

jointedness, which leads to occasional misunderstandings), we are a voluntary organization of world Jewry, this plan cannot be activated without a thorough discussion. It would be best that we begin immediately.

STEVEN B. NASATIR

A Perspective on the Future Relationship Between North American Jewish Federations and the Jewish Agency

The subject of my talk — A Perspective on the Future Relationship between North American Federations and the Jewish Agency — is one that could be discussed and debated for longer than this five-day assembly — and probably will be. It is a subject which has become a process — it has come out of the closet and onto the floor.

It is appropriate in offering this perspective to begin by restating some of the more significant achievements and successes accomplished by the Jewish Agency system.

It was our Jewish Agency that was responsible for the remarkable pre-statehood service to the Yishuv. Since the Proclamation of Israel's Statehood, our Jewish Agency has assisted in the absorption of nearly two million immigrants. It is our Jewish Agency which

established more than 500 agricultural settlements and more than 220,000 children and youth have been able to enter the mainstream of Israel's society as a result of Agency programs. More than 350,000 housing units have been built. And in recent years, it is our Agency's Project Renewal program which has fostered remarkable community-to-community partnerships that have resulted in the revitalization of neighborhoods and the opportunity for grassroots involvement and individual growth exceeding our most optimistic projections.

The past 37 years have been a time of miracles for the Jewish people, and the Jewish Agency has been the maker, the driving force, the catalyst for these many miracles. All of us who have participated in this enterprise are privileged and enriched by the experience.

It is in the context of these achievements that many North American Jews have increased their commitment and devotion to helping our Jewish Agency make the changes necessary to improve

its effectiveness and accountability and to ensure its role as maker of miracles for generations to come.

The process of change is ongoing and evolutionary rather than revolutionary. To many North American leaders, a key issue for our collective institutional future is the further development of change in the structure and process of governance. The report of the Caesarea Governance Commission was only partially adopted, and though some significant changes have taken place, more needs to be accomplished. Change of any complex organization's system is never simple, and that's especially true in this organization where, for a variety of reasons, clarity of communication between partners does not always come easy.

In the spirit of this plenary's examination of various viewpoints, permit me to identify a few Jewish Agency issues on which one partner or the other says one thing which is interpreted as another — where a concept is directly addressed but heard with a different ear.

For openers, let's begin with the views being expressed by significant numbers of North American representatives that the present configuration of delegates to the Assembly and representation on the Board of Governors should be changed. Some leaders at the Agency have interpreted this as an attempted takeover of the reins of power, based on the premise that "those who provide the funds should make the decisions."

Were this, indeed, the North American position, I would be among the first to call that attitude arrogant and inappropriate. But it's not what leadership is saying.

What is sought is direct community representation and an appropriate role

in decision making, albeit not the preeminent role. Jewish Agency programs are for Israel and, therefore, the majority vote belongs to Israelis. The issue isn't Israel's right to be the majority shareholder, but whether the present system of relationships ensures the greatest good for Israel. From a W.Z.O. perspective, I'm certain that's not a popular question, but nevertheless it is a question which is being asked.

Volunteer and professional leaders from North American Federations have a different political tradition than the W.Z.O. As Dan Elazar has pointed out in his insightful monograph on the Jewish Agency, a part of the W.Z.O. is deeply entangled in Zionist politics — as it should be — for it is a political organization. However, when an appropriate activity for one sphere of operation impinges on another we have the perception that the Jewish Agency is a politicized creature. The policies of one are perceived to be those of the other.

W.Z.O. funds used for settlements in Judea and Samaria are an example of this unrecognized dichotomy. Salaried employees being accountable to both organizations is another. As a result, many North American leaders continue to view critically the lack of separation between the W.Z.O. and Jewish Agency.

Another area where signals from one partner to another are not being communicated effectively is in ideological matters: specifically, aliya.

The articulation of *Shelilat Ha'gola* (negation of the Diaspora) is largely rejected in the United States. Most committed American Jews acknowledge Israel as our Jewish center but see modern Jewish life as a multipolar existence, in which vibrant points of Jewish living

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around the world draw sustenance from one another. In addition, most American Jews simply do not endorse the notion of aliya as a personal Jewish imperative.

All the rhetoric in the world concerning the inevitability of assimilation, anti-Semitism, and the Jewish people's collective obligation to return to Zion, will not move hundreds of thousands of Jews living in freedom to make aliya. This doesn't mean that Jews from America shouldn't support the need for aliya from the West. We should — and we do — as evidenced by the growing support Federations provide to potential olim but, with all due respect to the increased involvement of Federations in helping the process by which Jews may choose aliya, we are setting ourselves up for failure and disappointment if we think that the result of these efforts will be a significant movement of aliya from North America.

The clash of viewpoints on aliya and negative perceptions about the Diaspora have a spill-over effect in other areas of our Jewish Agency agenda.

The heightened Jewish Agency interest in Jewish education is one example. We applaud the collective efforts of our leadership to bring additional resources and talent to improve the quality of Jewish education throughout the world and to expand study opportunities in Israel. But, as we watch the different agendas being played out, we again are reminded of our differences. For example, the oft-repeated assertions that 70% of Jewish children in the United States do not receive a Jewish education is simply not true. The opposite is true.

Approximately 70% of Jewish children in the United States receive some form of Jewish education during the years

from early childhood through high school.

My point is not to be more exacting about statistics or to brag about what is clearly a terrible inadequacy but rather to deal with the underlying premise that America is a vast wasteland of assimilated Jews whose redemption can be found only through education exported from Israel. If properly used, it is Israel — with its place in Jewish history; in Jewish tradition; its vibrant cultural life; the attractiveness of life where Jews are a majority and where the rhythm of Jewish life provides the context in which people live their lives — which has the power to influence and even transform Jews, not the techniques or the talents of Israeli educators, however creative some may be.

Israel education per se is not exportable to the Diaspora. Furthermore, turning the issue back and around, when we examine the quality of Jewish education throughout the world, we need also to look at Israel itself. Recent studies by Professor Ritterband and others have shown that yerida from Israel to the United States is not the emigration of the uneducated or of those who have not "made it" in Israel. It is increasingly clear that emigration from Israel is from those who are well educated. Query: Where have we gone wrong?

In addition, the dual education system in Israel appears to be responsible for minimizing options in religious identification, resulting in all too many young Jews growing up in Israel with a secular education but lacking a proper Jewish religious education. This, too, should be our collective concern.

Another inflammatory issue is neshira. It would be futile to repeat the

positions of our various groups. The arguments and counter-arguments are known to all of us. We all pray for the doors of the Soviet Union to open once again to permit Jews to leave.

We hope that significant numbers will choose to go to Israel, but American Jews will not tolerate the assertion that one must be in Israel in order to be Jewish. Nor should we underestimate the negative implications of interference in the internal processes of the United States Government in regard to refugee policy.

For more than 50 years, since the beginning of the Hitler period, the American Jewish community has struggled along with our non-Jewish colleagues in the Refugee Resettlement community to keep America's doors open, culminating in enactment of the 1980 Refugee Act, including its liberalized definition of who is a refugee. Continuing attempts by Israel to restrict that definition will cause grave harm to the relationship between the American Jewish community and our elected officials, whom we have pushed to advocate vigorously on behalf of Soviet Jews. Additionally, as a matter of principle, American Jewish leaders are committed to seeing to it that the doors of the United States never again are closed to any Jews. This issue is serious. The problems are complex. Acrimonious accusations are not helpful. We need to listen to one another so that responsible solutions can be found.

The issues just identified are problems of differing perspectives within the Jewish Agency's orbit of responsibility. To reconcile these different views in a way that will permit the Agency to satisfy its different constituencies, thereby enabling it to provide essential programs and services, is a challenge

made even more difficult by two additional problems which are not of our making but which seriously impact on our future.

Problem number one has to do with our not being able to count on automatic and almost unquestioning support for all of Israel's decisions. The American Jewish community still is overwhelmingly supportive of Israel, but the Lebanon experience and its lingering aftermath contributed to some erosion of the belief that Israel is always right, always moral and always defensible.

Though the last three years have shown no diminution in financial or political support, a subtle disillusionment has crept into the attitude toward Israel which will not, I fear, be easily or quickly reversed.

The other problem is the divisive issue of amending the Law of Return and the whole issue of religious pluralism in Israel. This is a religious controversy of great importance and meaning to Jews throughout the world and should be considered by religious authorities representing all points of view, rather than by a government action.

The Chairman of the Executive is to be commended for properly asserting the Agency's prerogatives under the law of status the last time the issue was brought before the Knesset. Jewish Agency delegates cannot solve this problem, nor would we all agree on what the solution should be. But, regardless of our individual religious beliefs, we do have a role in making it clear to all concerned that amending the Law of Return would result in significant alienation and have major implications for future Diaspora-Israel relationships, including the future of the Jewish Agency.

Having articulated past achievements and current problems, let me now turn to suggestions for future strengthening of our ties.

The spirit of openness and candid dialogue which characterized this session of the Assembly should be continued. The issues of redefining goals and objectives, governance, structure, representation and assessing effectiveness, must be pursued in an open and constructive way. The process which began at Caesarea should continue to command our attention and consideration.

Further assistance should be provided to help develop a Federation-type movement in Israel. Certainly there exists in Israel sufficient private wealth and interest to make such an enterprise possible. Israeli initiative in this area could result in the development of a voluntary leadership group in Israel who would participate with Diaspora community leadership in providing funds and service to Jewish communities in need around the world, and who, of course, would take their rightful place as leaders within our Jewish Agency structure.

The Diaspora must raise significantly more funds for Jewish Agency programs. The accumulated deficit is the Diaspora's responsibility and more needs to be done to help eliminate this burden.

The more closely we involve community-based Federation leadership in Agency programs, the easier it will be to raise additional dollars. As remarkable as our fund-raising achievements have been, there is room for significant improvement. We also haven't done as well as we should or could to market a myriad of special giving opportunities which can be associated with multi-

million dollar projects found within the regular operating budget of the Jewish Agency.

Our United Jewish Appeal, in consultation with community-based Federation leadership, has been carefully developing a plan for a national campaign of the future. Ambitious plans can succeed but they need the help of all of us.

Israeli government officials have to stop announcing that the money contributed by Diaspora Jewry is no longer significant. We who struggle with a budget that can't meet all the existing needs know that's not true. We also know that dollars given have meaning to Jews far beyond the monetary value of the gift and also directly connect with political efforts on Israel's behalf.

We also need to examine seriously the cost-benefit relationship of supplemental campaign efforts of Israeli-based institutions to see what we can do to raise more money for everyone through a more comprehensive, single campaign.

Having spelled out issues on which we can agree or disagree, what is the prognosis for our future relationship? I end at the same place I began, with an emphasis on our achievements and an optimistic view of the future. The UJA theme of "one people, one destiny" is applicable to our subject. We are not only one people, but one large extended family and, like so many of today's nuclear families, we may be dispersed and we may have disparate views, but we can, and should, come together to make the changes that need to be made, to address and to share our crises and problems, our frustrations, our dreams and goals, our achievements and our destiny. Together we can insure our survival and our future.

American Yavneh?

Nothing is more distinctive of Judaism than the legal metaphor of covenant. For millenia it has defined the essence of Israel's sense of itself, its relationship to God, and its destiny. Even the Hebrew Prophets, whose message is commonly misunderstood (by Jews and Christians alike) as the moderation of rigorous legalism with social justice, were conservative legalists who defended the rule of Jewish law. In moments of crisis throughout ancient Jewish history, priests, judges, and prophets affirmed the rigorous standard of covenantal obligation proclaimed at Sinai.

For nineteen centuries *halakha*, interpreted by the rabbis, preserved Jewish communal life in the Diaspora. This remarkable achievement, without historical parallel, can be traced to Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, who refashioned Judaism to survive without a sovereign government to sustain it. In 68 C.E.,

with Jerusalem under Roman seige, he implored the determined Jewish zealots: "My children, why do you destroy this city, and why do you seek to burn the Temple?" The rabbi, despairing of the futility of their resistance, instructed his disciples to remove him from the city. They carried him in a coffin, safely past the gatekeepers and beyond the city walls, to Vespasian, the Roman commander. Ben Zakkai arose from his bier, proclaiming: "*Vive domine imperator.*" Three days later, so legend proclaims, the Roman warrior, bathing at Gophna, was informed that with Nero's death he was indeed the new Emperor. In appreciation of Ben Zakkai's prediction, he summoned the rabbi and asked for his wish. "I ask nothing of thee, ... save Yavneh," ben Zakkai replied, "where I might go and teach my disciples, and there establish a prayer house, and perform all the commandments."

In Yavneh, ben Zakkai demonstrated that through law Judaism could transcend its own historical tragedies. Submissive to God and to Rome, ben Zakkai

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