

IMAGE ISRAEL

Then and Now

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As Israel is being transformed from a crisis-laden Third-World country toward a technology-driven First-World state, Zionist fund raising must similarly be transformed. It must focus on Israel's current renaissance and work with Israeli partners in helping shape its bright future.

Nearly two decades ago, a national United Jewish Appeal (UJA) public relations professional returned from a post-mission assignment in Israel with what was supposed to be a proposal. What he reported instead was a dilemma.

Out of a series of meetings in Jerusalem with three fellow professionals who worked on assignment with the Jewish Agency—an American Jewish photojournalist, a *sabra* feature writer and film scenarist, and a freelance writing immigrant from South Africa—he was to develop a preliminary proposal on what image or images of Israel to project to the American Jewish public for the following year's UJA/Federation fund-raising campaign.

At those meetings, they all shared their own most compelling images of Israel—which varied widely but had much thematically in common.

- For the older Israeli writer, a vigorous and youthful-looking veteran of the 1948–49 War of Independence who was not yet 15 when he saw his first action, it was the sounds and sights of a daylong battle—old rifles against superior hand weapons and artillery—on the road to Jerusalem.
- For the UJA public relations man, it was the sight of a fresh bullet hole in the window of his fourth floor room at the King David Hotel on his first visit to Israel in 1962. The room overlooked the sniper-close Mandelbaum Gate that barred access to the Old City.
- For the photojournalist, it was the poi-

gnant moment in the mid-1960s when the immigrant North African family whose “first day in Israel” he was recording for a Jewish Agency story arrived at the absorption town of Dimona in a devastatingly lonely stretch of desert in the western Negev. The isolation simply overwhelmed them into a state of staring numbness.

- For the freelancer from South Africa, it was the sight of three young men bursting out the door of their synagogue on Yom Kippur, 1973, *talitot* flapping as they ran to rejoin their units—all dashing to their deaths, she was sure. Happily, she was mistaken in that premonition, but the image was searing and ineradicable.

PEAK WARTIME CAMPAIGN

Those were the kinds of images the annual UJA campaigns—themselves central to organized Jewish life (at least as seen from the inside)—had legitimately employed for three decades to maintain the centrality of Israel in world Jewish life. An Israel with a precarious hold on existence—devoid of natural resources, virtually a *Third World* country, enduring crisis after crisis, under siege by implacable enemies, constantly threatened with annihilation, facing wave after wave of immigration, far beyond anything a nation of so few souls had ever faced before.

Indeed, Israelis dealing with American colleagues and visitors often enhanced that Third World image by explaining a wide range of phenomena—from technical malfunctions to professional failures to poor ser-

vice—as symptomatic of a “poor country.” The Israel so undeniably central to us in those days was a source of inspiration, surely, even of “miracles”—but also of collective worry and potentially disastrous *bad news*.

Alarmed by recurring crises, deeply moved by loss and pain in war, frequently in shock and enraged by the news of the day, and anxious to keep Israel's gates open to oppressed Jews everywhere, the American Jewish community—more accurately, that portion of it participating in the annual campaigns—came through magnificently. Allocations of federation campaign funds to the UJA for Israel stayed well above 50 percent through that bad-news period, and became almost 100 percent in times of war or other overseas crises. A peak campaign in response to the Six-Day War gave way six years later to an all-time high in response to the Yom Kippur War. In the first week of that war, more than \$100 million in cash was collected against outstanding pledges.

Yet, only a short time later, in the late 1970s, those four preliminary planners in Jerusalem could find no discernible major crisis to give shape to another year's motivational campaign. The Camp David accords were holding. Jerusalem remained united. Trouble in Lebanon—the occasional *katyusha* fired into the Galilee—had not yet begun to escalate toward open conflict. Immigration from the Soviet Union and Ethiopia was sporadic or limited, with the great exoduses, generating special campaigns, still some years away. The centrality of Israel in world Jewish life did not seem seriously in question.

There was no image the four pre-planners could come up with for the forthcoming campaign that they felt could legitimately alarm, cajole, anger, motivate, or otherwise mobilize American Jewry to come to the defense and support of a needy, dependent Israel.

That was the dilemma.

ISRAEL'S CENTRALITY IN QUESTION

The national UJA management team decided on no significant change in Israel's campaign positioning that year. Need and

dependency, carried over from past wars and crises, still prevailed, although, ironically, there was a reluctance to deal publicly with what Israelis called their “social gap.” Yet, the tradition of developing an annual “campaign line” persisted. The apparent bad-news lull created an opportunity (“Now, More than Ever”) to address ongoing needs in a measured, productive way.

The campaign inaugurated by that decision moderately maintained the momentum of the years following the Yom Kippur War. And the level of allocations to Israel held fairly firm.

To some, that decision did not solve the dilemma, but delayed confronting it. And in fact, the dilemma has persisted to this day; no motivational substitute has been found for the crisis-generated campaigning of the “bad news” days. Even today, memories of those campaigns dominate certain professional meetings and discussions, generating an atmosphere that is close to nostalgia for more rough-and-tumble times.

Meanwhile, within the space of a single generation, Israel's centrality *has* come seriously into question—with its campaign share dropping below 40 percent, with local causes becoming dominant and communities turning inward, concerned with intermarriage and other erosions in Jewish identity and continuity; with the bitter and divisive issue of religious pluralism alienating large segments of American Jewry; and with an emerging younger generation having little direct experience in Israel, feeling little or no connection with it. Under those irreversibly changed conditions, some argue that fund raising for Israel at any substantial level is a thing of the past.

AN ALTERNATE CURRENT

Contrary to our old common wisdom about bad news bringing in the money, American Jewish financial support for Israel—overall—is not being diminished now. Despite the fact that a Jewish press closely tied to the federation system in many communities tends to equate UJA/federation trends with Ameri-

can Jewish fund raising and communal relations with Israel as a whole, the whole is considerably greater than this or any of its parts. Funding is flowing along an alternate current—impelled by *good news* campaigns on behalf of today's—and tomorrow's Israel.

For example, during a ten-year period bridging the 1980s and 1990s, the American Technion Society (ATS) "good news" campaigns registered a cumulative growth of 218 percent. Nor was that an isolated achievement. According to the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* (June 13, 1996), during that same period, funds for *specific programs* in Israel from philanthropic organizations outside the country more than doubled. Donors are responding not so much to needs as to *results*. And they want to make a difference, to participate in economic growth, and to deal with sophisticated Israelis as partners and equals.

ISRAEL'S REMARKABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Most of us are aware by now of such widely reported indices of Israel's remarkable economic growth in recent years as its mounting number of high-tech companies in operation (now approaching 2000) and their prominence on New York stock exchanges. Past reports have also pointed to such indicators of stability within that growth as drastically lowered rates of inflation and of unemployment. Visitors to Israel are becoming increasingly aware of a proliferation of high-tech industrial parks in the country, as well as a steady progression of multinational companies "setting up shop" there with research, development, and production facilities. Among them, to name only a few, are Intel, Motorola, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard and IBM.

Israeli companies have begun to appear in the United States and elsewhere, as they establish American and international operations and acquire American and other foreign businesses. And early last year the International Monetary Fund added Israel to its list of industrialized nations—a *First World* roster.

Consider these other compelling "good news" facts, figures, and reports:

- Israel is the only country that has free trade agreements with the United States, European Union, and the European Free Trade Association.
- Its annual growth rate in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) now surpasses the rate in most Western developed countries.
- U.S. Robotics, Siemens, America Online, 3COM, and Bay Network have made substantial investments in Israeli technological firms, and such companies as Sprint and Electronic Data Systems, along with the U.S. Department of Defense, have contracted for Israeli high-tech products and services.
- Israel participates *on equal terms* with the United States in key research and development programs in science, industry, and agriculture. In the Israel-U.S. Binational Industrial Research and Development Foundation (BIRD), which matches U.S. and Israeli companies, Israel provides the technology, the United States the marketing expertise.
- Israel has similar matching arrangements with Canada, Holland, France, Spain, and Singapore.

EMERGING PARTNERS

Professionally, many of us have been slow to respond to these changes. At a national AJCOP meeting a couple of years ago, one senior professional leader suggested, "We don't have the expertise to be involved with economic development." Indeed, another participant indicated, "Most of us come from a social welfare background and should not rest until Israel's problems of poverty are put to rest."

We need to view Israel realistically, and the reality is that Israel today is making a strong move toward a technology-driven independent economy. It is also an Israel that, despite terrorism and setbacks, is still intent on seeking peace and has much to offer toward sharing regional resources and en-

hancing regional ecology. On recent evidence, it seems quite capable of absorbing expectable levels of future immigration very much on its own, and it is constantly upgrading its higher education, scientific research, and programs for narrowing societal differences.

That is the Israel that has been attracting the support of a significant number of people in the American Jewish community, through ATS, other university campaigns and a range of additional program-specific fund-raising efforts, including some special federation programs. These are enthusiasts who consider themselves *partners* with the institutions they support and are welcomed in Israel as partners—to see, feel, touch, and enjoy the projects and programs they make possible. This sense of real, participatory partnership is a powerful force for fund raising, going far beyond the comparatively passive “designated giving” of past years. This potentially transformational, results-oriented philanthropy is the emerging Zionism of the twenty-first century.

PLANNING AND PERSISTENCE

Israel is no longer a “nachus machine.” There is no automatic, euphoric reaction to today’s uplifting news from Israel to match yesterday’s knee-jerk reaction to war, bloodshed, and threatened extinction. Rather, today’s fund raising for Israel requires planfulness, persistence and hard-working attention to fundamentals we may have bypassed in the days when simply sounding an alarm seemed to get the job done. Those formerly obscured fundamentals include an all-out effort to identify our potential donors, to find out what they value about what we do, to put what we discover to work in our planning, to monitor the results, to “listen to the market” and to constantly fine-tune planning.

What perhaps makes it even tougher is that we are now dealing with proud, independent, increasingly sophisticated partners in Israel. Relating to those partners as equals, rather than as dependents in a one-way giving

relationship, is made even more difficult by the fact that we are working across two cultures, with strain and pain as possible as prospects for gain. Yet, is that not to be expected when we are developing new modalities appropriate to twenty-first-century relationships?

CONCLUSION

Our core challenge is to truly grasp the difference between the needy, endangered, dependent Israel we presented in its first three decades of embattled existence and the sparkling, future-directed Israel of today and tomorrow.

The new fund-raising approach may have a key role to play in developing a future corps of American Jewish communal service professionals with the broadest possible perspective on the realities of Jewish life, here and in Israel. When professionals from *that* corps get together—as the remembered four did in Jerusalem two decades ago—to work out their campaign’s most attractive and persuasive image of Israel, an impasse will in no way be the outcome. They will have a hard-won plan in hand, worked out with their sophisticated Israeli partners in tough but fair cross-cultural, results-oriented interaction. They will be focusing on excellence rather than exigence, on what is working and can be made to work better, what can be built and what can be transformed, rather than on what is not working and has to be repaired.

They will be serving as “honest brokers” in the negotiating process that will increasingly define fund raising in the century ahead, finding ways, on the one hand, of presenting Israel with total truth and dignity, at least approximating the self-image most Israelis have, and, on the other, of offering their clients a realistic picture of an Israel on the rise with much that is dramatic, creative, and dynamic to offer potential supporters.

In a word, they will be the twenty-first-century Zionist fund-raising professionals—to the benefit not only of the state of Israel but also of Israel’s partners in the American Jewish community.