Jerusalem Program of 1968—to the need to strengthen Jewish life in the Diaspora, many WZO leaders and functionaries adhere to the classical Zionist view that negates the possibility of a viable Jewish life outside of Israel and that regards an investment in Jewish life abroad as justifiable only if it can lead directly to increased *aliya*.

Those in the WZO who hold such views would probably find it difficult to work with Federations on a true partnership basis, as would be required by the new patterns of relationships with Israel that we have described. But forces are now emerging within the WZO itself and in a growing number of independent bodies in Israel dealing with Israel-Diaspora relations that are prepared to meet the challenges entailed in these new patterns of relationships.

There is also a need for some coordinating mechanism for Federation initiatives on the Israeli side, since it would be counterproductive for each community to establish an entire array of independent Israel involvements. It seems unlikely that the Jewish Agency in its present form could serve such a purpose, since the genie of direct involvement, once let loose, cannot easily be put back into the old structure.

If the trends described in this article do become more widespread, then in the not-too-distant future we could be faced with a paradoxical situation, assuming that there are no dramatic boosts in overall campaign receipts. The size of the campaign pie to be divided up would shrink or remain about the same in real terms, and Federation allocations to the UJA would hold steady or continue to drop. It is also possible, as some observers believe, that the campaigns in the larger communities will increasingly put the stress on local needs and services, with less of the traditional focus on Israel.

But such developments would not necessarily signal the demise of a Federation's commitment to Israel. This commitment could be expressed in greater amounts of money being spent on Israel-related programs in the category of "local" services. And if these expenditures were aimed at activities such as enhancing the Israel dimension in Jewish education, providing scholarships for Israel programs, organizing leadership study tours, supporting *aliya*, fostering people-to-people ties with Israelis or incorporating the work of

*sblichim* into community institutions, then the overall result would be a much more authentic and enduring commitment to the centrality of Israel than the commitment that many have seen over the years reflected in the fluctuating share of funds allocated to "overseas needs."

Such developments could also stimulate a much-needed re-examination of Israel-Disapora relations by prodding communities to grapple with the distinctions between promoting the centrality of Israel in the social and cultural life of a community, as opposed to putting the stress on the centrality of fund-raising for Israel. During

the first 40 years of Israel's existence there has been little distinction in practice between the two approaches. But at this point, as American Jewry is becoming less dependent on fund-raising for Israel as a community-building mechanism, and as Israel is becoming less dependent on this philanthropic aid, both sides will finally be able to ask themselves, and each other, what their relationship is really all about.<sup>8</sup>

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8. These issues are explored at greater length in a forthcoming book by the author about American Jewry's relations with Israel through Federations, UJA, the Jewish Agency and the WZO.